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CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 13

Summer, 1962

THE YEAR IN FRENCH CANADA

Chronicle

BY JEAN-GUY PILON

Articles

BY PAUL WEST, S. E. READ, NORMAN SHRIVE,
FRANK DAVEY, MICHAEL R. BOOTH

Reviews

BY E. E. BOSTETTER, GEORGE BOWERING, WILLIAM HALL,
MARGARET LAURENCE, FRED COGSWELL, GEORGE WOODCOCK,
AND OTHERS

Opinions

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contributors

PAUL WEST is a widely known poet and critic whose articles and verse have appeared in many English, American and Canadian magazines of international standing. He has published several books of criticism, and his book on Newfoundland — where he teaches at Memorial University — will appear shortly.

MICHAEL R. BOOTH, who has already written on theatrical subjects in *Canadian Literature*, is at present editing for republication Horton Rhys's mid-Victorian *A Theatrical Trip for a Wager through Canada and the United States.*

NORMAN SHRIVE, who teaches English at McMaster University, is at present working on an extensive study on Charles Mair, on whom he will be writing shortly in *Canadian Literature.*

FRANK DAVEY is a young poet and critic whose *D-Day and After* appeared recently as a small press publication. He is actively interested and involved in the publication of little magazines and is one of the group which publishes *Tish* from Vancouver.

S. E. READ has been a contributor of reviews and critical pieces to *Canadian Literature* since its earliest numbers. He is a Professor of English at the University of British Columbia.

JEAN-GUY PILON is one of the leading members of the group of young French-Canadian poets and critics associated with the review *Liberté* and the publishing house Les Editions de L'Hexagone. He is one of the best of contemporary Canadian poets writing in French; his collections include *La Mouette et la Large*, *Les Cloîtres de l'Eté* and *L'Homme et le Jour.* He recently edited, with Eli Mandel, the bilingual anthology, *Poetry 62.*

E. E. BOSTETTER, a member of the faculty of the University of Washington, is the author of numerous studies of Keats and the other Romantics, a contributor to *The Sewanee Review*, and the editor of Byron's *Selected Poetry and Letters* in the Rinehart edition.

GEORGE BOWERING is a young poet who has published verse, stories, criticism and plays in many Canadian, American and Indian journals, including *Fiddlehead*, *Prism*, *Canadian Forum*, *Delta* and several of the little magazines discussed in Frank Davey's article. His first book of verse, *Sticks and Stones*, is due off the press this year.

editorial

CELEBRATIONS OF HARVEST

THE WORLD OF CULTURE, like the world of primitive religion, moves in the ritual cycle of the year. Spring, fall and winter, seedtime, harvest and Yule, are the times when publishers and other farmers of the art perform their rites, with as much apparent faith in the magic of the seasons as any cultivator of the zodiac-ridden East. To complete the antique pattern, we observe also the higher rites of annual reckoning, when the Brahmins in their proper spheres award prizes, prepare anthologies and bibliographies, and grandly judge and celebrate the harvest of the year.

This year *Canadian Literature* plays its Brahminical role in the great ritual by assuming the responsibility of judgment for the University of British Columbia's Medal for Popular Biography. Unfortunately our reading of the biographies of 1961 produced a result which gives a tone of anti-climax to this announcement; we decided to make no award at all for the year. Those readers who remember our editorial of two years ago, "On the Cultivation of Laurels", will not be entirely surprised at this judgment. We have always contended that awards, when they are given at all, should be clear indications of exceptional merit. As the Canada Council recognized when it took over the Governor-General's Medals, to give an award merely for the best book of the year is pointless, since it may be a good deal worse than the fifth-best book of the preceding year. Without a continuing standard of excellence any award loses its meaning. This at least is the attitude we have taken. 1961 was a year of near-famine in the publication of biography, and we found no book among the lean and withered crop that stirred our collective admiration enough to regard it as exceptional. We can only hope that 1962's biographers will have cultivated their gardens more propitiously.

MEANWHILE CELEBRATIONS OF ANOTHER KIND, in the form of published estimates of the year's achievements, are proliferating in many directions. *The Canadian Annual Review*, published by the University of Toronto Press ($15.00), has now appeared for a second year under the editorship of John T. Saywell, so that we can regard it as an established feature of annual publishing. It is an ambitious survey of many fields of Canadian life, from politics to sport, and roughly a fifth of its pages are devoted to cultural activities in a rather broad sense, including literature, music, art, theatre, radio and television. The *Review* has grown in size since its first year, but not uniformly in quality. In 1960, for instance, literature was admirably discussed by Milton Wilson, and there were intelligent comments on the quality of radio and television programmes. In 1961 the discussion of literature, no longer by Professor Wilson, has declined to factual narrative ruined by insensitive comment (the short works of Lowry and Salinger, we are told, "form one whole"!) And the accounts of radio and television have become almost completely concerned with the politics of broadcasting.

It seems, from looking through the rest of *The Canadian Annual Review*, that such fields as politics and the national economy have been far more comprehensively and capably dealt with than the arts and related subjects. This may well be because the editor himself is at home in these fields while — from his extremely spotty choice of commentators — he quite evidently is not at home in the world of culture. Perhaps what we still need is a good Year Book of the Arts run by people who really know about them, with a group of commentators chosen not merely for their ability to mug up facts, but also for their critical perception and their power to present lucid and brightly written accounts of significant happenings in their own fields. I suggest it to Canadian publishers as a suitable Rite of Spring for 1963.

IN FRENCH CANADA, something very near to what I am suggesting is being done in the field of literature. It is an annual critical survey of French-language books edited by Adrien Thério; the first issue, *Livres at Auteurs Canadiens 1961*, priced at $1, has just appeared, and I gather that it has had a wide sale of almost 10,000 copies, which emphasizes the comparatively greater interest that literary topics arouse in French as compared with English Canada. It is a substantial work, a hundred pages of magazine format, and it includes not only complete bibliographies, but also reviews by good critics of every book of literary significance published in French-Canada during the year.

EARLE BIRNEY AND THE COMPOUND GHOST

Paul West

NO POMP OR POET'S POSE: just a tall, self-contained self-analyst dominating the lectern and mixing shrewd points with occasional smiling mutiny, as if to suggest a terrible soul beneath: not professional or vatic, but a gently wild man born in Calgary in 1904. That is how he must have appeared, as lecturer and reciter, during a multitude of performances in North America, Japan, Mexico, India and London. It is typical of him that he should speak of "saying" his poems, display a genial regard for beer-parlours and write, he supposes, to prevent himself from going mad.

The poet in this poet-professor has always delightedly fastened upon the unfamiliar: not to show off with, not because the Pacific Coast bores him or because he finds the ordinary too difficult, but because he has always been something of an animist. For him the temperate Canadian pastoral kept leaping into pageantry, bestiary and something close to the heraldic. We could liken him to his favourite Chaucer: voracious for the detail of contemporary life and yet, while musing on and exposing foible, lunging after ghosts, the miraculous or the shimmering timeless. The Birney of "Anglosaxon Street" is an inspector of human customs:

> Then by twobit magic to muse in movie,
> unlock picturehoard, or lope to alehall,
> soaking bleakly in beer, skittleless.
>
> Home again to hotbox and humid husbandhood,
> in slumbertrough adding sleepily to Anglekin.

The pastiche disguises nothing: this is the flavour of Chaucer but with more feel

for the motion of life than Chaucer has; the method is compactly allusive, as if he wants to transform everything. And the key to Birney's power, as to the disciplines and rigours he has imposed on himself, is his urge towards myth. This is why his Canadian pastorals never quite succeed. Because he is a lover of myth, he tends naturally to the dislocated reality of mountaineering and the lost reality of the Indians: for instance, the title-poem of his first book of poems, *David and Other Poems* (1942) is peculiarly diffuse yet crammed with exact data. The data is placed exactly nowhere:

> One Sunday on Rampart's arete a rainsquall caught us,
> And passed, and we clung by our blueing fingers and bootnails
> An endless hour in the sun, not daring to move
> Till the ice had steamed from the slate. And David taught me
>
> How time on a knife-edge can pass with the guessing of fragments
> Remembered from poets, the naming of strata beside one . . . .

One might call it the inevitable Canadian metaphor, this siting of particulars in the vast blank. And whatever one calls it — whatever it tells us specially of Canada — it keeps falling short. Supposed to refer universally because it is of no region, it misses the suggestive power of such lines as these of Eliot:

> Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
> With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
> And went on in the sunlight, into the Hofgarten. . . .

Eliot's two tent-pegging references — the colonnade and the Hofgarten — complicate reality all over again; they restore whole worlds to us, whereas Birney's descriptive sequence followed by that not very firm allusion to the poets merely insulates us. We have to set to work in order to get beyond the phantoms of atavism, the primitive pattern.

Having objected to the delicious particulars of such poems as "David" I have also to confess that I find the philosophical Birney (strong in *David and Other Poems* and repeated in more senses than one in the second volume, *Now Is Time*, 1945) just as far from enlightening me as I find, say, the Speech of the Salish Chief in *Trial of a City* (1952) a bit fusty, not a little fustian. Much of the early Birney is an express of vivid description with philosophical baggage to follow by the next train. There is no synthesis; but in his deliberate habit of reprinting earlier poems in the context of new ones there is an effort meriting great sympathy. It is Birney trying to put a world together: now blurring with general ideas, now thrusting detail (either urban or pastoral) into the middle of philosophising. He

cannot keep the pastoral intact, he knows, and the presence in *Now Is Time*, which is mostly war poems and excellent ones at that, of philosophical poems from *David* warns us that he is groping after something: a fusion, an amalgam, a compound. Again, in *The Strait of Anian* (1948) he juxtaposed his poetic past and his present, and in *Trial of a City* turned to satirical fantasy and recaptured the mordant note of some poems in *David*.

This progress is worth pursuing in further detail: it crazy-paved the way for what is Birney's finest and most recent achievement, *Ice Cod Bell or Stone*[1], the very title of which suggests a miscellany rammed together; a reconcilable quartet. He has approached it by finding various modes of expression variously unsatisfactory. First, the remote and straitened reality of "David" in which the conversations seemed hardly artificial enough: "but he cried, louder, 'No, Bobbie! Don't ever blame yourself; You can last.' He said only, 'Perhaps . . . For what? A wheelchair, Bob?'" Then the war poems, with an imagery that knocks us over before we have time to assume any attitude at all:

> The clusters of children, like flies, at the back of messhuts,
> or groping in gravel for knobs of coal,
> their legs standing like dead stems out of their clogs.

And then the satirical semi-dramatic, the vocal equivalent of myth: the poet is seeking again the movement of conversation, trying to find an idiom and inflexion to partner the jumble he has now acquired of Seal Brother, Hell, salmon, seawolves, the Tide of the Thimbleberries, cetegrande, popcorn, "Narvik's blanching hulks", the "rotograved lie", the slug's "greentipped taut horns of slime", "dying Bering, lost in fog" and lilies growing their pungent bulbs unprompted.

AFTER A SILENCE of ten years he finds his way out in *Ice Cod Bell or Stone*, through a loose combination of voices. There is the deliberate patience of the professional gazer: as in "El Greco: *Espolito*":

> The carpenter is intent on the pressure of his hand
> on the awl, and the trick of pinpointing his strength
> through the awl to the wood, which is tough.

The flat tone and meticulous eye seem to insulate the horror from us without,

[1] McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, $3.50.

oddly enough, soothing us one bit. The point is well taken because we are allowed no guesswork. Because we are not the intended victims (not on *that* wood anyway) Birney deprives us of vicarious pain. Contrast this cool recital with such ventriloquism as the following:

> Ah but I saw her ascend up in the assendupping breeze
>
> There was a cloudfall of Kewpids
> their glostening buttums twankling

That comes from a poem called "Mammorial Stunzas for Aimee Simple McFarcin"; not far from Eliot's Aristophanic melodrama, but closer than Eliot ever is to illustrious vernacular and rendered with a Dickensian relish for caricature. Just *listen* to this:

> Jesus man what did you expect
> Queen Liliuokalani spreadeagled on a tapa mat?
> Sure they got a farm in Diamond Head crater this
> a big place state cap world tour —
> but any guy dont like Waikiki say we got
> more catamarans surfboats fishspearin palmclimbin
> than all them natives saw in a thousand
> years waitin around for us okay maybe the hula
> aint

The book displays three principal idioms: cool meditation studded with vivid detail, and pastiche of raw vernacular; these tend to slide into each other when the poet is empathising hard or really wanting the contrast of two points of view. The third is represented by a few poems in foundering, chaotic typography the point of which — presumably visual enactment — escapes me almost entirely. All three idioms, however, tell us a great deal about Birney the rebel. He is repudiating the professorial sage, the mug tourist and (I think) the Birney who shrinks from typographical trickery and therefore forces himself to attempt it. There is no need to choose between Birney the eloquent and reflective intelligence and Birney the mimic; in each role he is anxiously trying to relate himself to the world — and with gratifying success, all the more so when he deepens a poem by transcending while evoking the academic mode:

> Lo as I pause in the alien vale of the airport
> fearing ahead the official ambush
> a voice languorous and strange as these winds of Oahu
> calleth my name and I turn to be quoited in orchids. . . .

The mimicry is the fact, more or less, and the comment is the endlessly interpreting mind. Sometimes they are sandwiched in an impacted conversation:

> *But arent there towns in Mexico more av-?* Dear madam,
> Actopan is a town more average than mean.
> You may approach it on a sound macadam. . . .

Always, however, whether or not the mimicry is full-blooded or tame, the conversations — like the personae, the academic-sounding exercises, the brilliant vignettes of Japan, Mexico, Siam, are metaphors for the essential loneliness of any articulate observer. The mimicry is the lunge out of oneself, the effort to transpose oneself without however losing the advantages of intelligence.

Ice Cod Bell or Stone is a conspectus of the poet's honesty while he strives to be more than a tourist in a world of gaudy surfaces and fraying skins. No-one anywhere is treated more impersonally than the tourist, and this book is a record of being a geographical and spiritual tourist. Observe the names, weird and unfriendly, which populate the Mexican reservation in this volume: Najarít, Ajijíc, Irapuato, Pachucan, Tepoztlán, Tehauntepec. This poet responds acutely to the out-of-the-way; apart from the twelve poems about Mexico, which must almost all of them rank among his best, there are many novel themes or points of departure: a bear on the Delhi road, Captain Cook, El Greco, a tavern by the Hellespont, Ellesmereland, Kyoto, a Bangkok boy, two poems by Mao Tse-Tung, Wake Island, Honolulu, Yellowstone, and (that telling mutilation) Aimee Simple McFarcin. By contrast the few Canadian poems seem less mature: quiet demontrations of fidelity tucked in between bouts with seductive haunts where life is more intense.

Yet I do not think Birney yields to the meretricious or pursues novelty for novelty's sake (except typographically). In one poem called "Can. Lit." he explains that

> We French, we English, never lost our civil war,
> endure it still, a bloodless civil bore;
> no wounded lying about, no Whitman wanted.
> It's only by our lack of ghosts we're haunted.

It is precisely that lack of ghosts which emerges in the Canadian poems in this collection and which handicapped the early Birney until he went to war. Even this haunting poem about a tree seems no more, finally, than a punctuation mark added to a vast meaningless process:

> Then the white frosts crept back. I took
> to slipping out when no one looked
> and poured the steaming crescent of my pee
> over the shivering body of my tree.
> That brown offering seemed to satisfy;
> a warm tan mounted to her head.

The tan is a substitute for those ghosts. Significant too is the poem which gives the title:

> Explorers say that harebells rise
> from the cracks of Ellesmereland
> and cod swim fat beneath the ice
> that grinds its meagre sands
> No man is settled on that coast
> The harebells are alone
> Nor is there talk of making man
> from ice cod bell or stone.

It is all "say" and "alone"; he evokes a land of little purchase. He is supposed to deal with a country upon which the history of man's failures and triumphs is hardly even recorded. Phantom hypotheses make a poor show alongside those who

> . . . came chattering and dust-red from Asia
> to these wharfstones, a tipsy Xenophon in tow. . . .

or that small Japanese boy with his kite:

> tall in the bare sky and huge as Gulliver
> a carp is rising golden and fighting
> thrusting its paper body up from the fist
> of a small boy on an empty roof higher
> and higher into the winds of the world.

"It is not easy to free", one poem says, "myth from reality"; we might have expected that from Birney. It is no surprise either that he appears with just a few poems on a country whose main reality is the Great Outdoors, and then seeks ballast in more storied countries. And yet, even allowing that he has a distinct point to make about being at home abroad and yet never belonging there, I feel somewhat uneasy about *Ice Cod Bell or Stone*. I feel prompted to ask: Has he done as ingeniously, as vividly, as boldly, by Canada as he might have done? All great northern boredoms and ice vacancies apart, surely this raw material from

the only poem about modern North America could have yielded something more arresting:

> wordswords are oozing and ooshing from the mouths of all
> your husbands saying SPACEWAR and FIGGERS DONT and EGG
> inter
> HEADS and WY and plashing on the of national
> plastic
> buses and dribbling on barbecues the slick floors of
> autocourts saying WALLSTREET saying BIGSTICK and TAXES
> and REDS

The acerb satires of Cummings and Irving Layton are more carefully calculated than this. Birney is quick to point out that Mexican strawberries resemble "small clotting hearts"; but is there no Canadian version of that, or of this?

> El Capitan Jasón Castilla y Mordita
> shoulders his golden braiding through the shitten air,
> rolls in a fugue of sporting up the Street
> of Games — crossing the already strabismic
> eye of the chess-carver tiptapping in his brick
> cave — and swings at the Lane of Roses. . . .

The English poet, D. J. Enright, has written of modern Japan in the same kind of idiom: raw, discordant, with close-ups that carry a climate and generalizations that go sour even while being made. But Enright has written, in that same idiom, about the English Black Country. Surely when a poet has so brilliant a technique as Birney has, it is a pity that he doesn't focus on the homely palpable, the squalid next-door.

I can't help thinking *Ice Cold Bell or Stone* a bit of a poet's holiday; I might even say an excursion into idyll — not idyll in the absolute sense but, comparatively speaking, idyll in the sense that the exotic (as Byron proved) makes more impact for less work. In other words, Birney has got a start from the exotic and redeemed himself by displaying so magnificent a technique that we know he never *needs* the exotic anyway. The over-familiar will serve him just as well; and it is surely the over-familiar that the poet has to teach us to see as if we have never encountered it before. Here is a man who has gone abroad and shot scores of zebras, impala and elephant because, it seems, his guns cannot touch moose.

All the same, I can see why Birney does as he does. Poets please themselves anyway. And those Mexican ghosts enable him to inherit myth while dealing with

daily reality whereas Birney the Canadian realist inherits only a few vague side-shows:

> O mammoma we never forguess you
> and your bag blue sheikel-getting ayes
> loused, lost from all hallow Hollowood O
>
> Aimee Aimee Tekel Upharsin

Birney's Mexico is dry, foetid, fly-blown, cruel, pauper-thick, tequila-eased, lottery-optimistic, tourist-pestered and legend-heavy:

> Wholehearted Aztecs used this isle
> for carving out the cores of virgins.
> Cortés, more histrionic, purified it
> with a fort and modernized the Indians
> in dungeons contrived to flood each time
> the tide was high.

History has bled to death there, but so it has in Rome, and there is much in Rome that is not imperial. It may be an advantage to a poet to have a theme with the grandeur or pain of history about it, but it should not be an essential. Otherwise the poet will become a mere historiographer. In one of his best poems the Italian poet Eugenio Montale makes highly effective use of a popular song, "Adios Muchachos"; Eliot's throbbing taxi is sinisterly eloquent and so are Pound's excerpts from headlines. If modern Canada has no legend, then the opportunities for imagism are considerable. Present the thing, for once, in terms of itself.

I FEEL SUPPORTED in these thoughts by Birney's own practice as a novelist. I am thinking not so much of *Turvey* (1949), his military comedy, but of the less applauded *Down the Long Table* (1955), which is primarily concerned with Leftist activities in Toronto and Vancouver. It opens with a public hearing where Professor Saunders, tired Canadian radical and specialist in mediæval English at a Mormon college in Utah, is denying un-American activities. But once a rebel. . . . The novel plods back over his picaresque career: as a young lecturer, quitting both Mormon college and pregnant mistress; pursuing a Ph.D. in Toronto; muddled politics, muddled love, bumming across Canada on freight trains in order to start a Third International in Vancouver; donnishly quizzing the layabouts of the South Vancouver Workers' Educational Army; eventually

returning to Utah, respectability and a safe chair (now having his doctorate). With less documentary purpose and more panache this might have been a disturbing and savage book. Birney separates his chapters with excerpts from newspapers, and this Dos Passos technique surely belongs in his poetry too. It proves he has some feeling for life's miscellaneous and kaleidoscopic quality and therefore too for such techniques as we find in poets as different as Eliot, William Carlos Williams and Pound. (Obviously Birney has enjoyed and learned from his Joyce; Aimee Simple McFarcin comes to us by that route.) *Down the Long Table* also reveals a flair, as I suggested earlier apropos of "Anglosaxon Street", for the motion and feel of life: a wilder Chaucer. And this flair, combined with the by no means idealizing or evasive eye intently turned on Mexico in *Ice Cod Bell or Stone*, is just what most Canadian poets lack. Irving Layton is too self-consciously tough; Jay Macpherson and James Reaney are too academic in flavour; Louis Dudek, if anyone other than Birney, has been close to what I am specifying, and his magazine *Delta* regularly offers samples of the right thing, although these are sometimes carelessly put together.

Birney alone, I feel, at present, has the necessary equipment. His sense of pageantry curbed by a gritty realism, he apprehends the squalid or the dull with visionary zest. Take this, for instance, from *Ice Cod Bell or Stone*:

> those ladies work at selling hexametric chili,
> and all their husbands, where the zocalo is shady,
> routinely spin in silent willynilly
> lariats from cactus muscles; as they braid they
> hear their normal sons in crimson shorts go shrilly
>
> bouncing an oval basketball about the square —

The power of that is not in the exotica but in one phrase, "all their husbands", which suggests in the echo of that popular-song fragment — "where the zocalo is shady" an absolute, almost preposterous vision of labour. All the husbands (as in the poem quoted earlier) are collected up and frozen into a helix of work, rather like those streams of soaring and diving souls in William Blake's drawings. It is a microcosm: mysterious women obedient to occult routine; their husbands, *all* of them, animated by something heavy — all the suet in suetude; and the "normal" sons not yet conscripted but devising their timekiller just the same. It is a most original and graphic piece of summary poetry: tough enough to stand a little experiment I tried by altering a few words:

Those ladies work at selling Pentagonic jelly,
and all their husbands, where the conifer is shady,
routinely spin in silent willynilly
lariats of smoke from new Havanas; as they fume they
hear their normal sons in boxer shorts go shrilly

bouncing an oval basketball across the border —

A small homage to Birney the satirist. But a presumption and defensible only because I think poetry ought almost always to be contaminated by the great deal of our living that is ugly, awkward or vapid. Ice, cod, bell and stone belie the book, are more pastoral than the symbols Birney manages best, and more Canadian-sounding than the book's contents. They remind us that the most characteristically Canadian thing is the Canadian landscape; cities, on the other hand, merge together. One would like to see Birney at the automat or the supermarket; if he can tackle a diaper, as he does in the present collection, then the rest is easy. Our civilization is unlikely to restore itself to a life based exclusively on ground-roots and the pasturing of animals.

Let us hope that Birney's proposed trips to the Caribbean and Latin America are intended to give him an objective view of the home image, for a graphic synopsis to come, with the whole of the world jumbled together on the poet's own planet. *Ice Cold Bell or Stone* marks a tremendous access of vision and technique, and proves that the lack of ghosts is, properly speaking, immaterial to a poet as good as this.

THE ACTOR'S EYE

Impressions of Nineteenth-century Canada

Michael R. Booth

FOR MOST OF ITS THEATRICAL HISTORY, Canada has been dependent on British and American actors. In fact, in the earlier part of this history she would have had no actors at all were it not for adventurous travelling companies, since the few Canadian actors of merit who appeared in the nineteenth century sought their living in the United States; even if they had stayed at home there would not have been enough of them to keep a single theatre open. The kind of actor who came into Canada during this period was something of a pioneer, for even in the cities acting could be a hazardous and difficult occupation. The records left by several touring players constitute an interesting account of the theatres they acted in and the towns and villages they passed through; their impressions collectively provide a vivid picture of contemporary Canadian theatrical conditions as well as an observant commentary on Canadian life.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Montreal, Quebec, and Halifax were the only towns with theatres (or what passed for them), and even here performances were irregular; several years might pass between visits of professional troupes. John Lambert noted of the theatres in Quebec and Montreal that "the persons who perform, or rather attempt to perform there, are as bad as the worst of our strolling actors; yet they have the conscience to charge the same price, nearly, as the London theatres."[1] Quebec was better off than Montreal because of the presence of the garrison amateurs, but only two of these "did not murder the best scenes of our dramatic poets." Boys performed the female parts ("despicably low") as there was only one actress, "an old superannuated demirep, whose drunken Belvideras, Desdemonas, and Isabellas, have often *enraptured* a Canadian audience."[2] The arrival of a company from Boston under the direction

of Luke Usher improved matters, but Lambert doubted whether the citizens of Quebec were willing to spend enough money to support professional theatricals.

The English actor, John Bernard, visited Montreal in 1810, reaching it after a road trip which he described with horror. He found a company "as deficient in talent as in numbers," but acted for it with great success. "The houses proved all good, and my own [benefit] was an overflow, an assurance to me what Montreal could do for a manager when any proper inducement was offered to it."[3] In Quebec he had similar success, in spite of having to perform "in a paltry little room of a very paltry public-house, that neither in shape nor capacity merited the name of theatre."[4] Bernard considered opening a theatre in Quebec himself, but felt that he would provide unfair competition with the army amateurs.

In the twenty years after 1825, Montreal established itself as the theatrical centre of Canada, and was visited during this period by such names as Edmund Kean, Madame Vestris, Edwin Forrest, Charles Kean, Charles and Fanny Kemble, Tyrone Power, Ellen Tree, Céline Céleste, Louisa Drew, James Wallack, and William Macready. Unfortunately, none of these performers (with one exception) left any impression of acting in Canada. The exception was Fanny Kemble, who had acted in Quebec and Montreal in 1833. She wrote in 1834 to Charles Mathews, then in the United States, in answer to his request for information about Canadian conditions. Her letter is worth quoting at some length.

> Vincent de Camp had the theatres there, and (truth is truth) of all the horrible strolling concerns I ever could imagine, his company, and scenery, and *gettings up*, were the worst. He has not got those theatres now, I believe; but they are generally opened only for a short time, and by persons as little capable of bringing forward decent dramatic representations as he, poor fellow! was. . . . Our houses were good; so, I think, yours would be: but, though I am sure you would not have to complain of want of hospitality, either in Montreal or Quebec, the unspeakable dirt and discomfort of the inns, the misery of the accommodations, the scarcity of eatables, and the abundance of eaters (flies, bugs, &c.) together with the wicked dislocating road from St. John's to La Prairie, would, I fear, make up a sum of suffering, for which it would be difficult, in my opinion, to find an adequate compensation. In the summer time the beauty of the scenery going down the St. Lawrence to Montreal, and of the whole country round Quebec, might in some measure, counterbalance the above evils. But unless Mrs. Mathew's and your own health were tolerably good at the time, the daily and hourly inconveniences which you would have to endure, would, in my opinion, render an expedition to the Canadas anything but desirable. The heat, while we were in Montreal, was intolerable — the filth intolerable — the flies intolerable — the bugs intolerable — the people

> intolerable. I lifted up my hands in thankfulness when I set foot again in "these United States." The only inn *existing* in Montreal was burnt down three years ago, and everything you ask for was burnt down in it.[5]

By the middle of the century, theatrical activity had been extended into the country towns and villages, and while acting in the cities became more comfortable and audiences larger, the same inhospitable conditions that Fanny Kemble complained of could be found almost anywhere outside Montreal[6], Quebec, and Toronto[7], although audiences were often enthusiastic and profits often good.

ONE OF THE MOST ENTERTAINING and observant accounts of a tour which encountered these conditions was written by an amateur, Horton Rhys, who wagered five hundred pounds with a friend in England that he would make five hundred pounds profit (aside from living expenses) during a year's trip as actor and singer in any country other than Great Britain or Ireland. He was allowed to take with him any actress who had not appeared in London, Liverpool, or Manchester at the time of the bet. Rhys chose North America, and opened in Boston in May, 1859, acting under the name of Morton Price. For his programme he used skits and entertainments written by himself (including an operetta, *All's Fair in Love and War*), songs and dances, and three standard farces. In six months he had won his bet.

Rhys began the Canadian part of his tour at Quebec (which he found "at all times a dull-looking place") in the Music Hall on St. Louis Street ("a wretched contrivance"). The house grossed $250, apparently a good sum for the town. Rhys was depressed by the trip from Quebec to Montreal. "Wood and water, water and wood, wretched hovels, squalid people, dirty children, mangy pigs, and emaciated cattle are all you'll see in the dreary length between the Scylla and Charybdis of Quebec and Montreal."[8] In Montreal he noticed the low social status of actors in Canada, explaining that they "are a little too much of the fly-by-night order" to warrant any respect. In Ottawa the reception was good, but the troupe had to play in an uncomfortable converted chapel. In Kingston Rhys likewise found no theatre or concert hall, and performed in the city hall for three nights. He thought Kingston a dreary town where shops all closed at seven, and the eyes of their proprietors at eight. The cats of Kingston, though, were "the

most rampaginous crew I even had the misfortune to listen to". The "lower orders" of Kingstonians ("principally Irish and Scotch") were "very dirty and discontented, and most prolific". The second visit to the city was more profitable, as it took place in Great Exhibition week. The group acted in The Sons of Temperance Hall on a stage so cramped that from it one could shake hands with everybody in the reserved seats. Audiences were large, however, and cracked nuts and ate apples "like sensible people." Here Rhys took $450 in four nights, but had to cancel the Saturday night performance, as the Exhibition had ended that afternoon and only three people turned up. One of them, a man who had ridden twelve miles for the occasion, commented disgustedly, "Al-*ways* said as this Kings-*town* was the d-st hole out west, and now I know it! Ga way, hoss!"

Whereas in Kingston Rhys was at least able to praise fine buildings, Belleville aroused contempt. "Of all the melancholy, miserable, misanthropic-looking places I ever saw, Belleville is the beau ideal." The theatre was so new that it consisted only of lath and plaster, yet cost $50 a night to hire. After two nights at this rent, Rhys moved to a hotel dining room for his third. Following profitable appearances in Cobourg, Port Hope, and Peterborough (none of which had a proper theatre), the company moved on to Toronto, "the handsomest town we have yet seen." Rhys greatly admired the streets, shops, gardens, churches, public buildings and hotels. Regrettably, there was only business enough for one night, and Rhys concluded that he "didn't care much about Toronto; there was too much assumption of exclusiveness, without just grounds to go on." Six performances in Hamilton at the Mechanics' Hall and the Templars' Hall were an improvement on Toronto, but Rhys was puzzled by the town.

> Hamilton is curiously inhabited. There are more Englishmen there without any apparent occupation, and living upon apparently nothing, than in any other town in Canada. They seem to be an exiled lot, always looking out for and expecting something that never turns up . . . in short I never could make head or tail of them.

At St. Catherine's Rhys played in a hotel on a stage made of all the dining-room tables put together. The sole entrance to the stage was from the kitchen on a board perilously balanced on two buckets. The audience was "the most queer of all queer audiences . . . one foot in the grave and the other in bandages." The dining room was free, but Rhys was so angry at the owner's charge of five dollars a night for gaslighting that he left for London after one performance, though booked for three.

Covering much the same ground as Rhys were Sam Cowell, one of the first music-hall stars, and his wife. Cowell began his Canadian tour of songs, dances, and farces at St. Catherine's in July, 1860, sending reports to his wife, who remained in the United States till September and kept a diary of their whole North American trip. Cowell did well in Hamilton, Toronto, and Montreal, and when his wife joined him they took $951 for four nights in Quebec, receipts which led Mrs. Cowell to write thankfully, "Good Canada! God save the Queen!" Three more nights in Montreal on the swing back into Ontario yielded $480, but Mrs. Cowell's jubilation disappeared at Ottawa. Her description of their arrival at the theatre is vivid:

> Over the wooden pavements, and no pavements, and deep ruts, and thick pools of mud, we picked our way till we were in the fields. A great building towered over us. It was the 'New Hotel' which had been opened to accommodate the Prince of Wales and suite, but was now shut up! Across a dismal road lay the Theatre. 'A rat-hole below and a swallow's nest above.' We knocked in vain for admittance, for a long time. At last got into the den. Dismal crackling, brown 'evergreens' decorated the Theatre in the audience part. The dust clogged one's throat, and the gas leaked so badly that half had to be put out. — Sam dressed half in sight of the audience, and Miss German had a cellar (full of rats) assigned to her.[9]

The remainder of their tour in Canada conveys a similar impression of hardships encountered. In Brockville, there was "such a noisy set of 'roughs' in the gallery that Sam not only had to talk to them, but declined having the gallery used at all the next night . . . in consequence of this resolution, we had only $62." The first night in Kingston produced $105, but the next night only half as much, for "being market day, the 'dirty, stagnant little town' as it is called, was very busy, but the business hurt the concert, as few above the rank of shopkeepers live in Kingston and all were wanted in their stores at night." Belleville depressed the Cowells as much as it had Rhys a year before, "a straggling, forlorn looking little town," with the same monstrous scenery of "forest, forest, forest, in all it stages of decay" all the way from Kingston. Receipts were poor here, but good again in Toronto and Hamilton. Mrs. Cowell explained two bad nights in St. Catherine's by describing it as "only a village, and apparently almost a deserted one now." Brantford was much better, $215 in two nights, although "a yelping dog was in, and made a great outcry, several times, during the evening which hurt the concert." Three performances in London produced $339; on the last night "a most fashionable audience . . . there was great enthusiasm." The Cowells were

persuaded to play in Ingersoll, much to Mrs. Cowell's regret, for the take was low ($65 for two nights) and the conditions frightful.

> Violent storm. No gas in Ingersoll, and streets in total darkness. Seeing nothing, and drenched with rain, we got to the Hall. . . . The Hall, lighted by oil, was desolate-looking in the extreme. No dressing rooms, and a platform so frail that it trembled as they each got on it. A temporary dressing-room was formed by 'two uprights' and a line across, on which was pinned my double sized tartan shawl as a curtain. — The railway rugs, etc. were called into requisition as window blinds, etc.

After four performances in Woodstock ("no gas . . . the road rather eccentric") and Chatham, Mrs. Cowell remarked in her diary, "it will be quite a relief to get into a city like Detroit, after these half savage villages."

A MORE CHEERFUL ACCOUNT of another extended theatrical tour — this one of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in 1866 — was published anonymously in the 1890's, under the title of *Negro Minstrelry — The Old Fashioned Troupes.*[10] The author, "prompted by a wild love of adventure," joined a minstrel troupe organized in Boston. After a succession of poor houses in Maine, the company crossed into Nova Scotia from Eastport to Campobello Island. They came without advance notice and were mistaken for Fenian raiders because of the bright green covering of their double bass, sighted as their boat approached the shore. The islanders, enrolled in the militia to a man, greeted them with guns and pitchforks, but the misunderstanding was cleared up and the performance successful.

In Saint John and Fredericton receipts were low; the company faced ruin. In Fredericton bailiffs seized the baggage and musical instruments, which were released after the intervention of a clever lawyer. But the manager was detained at wharfside, and avoided his captors only by a desperate dive through the kitchen window of the moving paddlesteamer, landing "like a Brazilian bat" smack in a great pan of milk and eggs which the coloured cook and his wife were making into bread pudding. The escape from the officers proved only a temporary relief. Receipts were still low in Carleton, and the company disbanded. However, five of them, including the author — a violin, cello, cornet, and two end men, all doubling their parts — resolved to see what they could do on their own without the expenses of a large group. They advertised by pasting cheap wallpaper the

wrong side out on fences and painting in huge letters of red and black such captions as "Go and See, This Night, the Most Wonderful Combination of the 19th Century".

The first success of the new company — after failures in Windsor and Hantsport — came in Wolfville. The high school gymnasium was offered free on the condition that they clean it up, and the janitor was put on duty as ticket seller. After the evening, the five men found they had $90 profit to divide between them, which they partly laid out on the hire of two horses and a wagon large enough to transport them and their baggage wherever they wanted to go. With the transaction came the driver, Jehu Stevens, who had apparently overestimated the strength of his team and wagon. The next day they set out, Nell wheezing "as if she had the croup," Doctor with "a certain misgiving of the fetlocks," and the "erratic conduct" of the wheels alarming the passengers, who spent much of their time pushing. So travelled these strolling players in Nova Scotia in 1866, by means which had been unchanged for centuries all over the world.

Good audiences turned out through the Annapolis Valley, although in Lawrencetown

> . . . we found the inhabitants so suspicious of strangers that although the street in front of the hall was packed with people, not one would enter till the mail arrived; on the reception of which, however, and the perusal of an extended notice in the Bridgetown paper (written by one of ourselves) they dashed for the door with an impetuosity almost sufficient to upset the ticket-seller.

In Montangen, a French village on the Bay of Fundy, not only were the posters in English useless, but also the audience (attracted to the schoolhouse by a poster daubed hastily with extraordinary French) did not understand that they had to pay to see the show, and sat patiently waiting for it to begin while the "bones" man addressed them pleadingly but ineffectually in English. At last the schoolmaster, the sole person in the village who could speak English, explained the situation, whereupon the audience began a mass stampede to the door and were only persuaded to stay by being informed (through the schoolmaster) that the company would perform for ten cents a head, "after which the show proceeded, apparently enjoyed by our strange audience as much as if they understood every word."

Success continued. In Yarmouth the minstrels played to 3,000 on two nights. On July 4th their wagon was wrecked at Port Latour, and the only "theatre" was a fish house without seats, stage, lamps, or windows. However, the whole

male population was organized into a transport train until, with planks, boxes, stools, flags, lamps, etc. "we had improvised quite a respectable *opera house*," and the "fishy redolence" was almost forgotten. To compensate for their pains, the minstrels charged fifty cents, double price, for performing on Independence Day, and took $65. After Shelburne, Jehu Stevens declined to proceed any further, and conveyances had to be procured from day to day. At Lock's Island the only hall was filled with merchandise, but the show went on happily in a large sail-loft, with Union Jacks for dressing-room curtains and planks on empty herring boxes for seats. The first to arrive were three beautiful young ladies in hats, lace, kid gloves, and pearl-studded lorgnettes, who insisted on paying a dollar each for "reserved" seats. Their appearance in the sail-loft, calmly seated in the first row of herring boxes, astonished the company, particularly as throughout the performance they intently studied the actors through expensive opera glasses, although they were only a few feet from them.

The minstrels found Halifax too big for their purposes, and so played the mining settlements to the north. Mount Uniacke was "a most miserable place, with none of the comforts and hardly any of the necessaries of life", and the miners and their families were "a wretched lot". A concert in "a shanty called the School House" was crowded, though unpleasant for the author, as "a burly miner, with a big pistol in his belt, and sitting close to the low stage, amused himself with ejecting tobacco juice over my polished boots." At Shubenecadie the troupe acted in a government drill shed; at Renfrew "we almost lost our lives, owing to an attack on the part of a ferocious army of fleas." At Albion the audience in the Temperance Hall was composed of "rough Scotch miners".

Eventually arriving at Cape Breton Island, the group got a hostile reception from the telegraph operators of Plaster Cove, the terminal of the Atlantic Cable. These men, "the most discourteous, supercilious pack that we had yet encountered," were apparently annoyed by "the fact of our Yankee origin; surely an anomaly, seeing that Yankee capital and ingenuity was the prime cause of their being so employed." Such was their hostility that they turned up at a performance in Port Mulgrave armed with rotten eggs, but were prevented from a demonstration by the timely presence of forty Yankee fishermen carrying marlin-spikes, the crews of two Gloucester schooners who had been informed by the actors of their plight.

Following this incident, the minstrels profitably retraced much of their route, and ended the summer's tour in Halifax. In his final remarks, the anonymous author commented on the people he had met, differentiating "the Blue-nose from

the Yankee". He was impressed by the weight of social distinctions and the rigidity of class lines in Nova Scotia, and especially interested in "the scion of aristocracy, who kills time by lounging aimlessly around the streets and attending daily service at the Episcopal church." This sort of person's contempt for anything American, matched by his admiration of anything English, puzzled the writer:

> Tell him that his own land lacks "go-ahead-a-tiveness," that Yankee enterprise and Yankee ingenuity are all that are needed to develop its neglected resources, to make factories spring up along its disused water-courses, and to awake its town to renewed life and vigour — and he will shrug his shoulders pityingly, as much as to say, "We leave you Yankees to the undisturbed enjoyment of this bustle and confusion; we are content to jog along in the ruts which our ancestors marked out for us, satisfied if only we dwell within the shadow of the crown."

To the theatrical traveller in pre-Confederation Canada the professional environment seemed primitive and the people often peculiar. Nevertheless, the seemingly universal badness of the roads and the makeshift nature of theatre buildings, Temperance Halls, Mechanics' Halls, hotel dining rooms, and other substitutes for a theatre and a stage, did not deter him from acting anywhere that audiences (many of them enthusiastic) were to be had. Without his comments we would know very little about theatrical conditions in Canada at this time, particularly the conditions that were faced in innumerable small towns and villages far away from the main theatrical centres.

FOOTNOTES

[1] John Lambert, *Travels through Lower Canada and the United States of North America in the Years 1806, 1807, and 1808* (London, 1810), I, 302.

[2] Lambert, I, 302.

[3] John Bernard, *Retrospections of America* (New York, 1887), 355.

[4] *Ibid.*, 363. Another traveller to Quebec said of the theatre there that it "receives little encouragement from the inhabitants; transient people are its best supporters; it is but a very indifferent building for scenic representations, being only the upper apartment of a tavern, with so small an entrance to the audience part of it, that in the event of fire the most dreadful consequences must ensue." Jeremy Cockloft, *Cursory Observations Made in Quebec . . . in the year 1811* (Toronto, 1960), 32.

[5] Anne Mathews, *Memoirs of Charles Mathews* (London, 1938-39), IV, 320-21. Needless to say, Charles Mathews did not act in Canada.

[6] One actor who played in Montreal in 1858 remembered that the summer seasons there were popular with performers. "There was a change of bill every night, and

so the work was heavy . . . . yet the Montreal season was thought to be most desirable, enabling those who had saved money during the winter to hold on to their savings, and those who had not to — well, to live. Montreal is a pleasant city. The audiences, in those days, were responsive, and the people were friendly." J. H. Stoddart, *Recollections of a Player* (New York, 1902), 115.

[7] Even then, the cities might not always be comfortable for players. Writing of Toronto in the 1860's, Rose Eytinge recalled that "the weather was bitterly cold, and the theatre was like an ice-house. After all these years . . . my memory carries me back to the horror of that dimly-lighted, freezingly cold, long, narrow den which was miscalled a dressing-room." *The Memories of Rose Eytinge* (New York, 1905), 104.

[8] Horton Rhys, *A Theatrical Trip for a Wager through Canada and the United States* (London, 1861), 49.

[9] M. Willson Disher, ed., *The Cowells in America* (London, 1934), 176.

[10] *Negro Minstrelsy. The Old Fashioned Troupes* (Boston, n.d.), 9.

WHAT HAPPENED TO PAULINE?

Norman Shrive

As everyone interested in Canadian literary history knows, the Pauline Johnson centennial was celebrated *last* year; indeed, the more obvious activities connected with it took place during or close to her birth-month, March, and are therefore well over a year into the past. But neither in 1961 nor in the time since has there appeared in print — at least, to my knowledge — any reasonably searching evaluation of the real place in Canadian letters of this internationally famous versifier and story-teller. Marcus Van Steen's introduction to a new McClelland and Stewart edition of *Legends of Vancouver* was inclined to repeat the usual commonplaces, although with a refreshing suggestion of doubt here and there. Ethel Wilson's memoir in *Canadian Literature*, delightful as it was, was really a book review of the same new edition.

Recognition of another type was, of course, ample. It included a special five-cent stamp, testimonial dinners, articles in weekend supplements and pilgrimages to Stanley Park, to Mohawk Chapel and to Chiefswood, the old Johnson home on the Grand River. The International Conference on Iroquoian Studies, which drew scholars from all over North America to McMaster University, had as part of its three-day programme a public lecture on "The Place of Pauline Johnson in Canadiana". Perhaps the most important expression of respect for Miss Johnson's memory (judging by the dignitaries present) was a special dinner in Brantford. As reported by the *Expositor,* "Chief Red Cloud (Fred Williams), with his grandson, Little White Bear (Perry Williams), performed a number of traditional dances." Mohawk songs "were sung by the Wright Quartet", and "decorating the tables were paper models of canoes and tepees". Miss Ontario, of the Six Nations Reserve, was there, perhaps very appropriately, and so was

Dr. George F. Davidson, Deputy Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, to give the main speech of the evening. Miss Jessie L. Beattie, author of *The Split in the Sky*, read her poem, "A Message from Pauline" (as her ardent supporters invariably refer to her), and, unaccountably, Mordecai Richler wandered in, retaliating a week or so later, one senses, for the discomfort he felt, by writing a squib for *Maclean's* which, Miss Beattie told me, did not please her at all.

But the learned journals seemed blandly indifferent to Miss Johnson. Yet Pauline Johnson is material for interesting controversy. If we accept her as Indian (which, technically she was not, even when given her Indian name, "Tekahionwake"), how did she and the people who claim her as their own differ from their brothers and cousins on the other side of a man-made border? What necessarily makes her part of Canadiana rather than of Americana or of North Americana? And then there is perhaps the most searching of all questions: was Pauline Johnson really a poetess — Indian, Canadian, North American or otherwise?

At the Brantford dinner, Dr. Davidson, deploring the fact that the recently published *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* contained not one word of Miss Johnson's writings, took a verbal swipe at academic critics who believed such an anthology gave " a truly representative and completely adequate picture of all the facts of our Canadian craft and skill in this important literary art without including a single word from the pen of the person who, more than anyone else, must be regarded as the main truly Canadian writer of our time." But many literary scholars would disagree with this assessment of Pauline Johnson. A. J. M. Smith, for example, the editor of that same *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* and himself a poet of international reputation, suggests that although the poetry of Miss Johnson was much admired in Canada, "the romantic fact of her Indian birth, played up by critics and journalists, has been accepted as convincing proof that she spoke with the authentic voice of the Red Man". Pauline Johnson, he continues, had a vigorous personality and an excellent sense of the theatre, as well as the good fortune to be praised by "a fashionable London critic", Theodore Watts-Dunton. But, says Professor Smith, the claim that her work is genuine "primitive poetry, or that it speaks with the true voice of the North American Indian will hardly be made by responsible criticism. . . . Her best known pieces are decorous imitations of . . . [Tennyson and Swinburne]. They have a graceful and easy-flowing cadence, which presents admirably vague impressions of pellucid waters and shadowy depths, but they are as empty of content as any devotee of pure poetry could wish. . . ." They are "minor Victorian escape poems"; and when Miss Johnson tried to portray the feelings and aspirations of the aborigines,

she became "theatrical and crude". The rhythm "is heavy, the imagery conventional, and the language melodramatic and forced. Her best work is not to be found in her Indian poetry at all but in one or two pretty and very artificial little lyrics."[1]

Here, certainly, are two assessments that if not diametrically opposite appear to have little in common except sense of conviction. And perhaps Canadian literary critics, feeling that Smith had said all there was to be said on Pauline Johnson, could not be bothered to tell Dr. Davidson to stick to his portfolio and leave literary judgments to the qualified. Yet, by interpreting Miss Johnson and her objectives in terms of the literary, social and nationalistic climates in which she lived, we can bring closer the professional and non-professional viewpoints and show why neither side can dismiss out of hand the other.

In the first place, the responsible literary critics of whom A. J. M. Smith speaks, with their comparatively wide knowledge of the struggle of Canadian letters for national and international recognition, have felt that much of Miss Johnson's work falls into a particular, all-too-characteristic pattern. Only three years after she was born, the Reverend Edward Hartley Dewart, in his introduction to British North America's first anthology of verse, intimated the sense of urgency that he and others were beginning to feel over the need for a truly Canadian literature. "There is probably no country in the world", he remarked, "where the claims of native literature are so little felt, and where every effort in poetry has been met with so much coldness and indifference as in Canada."[2] It is not important here that we note the reasons that Dr. Dewart offers for this neglect; most of them are familiar by now. What is significant, however, is the self-conscious attitude reflected by poet and critic alike at the time, the desire to be *Canadian* as distinct from British or American. The fact of Confederation, of course, served to increase the enthusiasm, and soon the newspapers and periodicals were publishing a veritable flood of verses supposedly Canadian. The poets concerned are known now only to the more devoted student of Canadian letters; the verse, from the intrinsically literary point of view, is undistinguished. But most of it is notable for one or two aspects in particular. In its reflection of national aspiration it both exudes sentimental idealism and implies a sense of colonial inferiority. In short, it is thoroughly romantic, even to deriving much of its imagery and technique from

[1] "Our Poets: A Sketch of Canadian Poetry in the Nineteenth Century", *UTQ*, XII (October, 1942), 89-90.

[2] *Selections from Canadian Poets* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1864), p.x.

the English Romantic poets of half-a-century before. In it we see significant illustration of the attitudes that determined the way poetry was written in later nineteenth-century Canada. The example set by the English Romantic poets directed it towards the depiction of native landscapes and, sometimes, native people, and although those landscapes and people were viewed as through an English filter — for example, by referring to them by the use of English instead of Canadian idiom — the verse was nevertheless considered "Canadian". And herein lies a source of confusion. To be dependent upon the literary tradition of England, as Smith has emphasized, surely cannot be a defect. If it is, perhaps all American poets except Whitman are to be dismissed with their Canadian cousins. But in post-Confederation Canada it was more important that the verse be written by a Canadian than that it be poetry; the comparison was more often between the poet and an accepted English master than between poetry and non-poetry. This approach to criticism is, of course, still with us; it reflects, in fact, an attitude that is sometimes expressed by a type of Canadian nationalism still very much alive. Professor Smith wrote in 1946 that "when it is recognized that the claims of nationalism are less important than those of universality and that a cosmopolitan culture is more valuable than an isolated one, our twentieth-century criticism will be prepared to approach contemporary Canadian poets."[3] And as late as 1957 he could remark, "the question of national identity still seems to underlie our thinking and haunt our imagination."[4]

How all of this is relevant to Pauline Johnson should be reasonably clear. During her most impressionable years the literary influences upon her were similar to those upon dozens of other versifiers of the eighteen-seventies. And despite her insistence upon her father's importance in her learning "the legends, the traditions, the culture and etiquette"[5] of the Indian, her literary education was English. Walter McRaye, her business manager and companion,

[3] "Nationalism and Canadian Poetry", *Northern Review*, I (December-January, 1945-46), 42.

[4] *The Book of Canadian Poetry* (3rd ed. Toronto: Gage, 1957) p. 36.

[5] Walter McRaye, *Pauline Johnson and her Friends* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1947), p. 19.

reports quite objectively that she read the standard poets and was especially fond of Scott, Byron, Tennyson and Adelaide Ann Proctor — the latter achieving a somewhat dubious fame as the author of *The Lost Chord*. And Miss Johnson herself reveals how she fits squarely into a particular manifestation of Victorian romanticism when she describes her parents. "Their loves were identical", she writes:

> They loved nature, the trees best of all, the river and the birds. They loved the Anglican Church, they loved the British flag, they loved Queen Victoria, they loved beautiful, dead, Elizabeth Elliott. They loved music, pictures and china with which George Johnson filled his beautiful house. They loved books and animals, but, most of all those two loved the Indian people, loved their legends, their habits, their customs, loved the people themselves. Small wonder that their children should be born with pride of race and heritage, and should face the world with that peculiar courage that only a fighting ancestry can give.[6]

There is certainly nothing reprehensible in such an outpouring of love. Unfortunately, however, when many Canadian poets of the time, Pauline Johnson among them, attempted to express their various loves in verse, they did so in a rhetorical, overly sentimental, often self-indulgent, way. In short, they reflected those aspects of flabby Victorian romanticism so familiar in much of the fiction, music, architecture and art of the period. In the United States Mark Twain was scornfully to denote the period as the "Gilded Age", illustrating his derision, for example, by the tragi-comic story of the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons in *Huckleberry Finn*; Canada, characteristically, had to wait a few more decades for Stephen Leacock and a similar satirical perspicuity. Yet, how can we appreciate what these poets were trying to do unless we are also aware of the contemporary tastes and norms that influenced them? One of Miss Johnson's many concerts was given at Prince Albert. Here is the programme of another evening of culture sponsored by the PAYMLAC (the Prince Albert Young Men's Literary and Athletic Club) as it is recorded in the Prince Albert *Times* of November 23, 1883:

> SONG: — "A Flower from my angel mother's grave" very prettily sung by Miss Mackenzie.
> READING: — By Mr. Fitz-Cochrane, "Gray's Elegy on [*sic*] A Country Churchyard".
> SONG: — By Mrs. Col. Sproat, "Jock o' Hazeldean", which was so acceptably delivered as to call for an unanimous encore, which produced that ever-popular old song "Comin' thro' the Rye", also very nicely sung.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

The next number was a reading by Mr. J. O. Davis, but he was prevented by illness from appearing.

* * * * * *

Mr. Joseph Hanafin read the celebrated speech by Sergeant Buzfuz from Pickwick, in very good form.

Mrs. Brown then favoured the audience with the song "Twickenham Ferry" in such acceptable style as to demand an encore, to which she kindly responded with "Two is Company, Three is None", which was also well received.

* * * * * *

The programme was well wound up by a comic song, "Patrick, Mind the Baby", by T. O. Davis, given in his best style, which brought down the house, and he was obliged to respond with "When McGinnis Gets a Job", which also took the house by storm.

It may be noted that Charles Mair, a man who considered himself of superior cultural tastes and who within a few months was to be widely praised for his closet drama, *Tecumseh*, was one of the officers of the PAYMLAC. I do not wish to suggest by this example, however, that the level of literary taste throughout Canada was of a consistently low level. Two periodicals in particular, the *Canadian Monthly* and the Toronto *Week*, reflected, through the editorship of men such as Mercer Adam and Goldwin Smith, and the contributions of writers such as W. D. LeSueur, Sara Jeanette Duncan, Charles G. D. Roberts and Archibald Lampman, a standard of excellence that the Canadian literary periodical has probably not attained since. It is significant, however, that both magazines had died from lack of support before the end of the century, thereby supplying evidence (not that it was needed) of the gap between the literary critic, the poet and the popular taste. Pauline Johnson herself, determined as she was to write, realized that she could earn no more than a few cents when she was fortunate enough to have work published; she therefore embarked upon a career that essentially catered to that taste. Dressed in Indian costume she went from city to city, town to town, even barn to barn, reciting her verse and reading her interpretations of the Indian legends. And despite the protests of those who see her as "a true poet", we must describe these tours as being in the tradition of the music-hall, not of the concert recital, nor even of the peripatetic bard of old, as has been rather romantically suggested. Walter McRaye, writing in 1946, notes that there "were no movies, or radio or Chautauquas" in the 'nineties;

Entertainment was given either by professionals or local talent. These were usually designated "concerts" or "shows". The professionals were brought in from Toronto,

> Montreal or Hamilton. Singers, violinists, cartoonists, comedians and lecturers — Pauline Johnson was of such a company. She read from her own poems and appeared in costume, a beautiful buckskin dress trimmed with ermine skins, and with silver brooches scattered over the bodice. These were very old and had been hammered from silver coins by the native Indian silversmiths. Two scalps hung suspended from her waist, a Huron scalp and one that had been given to her by a Blackfoot Chief. Around her neck was a beautifully graded cinnamon bear-claw necklace, and on her wrists bracelets of wampum beads. Draped around her shoulders was . . . [a] red broadcloth blanket . . . ; in her hair was an eagle feather. This costume was laid aside in the second half of the programme when she appeared in conventional evening dress.[7]

The picture is a striking one; one feels, indeed, that Miss Johnson could have carried at least part of the audience by merely standing on stage. And for those interested in symbolic acts and gestures, the change of costume for the second part of the programme may be of significance.

WE SHOULD NOTE that much of the popular interest in Miss Johnson today is still stimulated by the essentially non-literary aspects of her career — her Indian heritage, her dress, her skill as a stage performer and her personality. Even the fact that she, a woman, would engage in such an arduous and unusual venture might still raise a post-Victorian eyebrow — although, admittedly, to a very limited extent now. But she was unusual, and the fact that her poetry echoed the mellifluous cadences of Tennyson and Swinburne, the Victorian sentimentality of Adelaide Proctor, and the self-conscious nationalism of her own Canadian contemporaries, was ignored by her audiences. They probably were not aware of these borrowed and assimilated characteristics; if they were they probably did not care anyway. They *liked* Pauline Johnson and what she said, and that was enough. But, unfortunately, that is not enough for the literary critic. It is his business to do more than take his seat in the Orpheus theatre or before the hastily improvised stage in a western barn and merely listen to an Indian princess talk about her father's people. In short, he knows too much for his own popularity.

To talk about her father's people. This statement has, perhaps, unfair impli-

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

cations. Let us accept Pauline Johnson as she herself wished to be accepted — as a Canadian Indian. And in her own time this role was the very one in which her audiences *wished* — almost desperately, one feels at times — to see her. Psychologists might even say that her enthusiastic followers would have *projected* this role upon her, whether she wished it or not. For while Pauline Johnson was growing up, the popular image of the Indian was undergoing a significant change. He was no longer only the tomahawk-wielding, scalp-adorned aborigine of earlier times. Nor was he only the noble savage of the eighteen-thirties and 'forties. He had become more than noble; he was also the down-trodden, dispossessed — and vanishing — victim of the ruthless white man. And perhaps most significant in this era of urgent nationalism was the fact that the role of the Indian in preserving Canada herself was apparently being forgotten. Here, for example, are Mercer Adam's comments in the Toronto *Varsity* of March 5, 1886:

> It is important that the heroic deeds of the faithful Indian allies of Britain, in the struggle to plant and maintain the flag of the Empire on this continent, should be treasured, and a fitting memory preserved of their loyal services and staunch friendship. Nor should gratitude be lacking, particularly in the Canadian nation, which owes so much to the Indian tribes for the heritage it now peacefully enjoys, and from which it has rudely dispossessed the children of the woods, and done much to make them what they are now — a poor emasculated, vanishing race.

These remarks were written almost exactly one year after the outbreak of the North-West Rebellion. Yet they reflect no antipathy towards, for example, Chief Poundmaker and the Indians who had joined Riel against the Queen's authority. Many Canadians in Ontario felt, in fact, that the tribes had been goaded by the half-French Riel; many in the West sympathized with both Riel and the Indian. And Mercer Adam was only one commentator among many — including essayists, novelists, poets — who were reflecting a depiction of the Indian in rather stereotyped and often self-indulgent terms. Self-indulgent because one cannot help feeling at times an almost patronizing attitude towards the Indian, at times even a reflection of a guilty conscience.

Pauline Johnson actually was one of the few people who saw through the new popular image of the Indian and who said so in writing. Aside from certain prose pieces in *Legends of Vancouver* some of the most perceptive, the most unaffected writing she did was in private letters to friends and in fugitive newspaper articles, writing that reflects an author of distinction more than the Pauline Johnson of the stage and of "The Song my Paddle Sings". The term "Indian", she noted,

> signifies about as much as the term "European", but I cannot recall ever having read a story where the heroine was described as "a European". The Indian girl we meet in cold type, however, is rarely distressed by having to belong to any tribe, or to reflect any tribal characteristics. She is merely a wholesale sort of admixture of any band existing between the MicMacs of Gaspé and the Kwaw-Kewlths of British Columbia, yet strange to say, that notwithstanding the numerous tribes, with their aggregate numbers reaching more than 122,000 souls in Canada alone, our Canadian authors can cull from this huge revenue of character, but one Indian girl, and stranger still that this lovely little heroine never had a prototype in breathing flesh and blood existence!

This conventional, seemingly invariable and inevitable maiden, Miss Johnson continues, is known as Winona or Wanda.

> She is never dignified by being permitted to own a surname, although, extraordinary to note, her father is always a chief, and had he ever existed, would doubtless have been as conservative as his contemporaries about the usual significance that his people attach to family name and lineage.

Above all, however, she is to be recognized by two distinguishing characteristics: her suicidal mania and her misfortune in love. She is, Miss Johnson notes,

> always desperately in love with the young white hero, who in turn is grateful to her for services rendered the garrison in general and himself in particular during red days of war . . . Of course, this white hero never marries her! Will some critic who understands human nature, and particularly the nature of authors, please tell the reading public why marriage with the Indian girl is so despised in books and [yet is] so general in real life?

Mercer Adam's Wanda, she notes, is much in love with Edward McLeod, "makes all the overtures, conducts herself disgracefully, assists him to a reunion with his fair-skinned love, Helene; then betakes herself to a boat, rows out into a lake in a thunderstorm, chants her own death-song and is drowned". Jessie M. Freeland's Winona is also the unhappy victim of violent love that is not returned. She assists young Hugh Gordon, "serves him, saves him in the usual 'dumb' animal style of book Indians, manages by self-abnegation, danger, and many heart-aches to restore him to the arms of Rose McTavish, who of course he has loved and longed for all through the story." But Winona also finds the "time-honoured canoe, paddles out into the lake and drowns herself."[8]

There is a temptation to give further exemplification of this quite delightful

[8] Toronto *World*, March 22, 1892.

critical perspicuity, but the point is clear enough. Pauline Johnson, the person, knew the Indian and could perceive the artificiality that had become associated with him. The irony is, however, that she in some respects became part of that artificiality, either deliberately or unknowingly. That it was the latter is perhaps indicated by the lapse in her powers of discrimination when she applied them to poetry. For example, in the glow of her enthusiasm for Charles Mair's verse-drama depiction of the Indian, a depiction she felt to be far more realistic than that of any other Canadian author, she reveals the romantic tendencies of both her own nature and of the age. "Oh! happy inspiration vouchsafed to the author of *Tecumseh*," she exclaimed, "he has invented a novelty in fiction — a white man who deserves, wins and reciprocates the Indian maiden's love — who says, as she dies on his bosom, while the bullet meant for him stills and tears her heart:

> Silent for ever! Oh, my girl! my girl!
> Those rich eyes melt; those lips are sunwarm still —
> They look like life, yet have no semblant voice.
> Millions of creatures throng and multitudes
> Of heartless beings flaunt upon the earth;
> There's room enough for them, but thou, dull fate —
> Thou cold and partial tender of life's field
> That pluck'st the flower; and leav'st the weed to thrive —
> Thou had'st not room for her! Oh I must seek
> A way out of the rack — I need not live
> . . . . but she is dead —
> And love is left upon the earth to starve,
> My object's gone, and I am but a shell,
> A husk, an empty case, or anything
> That may be kicked around the world.[9]

This rhetorical, melodramatic homage to Shakespeare Pauline Johnson found "refreshing", thus indicating, perhaps, the standards she set for herself in verse-writing. Mair became one of her closest friends: "Oh!", she wrote to him, "you are half an Indian, I know — the best half of a man, anyway — his heart." She invariably addressed him as "My Dear Tecumseh" and on one of her tours she wore an exquisitely-made costume that Mair had sent her from Prince Albert. He frequently insisted that if ever his play were brought to the stage only Pauline Johnson could play his Indian heroine. She was, he said, a "true poet", one "of a race knit up in the noblest way with our history", the "Canadian Sappho"

[9] *Ibid.*

whose poetry would live "even in this dark age."[10]

The "dark age" referred to was that period just before and after Pauline Johnson's death. Perhaps at no other time has the prospect for Canadian literature been bleaker than what it was then. As Desmond Pacey has aptly suggested, if the last three decades of the nineteenth century could be termed "the golden age" of Canadian literature, "the first two decades of the twentieth were without a doubt the age of brass."[11] Said Mair, referring cynically to the work of Ralph Connor, "No one reads poetry except the poets themselves; the whim of the flimsy day is the novel."[12] Even most of the verse writers were considered in some quarters as mere dilettantes and not poets at all. Mair, for example, regarded Service, MacInnes and Drummond as "jinglers, coarse rhymesters or worse".[13] And the story of how Pauline Johnson's days were made reasonably happy ones only through the generosity of devoted friends is a well-known one. By the end of the war she, like so many personalities of another era, was virtually forgotten.

THIS NADIR in the history of Canadian letters introduces one last significant aspect of Pauline Johnson's reputation — its quite remarkable re-ascendency in the nineteen-twenties. Why this should be can be partly and certainly interestingly explained by reference to another literary personality — John W. Garvin.

Garvin is surely one of the most fascinating figures in Canadian letters. A stockbroker by profession, he had evidently decided during the war that his ability as a businessman and his enthusiasm as a student of literature could be combined to sell Canadians an awareness of their literary achievements. He admitted to having written "about 130 poems", but, he said, "I have greater confidence in my philosophical theories and in my capacity as a literary critic."[14] Beginning modestly by an edition of Isabella Valancy Crawford's poems and some articles on poets in the *Public Health Journal*, Garvin was by the early ninteen-twenties a well known anthologist and booster of Canadian writing. These achievements, how-

[10] Public Archives of Canada, Denison Papers, 6001, Charles Mair to George T. Denison, April 19, 1913.

[11] *Creative Writing in Canada* (1st ed. Toronto: Ryerson, 1952), p. 82.

[12] Denison Papers, 4454, December 28, 1901.

[13] *Ibid.*, 4424, October 15, 1901.

ever, were to exact in the next decade a large price from both the man and his reputation. Garvin's "pet hobby", as he called it, was to bring him (and his wife, Katherine Hale) financial ruin. Even worse, perhaps, it was to identify him in the minds of later rebelling poets and critics as one of F. R. Scott's "expansive puppets" who "percolate self unction" when the "Canadian Authors Meet". For Garvin and his literary pretensions seem no more at home than where "the air is heavy with 'Canadian' topics", where one is mixing with the *literati* and the maple leaf is praised "beneath a portrait of the Prince of Wales".

But none can deny that Garvin (and others like him) helped to generate a new awareness of Canadian literature. Garvin's circle of enthusiastic *literati* in Toronto indicated the beginning of a movement such as Canada had not beheld since Confederation. Garvin edited anthologies, undertook lecture tours, even organized newspaper controversies over such topics as "Who was the real Father of Canadian Poetry?" or "Who are our greatest poets?" Today we cannot help flinching before some of his superlatives. In one of his letters he wrote: "I and other discriminating critics rate Charles Mair and Isabella Valancy Crawford as the greatest poets Canada has produced."[15] In other correspondence he styled Charles G. D. Roberts, his son, Lloyd Roberts, Albert Durrant Watson, Pauline Johnson and Robert W. Norwood as also "great". After a careful reading of Norwood's "Song of a Little Brother", he reported that he "unhesitatingly ranked him" as great too. It may not be irrelevant here to note that Norwood, an Anglican minister, had other talents as well. As Garvin described him: "He is such a splendid fellow, so brilliantly versatile; read[s] Browning's 'Calaban' in a masterly manner and sings comic songs incomparably. He could make a fortune on the vaudeville stage".[16]

The posturing extravagance of these people in both their verse and criticism has had a rather curious influence upon the history of Canadian letters. For this whole literary movement of the early 'twenties had an anachronistic affinity with that of the post-Confederation period. As then, the poets of the later time, supported by patriotic critics, seemed obliged, as A. J. M. Smith has noted, to gather "their singing robes about them to hymn the mysteries of Life and the grandeurs of Empire",[17] to regard their craft as one of a very high "high seriousness". But,

[14] Queen's University Library, Mair Papers, Garvin to Mair, May 23, 1913.

[15] *Ibid.*, November 17, 1915.

[16] *Ibid.*, December 14, 1915.

[17] *The Book of Canadian Poetry*, p. 2.

as Desmond Pacey has remarked, with their nineteenth-century emphasis upon nature and love, they seemed unaware that a new age had come into being, and that even it was changing rapidly.[18] The revolutionary trends that were influencing poetry elsewhere in the world were barely reflected in Canada; here again this country had to wait another decade. The poet and man of letters of the time, in fact, stood apart from the restless world around him; he was fastidious or affected in his dress, even to celluloid collar, ribboned pince-nez and stick-pin in his cravat; new members of the group were "new singing voices" who would "surely be heard afar"; if they were female, they were "brilliant daughters" of Toronto or Montreal; if male, they were "sons of Apollo". And if they reflected the changing currents of the world outside, they did so esoterically. Albert Durrant Watson, for example, had a medium by whom he aspired to communicate mystically with voices of the past, and he was a keen follower of the adventures in spiritualism of Oliver Lodge and Conan Doyle. One of his works, *The Twentieth Plane*, Garvin described as "a remarkable book, a product of psychical research seances". Other poets were similarly souls apart.

These remarks will introduce one last paradox concerning Pauline Johnson. She became one of those Canadian poets chosen for immortality by the literary boosters of the 'twenties, and whereas she herself had encountered difficulty in having her verses published during her lifetime, her name and somewhat romantic career now assured space for those verses in a large number of text-books and anthologies. "The Song my Paddle Sings" and "In the Shadows" became familiar to pupils of elementary and secondary schools throughout Canada, pupils who, significantly enough, were undergoing, it will be recalled, what the jargon of today would call an indoctrination programme, by which the maple leaf, the beaver and Jack Canuck became almost holy symbols and Empire Day and Victoria Day occasions for nationalistic reverence. In their enthusiasms to apotheosize Canadian writers, however, the critics did themselves and their subjects more harm than good, for when more sober, less chauvinistic judgment viewed many Canadian poets as being somewhat less than great, the consequent reaction tended to sweep all our early poets aside, along with the whole corpus of what has become known as the Maple Leaf school of criticism. Thus we have the remarks of Woodcock, MacLure and Levine, which were quoted in *Canadian Literature* last summer, but are humorously significant enough to bear repeating: "Victorian versifiers like Heavysege and Sangster and Mair were dead before

[18] *Creative Writing in Canada*, p. 84.

they reached the grave", "Lampman is a good old cheese, but Roberts and Carman belong on captions in the New Brunswick museum (Carman's verse is to poetic speech what Baird's Lemon Extract used to be to Demerara Rum)" and "the dead wood of the nineteenth century".

But such criticism is just as invalid as that of Garvin and his friends of the 'twenties. Pauline Johnson has suffered from both. The time has long since come, surely, for what she as an intelligent woman would have most wished, an unprejudiced, dispassionate assessment not of her verse in isolation, but of her verse in reference to the conditions by which it was written. If we attempt this, I think we shall see that she is to be neither unrestrainedly praised nor sneeringly scorned. For she tells us something about what it was like to be a writer in the eighteen-eighties and 'nineties in Canada; she tells us something about what became the fabric of our literary history. She herself, certainly, had none of the pretensions to that greatness so romantically ascribed to her by over-enthusiastic critics and well-meaning schoolmarms and schoolmasters. Nor did she wish anyone, one can infer from her private correspondence, to make apologies — or even anthropologies — for her. Perhaps what she was, what she tried to do and what effect she has had upon the enlightened, contemporary Canadian are reflected by Ethel Wilson's reminiscence in, ironically, the same number of this periodical as were the remarks quoted above:

> Many years later I saw her in a crowded street. She was much much older, yet she had a sad beauty. She was ill, walking very slowly and lost in sombre thought. Memory rushed in and, stricken, I watched her as though I had done it.

ANYTHING BUT RELUCTANT

Canada's little magazines

Frank Davey

HISTORICALLY, LITTLE MAGAZINES have sprung up whenever new, animated, and serious writing cannot find a market. Thus these magazines are usually managed and edited by writers — writers who are anything but reluctant to publish their own works. The annoyance that gets such writers into the magazine business is, of course, that in any period both the commercial outlets — whether "literary" mags or publishing houses — and the glossy-paged scholarly quarterlies cater chiefly to established writers. A new group or school of writers cannot possibly get a sufficient quantity of its work published to make its presence felt. Some of the semi-professional literary quarterlies, such as Canada's *Tamarack Review*, tend to become coterie magazines, depending for almost fifty per cent of their material on a particular fixed circle of writers — again writers whose reputations the magazine knows are safe and established. Which is, of course, a sensible commercial policy, particularly in a country which has tended to be a graveyard for literary magazines.

Little magazines, on the other hand, never have to depend on "name" writers, their mimeo expenses being low enough to keep their losses at a minimum. But this is only a minor difference. The major one is still that little mags are published by *engaged* writers, not by semi-interested onlookers. Whereas the commercial magazine or glossy-paged quarterly usually reflects one man's desire to be an editor, or a group's wish that their town, university, or whatever, have a "literary" mag, the little magazine nearly always reflects genuine writing activity and interest. While the editors of the *Tamaracks* and the *Prisms* seldom have any new work of their own to exhibit, seldom are engaged in creation with any excitement or persistence (but rather go altruistically or parasitically to those that are), the

editors of little magazines are usually so absorbed in and dedicated to their own writing that they feel they *must* found a mag — in order that their work may receive at least some attention and criticism. Often, if not always, the little magazine reflects the presence of a group of writers of similar interests who are meeting, arguing, fighting, writing, almost every day — a group charged with literary energy that seems to keep continually overflowing into and out of their mimeograph pages.

One could take the founding of Vancouver's *Tish* as an example of the birth of a little magazine. All of its five editors had been writing for some time; George Bowering had been getting poems published in eastern Canada — though, he says, never the ones he wished to have published. With two visits from the U.S. poet Robert Duncan their bi-monthly meetings to discuss their own work became weekly meetings of intensive study of Charles Olson, Duncan, Creeley Pound, and Williams. In no time literary theories and poems began filling the air, covering the desks, and some quick and dependable outlet for quantities of material had to be found. Even the established magazines willing to publish some of this work could not be relied on; they were too slow, and by the time one's poems were published one wished to disown them, ideas had changed so. Thus *Tish*, Vancouver's poetry newsletter, was born, and the energy, the intensive literary study and creation that began it show no sign of abating. If it did, of course, there would be no reason for *Tish* to continue, for, in order to be worthwhile, any little magazine must have this inspiring energy. Evidence of such energy is perhaps the prime criterion for judging its value.

Magazines with no energy whatsoever are, naturally, one of the other minor but important causes of the founding of little magazines. In Canada there are a large number of very low-energy literary mags with no particular policy; for example, *Prism*'s often nondescript collections, *Canadian Poetry Magazine*'s usual dilettante sprawl, and *Fiddlehead*'s custom of printing so nearly an equal number of bad poems to good ones that a writer begins to doubt the value of publication there.

All of which will tend to make the new little magazine editor angry and belligerent. He will be so proud of his strong direction and sense of development that he will often make a point of countering the petrified standards of the professional outlets with work initially as shocking as important. He will counter the nebulous — if even existent — editorial policies of the *Fiddleheads* and *Prisms* with an editorial line or bias strict enough to exclude almost all of the — to him — mysteriously-established establishment. It can almost be said that, to be true to the

energy that has got him writing and publishing, the new little magazine editor must be of necessity rebellious — else have his magazine redundant.

Again historically, such ventures have often been successes. Writers such as Hemingway, W. C. Williams, Pound, and Aldington, to name a few, all began their careers in little magazines that have now either disappeared or evolved to unrecognizable forms. Since the last war little magazines such as Canada's *Combustion* and *Contact*, and the U.S.'s *Black Mountain Review*, *Origin*, *Migrant*, *Measure*, and *Yugen*, spawned most of the writers now finding recognition in Grove Press and New Directions publications and in professional magazines such as *The Outsider* and *The Evergreen Review*. At present in the States Robert Kelly's *Trobar,* Cid Corman's second series of *Origin*, and Le Roi Jones and Diane Di Prima's *The Floating Bear* are carrying on the fight for the acceptance of new writers, the last with undoubtedly the most vigour.

IN CANADA TOO we are witnessing a new crop of little magazines. In the last two years *Moment*, *Mountain*, *Evidence*, *Cataract*, *Tish*, and *Motion* have all appeared. In Vancouver alone three new ones are projected: *Recall*, a new non-commercial mag of *Kenyon Review* tastes, *Spasm*, one probably in the "beat" tradition, and *Q*, "a quizzical monthly of satire and other social criticism." University magazines, such as Waterloo's *Chiaroscuro*, U.B.C.'s *Raven*, and Acadia's *Amethyst*, continue, but only as "student" publications — seldom with any attempt at absolute excellence.

Of the new and ambitious little magazines Toronto's *Evidence* is the only one to get above the usual mimeo format. Alan Bevan, the writer-editor, says that it "was born out of the conviction that there is a good deal of serious writing being done for which there is no adequate outlet in Canada." This is, of course, the best and only excuse for the founding of a little magazine, and so far Mr. Bevan has been able to find interesting writing. There have been frequent weaknesses, especially in the critical articles, but *Evidence* has still been superior to *Tamarack*'s seemingly endless issues of unexcitement. Bevan's magazine can be lively — see No. 3's provocatively accurate article in marijuana — but, in order to counteract its cold, almost malicious reception by the Toronto establishment, should become even more boisterous and militant, and its editor should take a more prominent part in its revolutionary trends. *Evidence* does not seem to be

the product of an active group; it looks like a one-man job, and, unless Bevan himself gets more lively, I foresee a dull future for his magazine.

Montreal's *Cataract* is certainly militant. Which is perhaps the best thing one can say about it. Militancy is fine when one has something to be militant about; *Cataract*'s most obvious trouble is that its writer-editors seem to spend more time thumbing their noses than they do writing poetry. Irving Layton's "Open Letter to Louis Dudek" in No. 2 shows more concern for Layton's own waning reputation (see his defensive and high-schoolish "To a Lily" here too) than for Dudek's. But *Cataract* is the product of a group intensely active and outspoken in writing; it has a distinct direction. And it has had good poems (ignore Avi Boxer); Sydney Aster has had several lucky hits, and K. V. Hertz and Henry Moscovitch have consistently shown much talent and potentiality. *Cataract* is certainly not a pretentious magazine — it even belabours its non-academic roots, and is definitely worth "bothering" with.

Moment is a Toronto mimeo poetry magazine at one time edited by poets Milton Acorn and Al Purdy, now edited by Acorn and his wife, Gwendolyn MacEwen. Like *Cataract* it is squarely in the little magazine tradition of being founded by coöperating poets to publish poetry that might not be accepted by the established markets. The poetry of Miss MacEwen is often "poetic" and esoteric, and at times beautiful and real; Acorn's is rougher, probably less poetic by anyone's standards. The outside poetry is diverse, both in quality and manner, and, with the lack of similarity between Acorn and MacEwen, the magazine thus appears to have little unity of policy. It is probably held together more by marriage than by literary interest. From what I have seen *Moment* is not dull and not lively, not consistently experimental and not quite reactionary, not sufficiently discriminating and not actually careless. It does have its triumphs, though — such as the Al Purdy poem in No. 6. A Toronto magazine.

David McFadden's *Mountain* from Hamilton is probably in one way the most ambitious and comprehensive little magazine in Canada. Its purpose seems to be not so much to announce something new, as to bring together and re-announce all of the new things that have happened recently in Canadian poetry. A sort of poor man's *Evergreen Review*, although one cannot call Pádraig Ó Broin's poetry new, or John Robert Colombo's lines poetry. Still the first issue of *Mountain* marked the first time a Canadian reader could see together in one place most of his country's important new writers. With possibly only two exceptions, all of the writers were under twenty-seven years of age.

McFadden announced in No. 1 that "*Mountain* has very definite and rigid

editorial standards, but they change from day to day," and they must in such an eclectic mag. The only demands McFadden appears to have made of his writers are youth and quality, and even these he has very clearly lifted at times. In the next issues perhaps some direction will become apparent, maybe not from Hamilton activity but from McFadden's consciousness of the energies of young Canadian poets as a group. A long hope, but still, even as merely "a lively review of current poetry," *Mountain* is indispensible.

Tish and *Motion* are the two Vancouver mimeo "newsletters". *Tish*, the poetry newsletter, is now in its twelfth issue, and seems to have crystalized its determination to re-make poetry a natural and spontaneous human occupation and rid it of the obscure and obviously "poetic" creations of would be "artists". Man not art, and the universality of human experience, are two of its battle-cries, and battle-cries they are, for its editors seem to have made a fetish out of belligerency. A lot of their poetry seems weak and irrelevant, yet some of it is powerful and does show that their attempts at "natural" poetry have enabled them to write skilled and complex poems with the craft totally submerged and unobtrusive.

Motion, the prose newsletter, seems also to be working in favour of unpretentious style and subtlety of effect. However, with only two issues out the question is still whether *Motion* has work that should be published despite the rejections of established magazines, or merely would like to think it has. Either in Canada or the U.S. I know of no magazine with which to compare *Motion*; the idea of a monthly prose newsletter seems to have been totally neglected, possibly because of the large amount of work necessary to provide sufficient material.

There is one other mimeo little magazine in Canada: another Toronto one, Pádraig Ó Broin's rather harmless *Téangadoir*, now in its 39th issue. It claims to be a magazine of current Canadian poetry, and is, exactly, and is thus all over the map. Ó Broin himself will never pretend to be experimental, yet side by side with his own traditional lyrics he will publish even such uncontrolled ones as those by G. C. Miller. *Téangadoir* is an interesting little magazine, but not a vital one. There is obviously no group of fermenting young poets behind it; most likely it is a hobby to Ó Broin, who does not seem to have much difficulty getting his poetry published elsewhere.

These little magazines really comprise most of what is happening in Canadian poetry. The so-called "quality or mass magazines", the established glossy literary quarterlies, continue to grind on, but most of the changes that slowly but eventually occur in them are generated elsewhere between the rollers of someone's rusty Gestetner. Canada is fortunate to have such a large number of little magazines

that the commercial literary outlets are never allowed the peace to become permanently stultified. What is sad is that most of these mags do not take sufficient advantage of their unique position — no one asks them to be responsible, and money is never available enough to be an objective — to further shake up the commercial world and speed the evolution of writing. As I said before, a little magazine must be either bold or redundant. *Cataract*, *Mountain*, and *Tish* are each in their own way somewhat brash, but *Evidence*, *Moment*, *Motion*, and especially *Téangadoir*, could all stand acquiring some reason for additional chips on their shoulders. An affable little magazine cannot help but be worthless.

FLIGHT TO THE PRIMITIVE

Ernest Thompson Seton

S. E. Read

> Caleb viewed him with paternal pride and said: "I knowed ye was the stuff the night ye went to Garney's grave, an' I knowed it again when ye crossed the Big Swamp. Yan, ye could travel anywhere that man could go," and in that sentence the boy's happiness was complete. He surely was a Woodcrafter now.

SLOWLY I CLOSED the book, and, after an envious look at the last illustration — a magnificent sketch of Yan in the full regalia of an Indian chief — placed it back on its shelf, along with *Rolf in the Woods*, *Lives of the Hunted,* a few Hentys, some Horatio Algers, a simplified Homer, a *Gulliver,* a *Swiss Family Robinson,* some recent numbers of *St. Nicholas*, a collection of annuals (chiefly *Boys' Own* and *Chums*), the *Books of Knowledge*, a Bunyan, and a Bible. As I did so, I knew that I would never completely forget Yan, who proudly bore the name of Little Beaver, or Sam, the Great Woodpecker, or Sappy Guy Brown, or Caleb, the kindly old trapper, or even the aged Sanger Witch, Granny de Neuville.

Fifty years later — give or take a year or two — I saw the book again — not *my* book, but one fresh from the presses. The old illustrations were still there — the footprints, the flowers, the birds, the designs for tepees and bows and arrows, the glowering lynx, repulsive Sappy Sam, with and without war-paint, and noble Yan, erect as ever in full regalia on the last page of the text. Ernest Seton Thompson and his *Two Little Savages* had survived not only the bite of time, but also the world's violent entrance into an age of atomic hazards and ever-expanding horizons.

Part of the reason for this extraordinary survival is to be found in the man himself, part in the central theme that repeats itself with modest variations in all he wrote, and part in the skills he employed. Let me start with the man.

He was born in South Shields on the east coast of England on the fourteenth of August, 1860, and was duly named Ernest Evan Seton Thompson. Largely, I gather, because of the violent antipathy with which he regarded his father, he was not happy with his name and early in his career started signing his sketches and writings Ernest Thompson Seton, a name he legalized in 1898. For a brief period, he succumbed to maternal pressure and changed to Ernest Seton-Thompson — this time with a hyphen; he regarded this as a pseudonym and after his mother's death reverted to Ernest Thompson Seton, dying as such in Santa Fé, New Mexico, on the twenty-third of October, 1946. His little name game has confused at least two generations of readers, librarians, and bibliographers.

In 1866 the family migrated from South Shields to Lindsay, Ontario, at that time a frontier village not far from the eastern edge of Lake Simcoe. Here the father, a financially broken ship-owner, intended, with more romantic imagination than hard-headed realism, to start life anew as a "gentleman farmer". It was a mass migration, for Mrs. Thompson, a true Victorian, had been fruitful; she had given birth to fourteen children, ten of whom, all boys, had survived. Ernest Evan was the eighth. He was dominated by his older brothers and had little in common with them. He despised his father, whom he describes as a financial failure, an indolent individual, an overbearing husband, and a tyrannical, brutal parent. Even toward his mother his feelings were ambilavent. A deeply religious woman, she was much given to prayers and long Biblical quotations, to hopes of salvation and threats of damnation. Her unthinking orthodoxy repelled him. At times, too, she neglected him, burdened and confused as she was by the complexities of her responsibilities. But in moments of crisis, especially those arising from the lad's recurring illnesses, she lavished tenderness and affection upon him. The confused, harried, and sensitive boy rebelled against the accepted conventions of religion and against his family. For refuge he fled to the world of the outdoors — first in the still wild, open country around Lindsay; later amidst the fields, streams, and the marshes that were yet within walking distance of the growing town of Toronto; still later in the vast, mysterious spaces of an opening Manitoba; and finally in the great wastelands and mountains of the American West. Nature became his sanctuary. In it he found clarity, order, and comfort rather than darkness, confusion, and anguish; and through his detailed observations of the

world he had chosen he developed his skills as artist and writer.

Of the genius of the man and the complexities of his life little of value has been written. The available encyclopædic articles give some facts about his life and work but nothing else. The few periodical articles I have checked are brief and superficial, with two notable exceptions: Fred Bosworth's "The Backwoods Genius with the Magic Pen" (*Maclean's*, 6 June '59) and Michel Poirier's "The Animal Story in Canadian Literature: E. Thompson Seton and Charles G. D. Roberts" (*Queen's Quarterly*, July '26 - April '27). The first is a short but lively profile of the man, spiced with some astute observations and unusual information; and the latter contains a perceptive and well written analysis of a limited number of his animal biographies. Two brief American biographical works have been published, but neither can be considered as a serious study. As for Engström's *Buffalo vind: en biografi över Ernest Thompson Seton* (Stockholm, 1953), it is beyond my realm of competence. In short, I am reasonably convinced that the best source of information on Seton is still Seton himself, primarily his erratic and sketchy autobiography, *Trail of an Artist-Naturalist* (New York, 1941), and *The Arctic Prairies* (New York, 1911), an unevenly written but sporadically interesting account of a canoe trip down the Athabasca to the plains country near the Arctic Circle, made by the author and a friend in 1907. Of only slightly less value as sources of self-revelation are his other major works, for rarely could he keep himself out of the picture. *Two Little Savages* is thinly disguised autobiography; *Lives of the Hunted* and *Wild Animals I Have Known* are well larded with personal anecdotes; and *Rolf in the Woods* and *The Gospel of the Red Man* reveal his basic religious beliefs and ethical principles.

The foremost impression I get from a reading of his works is that of a deeply sensitive and introspective man, somewhat egocentric and opinionated, who concentrated all his powers on the observation and minute study of nature and, especially in his later life, on the spreading of his "gospel". With the move to Lindsay, the boy was brought into an intimate, exciting contact with primitive, unkempt nature.

He quickly learned the simpler lessons of woodcraft and eagerly listened to tales of great hunts and Indian warfare told by men who had lived out their lives on the edges of civilization. He read tales of adventure and survival, such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Swiss Family Robinson*, and later, in Toronto, the works of the naturalists, starting with A. M. Ross's *Birds of Canada* and eventually moving into the formidable works of Alexander Wilson, the great Scottish-American ornithologist of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and of James

Audubon, the most famous of all naturalists of the frontier world. Under the influence of such men, the young boy soon began to keep his daily journals, and began, too, to sketch much that he saw — animal tracks, animals, birds, leaves, flowers.

By his early teens he had begun to retreat from his family and from his schoolmates, in order to develop his own peculiar, off-beat interests. He was an intellectual eccentric, an anti-social, juvenile hermit, an explorer in search of an earthly paradise. Eventually he found it in a quiet, cool, isolated glen near the River Don. With a typical egocentric gesture he named his Eden "Glenyan", for Yan was the name he had given his hermit-self. It was in Glenyan that, with crude tools, he fashioned his first crude shanty. Here he methodically studied the flora and fauna around him, and began to develop his conviction that in the world of nature man can find comfort and consolation, an ever-renewing strength, and all the essential rules for ethical and moral behaviour. Here, too, he first assumed in full the role of the romanticized Red Man.

In some ways Seton undoubtedly regarded himself as a mystic. His "voice" and his visions directed him in his activities, his way of life, and his beliefs. Though he eagerly sought for fame — and fortune — he preached the doctrine of the simple life close to nature, and in the spiritual shrine that he erected he placed in his holy of holies an idealized symbolical figure — the American Indian, the Red Man. From his childhood on he was deeply moved by anything even remotely associated with the Indian way of life. As he matured he not only came under the influence of the writings of Fenimore Cooper, but he also met many Indians in his wanderings through Manitoba and during his long canoe trip down the Athabasca. Generally he admired them, but he was not blindly consistent. He found many of the Indians in the far north indolent, dirty, superstitious, and savage. But these, he would have argued, had been corrupted by the corrosive influences of a white civilization. Actually his ideal was the Indian of the past, untainted by external forces.

This ideal is partially developed in the character of Quonab, "the last of the Myanos Sinawa", the profoundly religious, highly moral, and friendly Indian, who teaches Rolf Kittering, an abandoned white orphan, the true way of life; it is deeply imbedded in *Two Little Savages*, when Yan and Sam are brought to maturity and wisdom through studying and practising Indian manners and customs; and it reaches full bloom in *The Gospel of the Red Man; An Indian Bible*, a work compiled by Seton and his second wife towards the end of Seton's life. This is an anthology of sorts in which are gathered "the inspiring teachings

of the Red man," prayers, ethical codes, laws of behaviour. Its most revealing section is the preface, in which Seton takes a last, lingering look at his own age. In it he finds little that is good. The White man's way has failed. His culture is materialistic and poisonous; his religion arid, punitive, fruitless. Slowly but all too surely he is destroying himself. But salvation can yet be found through following the new *Gospel*. For this work, Seton expressly hoped, was to have a universal religious appeal; it would bring unity and peace into a world fraught by dissension and torn by fears; it would satisfy Christian and Buddhist, Catholic and Protestant, Presbyterian and Methodist — all alike. If man would only retrace the tracks of the noble Indian, he could once again find his way back to nature — and survive.

To the sceptic and the scientist, Seton's beliefs doubtless appear naïve — the products of a simple mind. But to Seton himself they were fundamental. They provided the main thrust that led to his establishment of the Woodcraft Movement and to his early support of the Boy Scouts in America, and they run as a central strand in all that he wrote. His sincerity is obvious; and it is this sincerity that is one of the great factors in his success as a writer.

FROM HIS EARLIEST DAYS in Lindsay and Toronto Seton studied the world of nature around him. Animals, birds, flowers, trees, the signs of changing weather, the medicinal folk lore of herbs — all came under his scrutiny. By curious games and devices to sharpen the memory he increased his powers of observation. Though he finally submitted to his father's commands that he should be an artist rather than a naturalist, he satisfied his own longings by becoming an artist who sketched and painted animals and birds to the almost total exclusion of all else. In 1879 he was gold medalist at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, and in the following year, according to his own account, he won a seven-year scholarship at the Royal Academy School of Painting in London, only to abandon it after twelve months or so to return to Canada because of ill health. Later, in the 1890's, he went twice to Paris to study and paint. At a time when he might have come under the influence of the French Impressionists — Cézanne, Monet, Renoir, Van Gogh — he preferred to carry the bodies of dead dogs to his attic rooms to perfect his knowledge of the anatomy of the wolf. The anatomy studied, he then painted — and exhibited — wolves, large and small, and realistic.

He prepared one massive canvas, four-and-a-half feet by seven, entitled "The Wolves' Triumph," for entry in a Paris exhibition. It was rejected. The subject, said the critics, was revolting. They had some reason on their side: a picture of a wolf pack finishing off the skeletal remains of a human body is a gruesome sight even though the winter setting is done with skill and feeling. The picture was eventually exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, much against the wishes of some members of the Toronto selection committee who were inclined to believe that it might leave an unfavourable impression of the Canadian way of life.

In brief, Seton never became a great painter. He remained basically a skilful illustrator doing what he loved to do — portray animals and birds, sketch the tracks to be seen in wilderness sand and mud; illustrate, with patient detail, the best ways to make tepees and bows and arrows, or to start a camp fire, in the Indian way, by rubbing-sticks. And his specialization paid off. Not only did he do a thousand drawings of animals and birds for Merriam's *Century Dictionary*; he also used his skill to illustrate all that he wrote.

But what of Seton, the author? First he was prolific, especially in the period from the 1890's to the 1920's. He started in a modest way with articles and short stories, but eventually he wrote more than thirty volumes, ranging from scientific and semi-scientific works to the vast bulk of his writing, which is specifically directed towards the younger reader. In all his works, however, Seton centres his interest on one focal point — the world of nature.

From the moment he bought Ross's *Birds of Canada* (he was then thirteen), he was well on his way to becoming a self-taught naturalist. Early in his career he published scientific articles on birds and animals, and in 1909 he produced his *Life-Histories of Northern Animals: an Account of the Mammals of Manitoba.* Not until some nineteen years later, however, when he was approaching seventy, did Seton complete his most ambitious work, his *Lives of Game Animals.* This vast work, originally published in four volumes, immediately brought him recognition as an outstanding naturalist. Professor McTaggart Cowan, himself a wild life specialist of international reputation, tells me that the *Lives* still stands as an invaluable reference work in its field, in spite of errors and unscientific observations and of its anecdotal passages and personal reminiscences. For Seton, even in his scientific garb, could never get far away from the technique of the tale, nor from the personal approach he exhibited with such skill in his more popular writings.

In some ways Seton was actually in revolt against the scientific method. To him

the type of natural history then current was too general, too vague, to be effective. Scientists, he said, placed their emphasis on the species. For him a true understanding of animals and birds came through a study of the individual. To him each animal was different, possessing its own particular characteristics, its own special profile of behaviour. Moreover the line of demarcation setting man apart from animal was a slight one. He even endowed his heroes and heroines with human virtues — dignity, sagacity, mother-love, love of liberty, obedience, fidelity — and encouraged man to look closely at the beasts of the fields and the birds of the air so that he, man, might learn from them ways to a better life.

At times, especially in his early stories, he so humanized his figures as to strain the credulity of his more critical readers and to antagonize the scientifically minded. At first, he even made his animals talk, not as the animals of Aesop talked, but as human beings talk when caught in situations that arouse such emotions as terror, love, or pity. He translates the single "thump" of a rabbit into "look out" or "freeze" and the triple "thump, thump, thump" into "run for dear life." In his later stories, however, he declared this conversational technique to be "archaic", but he never ceased to endow his heroes with human characteristics far beyond the accepted reaches of instinct. In "The Springfield Fox", for example, his heroine, Vix, leads the pursuing hounds across a railway trestle just in time to have an engine overtake and destroy them. And Wahb, the aging and heroic figure in *The Biography of a Grizzly*, is given a truly Roman end when, worn out and burdened by a sense of defeat, he courageously enters a cave filled with fumes he knows to be lethal.

It was, I believe, because of this same stress on the importance of the individual, with its consequent narrowing of the gap between animal and man, linked of course with his ability to tell a good tale, that Seton as a wild life biographer was from the first successful. He started in a modest way with such tales as "The Story of a Little Gray Rabbit," which appeared in that grand old magazine for children, *St. Nicholas*, in October, 1890, and he was soon in full flight as a writer of animal fiction. With the great success of *Wild Animals I Have Known* (it was published in 1898 and ran through four editions in two months) his fame was firmly established.

It would be a mistake to suppose that Seton's path to fame was completely smooth. Naturalists especially regarded his works with scepticism. Foremost among them was the famous and formidable John Burroughs, who turned his sharp pen against Seton in "Real and Sham Natural History", in the *Atlantic Monthly* for March, 1903. The attack opened obliquely and ended frontally.

Early in the article Burroughs warmly praises Roberts' most recent work, *Kindred of the Wild*, a volume in which "one finds much to admire and commend, and but little to take exception to . . . in many ways the most brilliant collection of animal stories that has appeared." This was a bitter dose for Seton to swallow, but more bitter was the one given a page later. "Mr. Thompson Seton says in capital letters that his stories are true, and it is this emphatic assertion that makes the judicious grieve. True as romance, true in their artistic effects, true in their power to entertain the young reader, they certainly are; but true as natural history they are not."

Seton was deeply hurt. He was, if one can judge by his writings, a self-centred man — opinionated and sincerely convinced of the validity of his techniques. He was also sensitive, especially to this unfavourable criticism from a man he had long admired. His autobiography bears witness to his distress. He devotes a full chapter to the Burroughs affair. He refused, he says, to answer the attack publicly, waiting, rather, like a clever hunter until he could meet his antagonist face to face. The chance soon came, for the two men were brought together at a dinner given by the fiery little Andrew Carnegie, who not only loved wealth but also worshipped famous authors. With Boswellian glee, and with considerable gloating, Seton records his conversation with the older naturalist. Burroughs, he says, was awkward and ill at ease. He, on the contrary, was self-possessed and quickly took full control of the situation. It was he who chose the subject of conversation — wolves, his favourite topic. With barrage-like intensity he covered Burroughs with probing questions about his first-hand knowledge of these animals. Had he ever seen even *one* wild one? Under the attack, says Seton, all that "poor old John" could answer was "No", "No", and "No", until finally, after a further scattering of shots, he completely "broke down and wept".

If the incident is accurately recorded the evening must have been far from a jolly one, but I am moved to doubt by what follows in a subsequent paragraph. Burroughs, says Seton, quickly made a public apology in the *Atlantic* for July, 1904, by lauding Seton in these words: "Mr. Thompson Seton, as an artist and a raconteur, ranks by far the highest in this field; he is truly delightful." But a glance at the actual article bears interesting fruit. Entitled "The Literary Treatment of Nature" it really continues Burroughs' early attack, though perhaps with slightly less acidity. "I do not expect my natural history to back up the Ten Commandments," wrote Burroughs, "or to be an illustration of the value of training-schools and kindergartens, or to afford a commentary upon the vanity of human wishes." And, most significant: "We have a host of nature students in

our own day, bent on plucking out the heart of every mystery in the fields and woods. Some are dryly scientific, some are sensational, and a few are altogether admirable. Mr. Thompson Seton, as an artist and *raconteur,* ranks by far the highest in this field, *and to those who can separate the fact from fiction in his animal stories,* he is truly delightful." As I have indicated by the last italics, old John's public apology was limited, to say the least. I still wonder a bit if he really did break down and weep before Carnegie and his assembled guests.

Yet this brief encounter has its points of interest. The soundness of Burroughs' position is obvious, but so, too, is the deep faith that Seton had in himself. The modern naturalist still looks on the Seton stories as a strange mixture of fact and fiction. But the young reader is not a trained naturalist, and willing to suspend disbelief, if any exists, he reads the biographies as written, feels the full impact of their conflicts and tragedies, and obtains much factual information about the world of wild life.

STANDING QUITE ASIDE from all of Seton's other works are two books that demand special comment — *Rolf in the Woods* and *Two Little Savages.* The first is nominally an historical novel for the young; the second a rich brew in which are mixed nearly all the ingredients found in varying degrees elsewhere in his writings. It is the quintessence of Seton.

I first read *Rolf* shortly after it appeared in 1911. In the half-century that had slipped away since then the details of the yarn had disappeared beyond recall, but the general impact of the book still lingered. When I re-read it recently I could easily see why. Set in the era of the border war of 1812-14, the story revolves around its two central figures — Rolf Kittering, a desolate, insecure white orphan, and Quonab, a noble Indian, with whom Rolf seeks refuge and through whom he learns the ways of life in the woods, and the values of a simple and primitive religious faith. The inherent didacticism in the work is not repulsively obvious, for both preaching and teaching are well blended with the exciting events of the narrative itself, including Rolf's escape from the combined tyranny of a besotted uncle and a rigid New England society, the struggle for survival in the deep woods of the Green Mountains, and the dangers of acting as scout and guide for American forces along the Canadian border.

The actual war, with its causes, events, and attendant horrors, is carefully kept

in the background, for Seton hated war and the military mind. Only towards the conclusion of *Rolf* does he allow the excitement of armed combat to creep in at all; he prefers — and in this he is consistent — to concentrate on the more peaceful thrills of camping, canoeing, hunting, trapping, and learning the Red Man's way of living. It all makes for good reading, and inasmuch as there is something of a plot with considerable suspense it is a good yarn, too. Seton wrote nothing else quite like it.

But another work also stands by itself — the classic in the Seton canon — *Two Little Savages*. It contains the essence of all of the beliefs that Seton held so dear. It is also the best and most evenly written of his works, evidencing not only his superb knowledge of animal life, but also his ability to tell a good story, to handle dialogue and to catch the sounds and accents of dialects, to write clear expositions, to preach unobtrusively, a good sermon, and to create convincing characters. It has been, I would guess, the most widely read of his books, and it is the book, I believe, that will last the longest.

Basically the ingredients are autobiographical. In the summer of 1875 the fifteen-year-old Thompson was seriously ill, and, under the doctor's orders, he was sent to Lindsay to live with the Blackwell family, who had moved into the large house formerly owned by Mr. Thompson when he was attempting, without success, to be a "gentleman farmer." William Blackwell, the head of the household, was a practical, hard-working, hard-bargaining man. Superficially he was tough and severe, but under the surface he was kindly and understanding. To Ernest he was a better man by far than his own father. As for Mrs. Blackwell, she was a fountain of motherly sympathy. Quickly the lonely, sickly boy became a member of the family group. In *Two Little Savages* the Blackwells become the Raftens, and one of the Blackwell boys is transformed into the second little savage — Sam. As for Ernest himself, he is given the name of Yan — his favourite nickname from his Toronto days. Even the minor characters are drawn from the folk of the village and its neighbouring farms — dirty, snivelling Guy; old Caleb, wise in woodcraft and Indian lore; and the Sanger (Lindsay) Witch, the ageless Granny de Neuville, who, though a repulsive crone, proves an unending source of folklore and herbal knowledge, which she transmits to Yan in a thick Irish accent. Around these characters the plot is formed, and thin though it is, it is sufficient to hold most readers to the end. The vicious three-fingered tramp is duly caught and subdued, and the evidence extracted from him is enough to terminate the bitter quarrel between Raften and old Caleb, and to restore that poor but dignified ancient to his rightful place in the community.

The obvious plot, however, is really a subsidiary affair. The real purpose of the work is to show how Yan, the insecure, sensitive, unhealthy boy, achieves status among his fellows. This he does through his unremitting study of nature, through practical camping, through learning *and* using Indian woodcraft lore, and through his willingness to venture into the dark and mysterious recesses of the forest and to face danger.

To Sam and Yan achievement brought excitement. It was exciting to make a tepee — not any old tepee but a real Indian tepee. It was exciting, too, to make a fire with rubbing-sticks, to cook, Indian fashion, to listen to the strange night noises, to track animals (even the family cat), to trap, to hunt, to kill — not a coon but a spitting, vicious lynx. It was exciting for these two little savages to do all these things for the very reason that in such things Seton himself found his own particular, exciting way of life. He knew of what he wrote and was able to convey that knowledge with enthusiasm to the millions who were to read the work.

Thus far I have said nothing about his ability as a writer in the more limited sense of that word. To avoid some comment on him as a literary person would be a continuation of the silence with which he has been generally treated by literary historians and critics. But to separate his skill as a stylist from the other ingredients that he poured into his moulds is not an easy task. Perhaps he did not even regard himself as a literary figure. His writings indicate little interest in the great works of literature and he seldom refers to other writers. Yet he did formulate for himself a simple theory of composition from which he seldom wavered It is found in an interesting passage in *Rolf*, and, reduced to its fundamentals, is this: follow the practice of Wordsworth and write of what you know and of the times in which you live. To do otherwise is folly. In following this theory Seton placed severe limits on himself, but it may be said that it was partly through his limitations he achieved success. He knew of what he wrote; he knew for whom he wrote; and what he said was generally stated with apparent simplicity, and effective lucidity.

I at one time thought that Seton was not really interested in writing as an art. But I am now convinced that he was a conscious stylist, quite willing to alter and to prune in order to produce the effects he desired. As a writer of expository passages he was a master; he could handle dialogue with an easy naturalness (this is especially evident in the *Two Little Savages*); and in his best descriptive passages he writes with sensitivity and poetic feeling. Take, for example, this description of a marten, from *Rolf in the Woods*:

> Into a thicket of willow it disappeared and out again like an eel going through the mud, then up a tall stub where woodpecker holes were to be seen. Into the largest so quickly Rolf could scarcely see how it entered, and out in a few seconds bearing a flying squirrel whose skull it had crushed. Dropping the squirrel it leaped after it, and pounced again on the quivering form with a fearsome growl; then shook it savagely, tore it apart, cast it aside. Over the ground it now undulated, its shining yellow breast like a target of gold. Again it stopped. . . . Then the snaky neck swung the cobra head in the breeze and the brown one sniffed, and sniffed, advanced a few steps, tried the wind and the ground. Still farther and the concentrated interest showed in its outstretched neck and quivering tail.

This, which is not atypical, illustrates Seton's competence as a writer. The structural quality of the sentences is such as to produce impressions of rapid motion and of tension. The language, basically simple, is precise and concrete, and appeals to the multiple senses of the reader. And the well controlled occasional metaphor or simile adds a touch of poetic magic to the overall effects.

But Seton nods much more frequently than Homer. His punctuation can be not only erratic but erroneous; his grammar is by no means always precise; and when sentimentality or moralizing overpowers his judgment he produces bathos of the worst order. This will serve to make the last point. It comes from the story of Tito, the wily coyote. She is quietly approaching a prairie-dog, just before the kill:

> She soon cut the fifty yards down to ten, and the ten to five, and still was undiscovered. Then, when again the Prairie-dog dropped down to seek more fodder, she made a quick dash, and bore him off kicking and squealing. Thus does the angel of the pruning-knife lop off those that are heedless and foolishly indifferent to the advantages of society.
>
> (*Lives of the Hunted,* Toronto, 1901.)

It should be evident from the quotations above that no valid claim can be made for Seton as a great writer; but it can be argued that, within his limitations and for his particular purposes, he was usually competent, and at times good. But — and again it must be said — he cannot be finally judged solely as a writer. His success came from his extraordinary ability to fuse into a unified and an artistic whole his manifold gifts — his wide and deep knowledge as a naturalist, his skill as an artist, and his competence as a writer, especially for the young.

Today the success that he first achieved some seventy years ago has been reaffirmed by the myriads of people who have read, and loved, and remembered

his works. His brilliant successors, such as Williamson, Gerald Durrell, and Haig-Brown, all of whom write with deep insight of the animal world, have not driven the ancient Nimrod off the stage, nor have the radical changes that have occurred in our own civilization; a brief bibliographical excursion reveals that at least twelve of his volumes are in print and that a limited number of his works are being translated abroad.

Some day, perhaps, old Seton Thompson — or Thompson Seton — will be forced into the limbo where dwell forgotten authors. But for the moment he sits securely on his small throne in the hierarchy of the living. And I believe that he will continue to hold his place so long as the young pitch tents (even backyard, drugstore tents), or gather around camp fires with the gloom of the forests as a backdrop, or look with inquiring eyes into the world of nature.

chronicle

L'ANNEE LITTERAIRE AU CANADA FRANCAIS

Jean-Guy Pilon

L'ANNEE QUI SE TERMINE a été féconde en œuvres de toutes sortes, mais elle a surtout été significative et représentative de ce qui se passe dans toute la vie du Canada français, j'allais écrire dans l'âme même de cette partie du pays. Certains sociologues ont parlé d'examen de conscience, de prise de conscience. Il faudrait aussi parler d'ouverture à la vie.

D'autres analyseront ce phénomène complexe, mais en devant résumer l'année littéraire, je ressens le besoin d'en souligner l'existence. J'éprouve par ailleurs un certain embarras, ne sachant pas exactement ce qu'il faudrait retenir ou éliminer. Certaines manifestations, assez modestes en elles-mêmes, ont une profonde signification; et c'est justement ce qu'il faudrait expliquer longuement. Les notes qui suivent sont donc forcément superficielles, et, au surplus, constituent un début de jugement qui paraîtra hâtif, mais surtout extrêmement subjectif. Depuis que j'ai entendu un grand journaliste français déclarer que l'objectivité pouvait devenir subjective, je ne m'y retrouve plus très bien, mais je fais comme si.

Année faste, donc! Des manifestations importantes, des livres de qualité et de toutes tendances, des possibilités innombrables surtout qui se dessinent à l'horizon.

En septembre 1961, Diane Giguère, speakrine à Radio-Canada, remportait le Prix du Cercle du Livre de France avec un roman discuté *Le Temps des Jeux*. Qu'importent les discussions, voici qu'un très bon écrivain — et les adversaires du livre le reconnurent également — était né. Elle l'emportait sur un certain nombre de concurrents, dont Jacques Godbout qui devait par la suite publier son roman à Paris.

A la fin de septembre, la Cinquième Rencontre des Ecrivains Canadiens, se

tenait dans les Laurentides, à Saint-Sauveur, une petite municipalité à 50 milles de Montréal. Autour du thème "L'écrivain dans notre société", les congressistes — plus d'une centaine — entendirent et discutèrent les remarquables communications de MM. Jean-Charles Falardeau, Fernand Jolicoeur, André Belleau, Claude Jasmin, Maurice Beaulieu et Gérard Bessette. Ces rencontres annuelles ont pour but de permettre aux écrivains et aux intellectuels de discuter de questions qui les intéressent et les touchent, de prendre mieux conscience de ce qu'ils sont et de ce qui se passe autour d'eux, de faire entendre leur voix en tant que groupe.

A la fin de la Rencontre, ils adoptèrent trois résolutions que l'on peut résumer ainsi: a) demander au gouvernement du Québec de dèclarer la langue française comme seule langue officielle au Québec; b) que l'autodétermination soit étudiée et reçoive toute l'attention possible; c) que le gouvernement du Québec crée un véritable Ministère de l'Education.

Les journaux, la radio et la télévision firent largement écho à ces résolutions et à la Rencontre en général. La revue *Liberté* publia par la suite le texte de toutes les conférences.

Il y eut par las suite une abondance de romans nouveaux. Mentionnons plus spécialement *Laure Clouet* d'Adrienne Choquette, trois livres d'Yves Thériault, coup sur coup; et le meilleur roman de Claude Jasmin: *Delivrez-nous du mal.* Que l'on se souvienne de nom de Claude Jasmin.

Jean Lemoyne publia par la suite un livre d'essais: *Convergences.* C'est le premier livre de Jean Lemoyne, l'un des grands esprits du Québec, qui s'est toujours refusé à la publication. *Convergences* a reçu divers prix dont le Prix du Gouverneur général. Il a été largement commenté, au Canada et ailleurs, et restera comme un livre majeur. Il a également été un succès de librairie, ce qui prouve qu'un livre difficile peut parfois rejoindre un large public.

Un événement exceptionnel allait se produire en novembre. On sait que le Gouvernement du Québec compte déjà un Ministère des Affaires culturelles. Ce Ministère a créé un Conseil provincial des Arts dont la tâche est de conseiller le Ministre et d'établir une politique d'ensemble tendant à promouvoir la cause des arts, des lettres et des sciences au Québec. Formé de vingt-six personnes venant de toutes les disciplines artistiques, littéraires et scientifiques, ce Conseil s'est réuni pour la première fois en janvier et assez fréquemment par la suite.

Présidé par M. Jean-Charles Falardeau, de l'Université Laval de Québec, il sera le plus vigoureux ferment de l'essor culturel chez nous. Son action est à peine commencée; pour peu qu'on lui donne des moyens d'action, il apportera aux arts, à la littérature et aux diverses disciplines scientifiques une aide et un soutien comme on n'en pouvait espérer il y a cinq ans.

En janvier, Gilles Marcotte, le directeur du supplément littéraire et artistique de *La Presse*, publiait à Paris, aux Editions Flammarion, un roman de grande qualité *Le Poids de Dieu*. Ce livre, bien écrit et composé, raconte le drame spirituel d'un jeune prêtre dans le milieu québecois, il y a quelques années.

Et puis, ce fut le roman de Jacques Godbout, *L'Aquarium*, publié lui aussi à Paris, aux Editions du Seuil. De Jacques Godbout, je ne puis parler sans la plus grande amitié. J'ai pour l'homme beaucoup d'estime, d'admiration et un coin secret d'envie. Car Jacques Godbout réussit tout ce qu'il touche. Et Dieu sait qu'il en touche des choses! Il fait depuis longtemps de la peinture, il a publié trois ou quatre recueils de poèmes (le dernier *C'est la chaude loi des hommes* est à lire sans faute), il a écrit beaucoup d'excellents textes pour la radio, il est cinéaste à l'Office National du Film, il a dirigé la revue *Liberté,* il voyage, il a représenté le Canada aux dernières Biennales Internationales de Poésie en Belgique, il intente entre-temps une action en libelle contre un juge de la Cour Supérieure, il poursuit parallèlement trois ou quatre polémiques dans les journaux et les revues, j'en passe et des meilleures. Et voici qu'il publie son premier roman: un livre brillant, passionnant, très bien écrit, qui reçoit une excellente critique partout.

Un ami faisait un jour cette blague: si le Canada anglais comptait un seul Jacques Godbout, il ne serait sûrement pas question de séparatisme.

S'il est paru plusieurs essais au cours de l'année, il en est un pour lequel j'ai beaucoup d'affection (et j'ajoute tout bas: je préfère ce livre à celui de Jean Lemoyne) c'est *Répertoire* de Jean Simard. Romancier et professeur à l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Jean Simard a réuni dans ce livre des textes tantôt courts, tantôt longs, où l'auteur se révèle tel qu'il est dans la vie quotidienne: un homme bon et tendre, attentif, curieux, qui s'intéresse à tout, observateur des défauts et des qualités des autres, un homme de goût, un civilisé. Un excellent écrivain aussi. Son livre n'a malheureusement pas reçu la diffusion qu'il méritait.

Les Editions de l'Homme et les Editions du Jour ont publié au cours de l'année une grande quantité de livres: deux par semaine environ. Essais, documents, reportages, romans, et parfois rééditions. Si beaucoup de ces livres n'ont qu'un intéret passager, il n'en reste pas moins que l'activité de ces éditeurs est une chose

extrêmement précieuse et qu'ils ne sont pas étrangers à l'éveil vigoureux du Québec.

J'allais oublier, et je m'en serais repenti longuement, l'admirable et touchant roman de Claire Martin: *Quand j'aurai payé ton visage*. Un livre tout en nuances et en sous-entendus, plein d'humour; un roman que j'aime beaucoup.

Du cote de la poesie, l'année fut spécialement mauvaise. Si l'on excepte *Poetry 62* qui comportait une partie de poèmes en français et qui a été reçu avec froideur au Québec mais beaucoup plus chaleureusement au Canada anglais (que se passe-t-il donc? la peur des Américains?), il n'y a vraiment rien à mentionner, si ce n'est l'Anthologie de la poésie canadienne-française que prépare, pour les Editions Pierre Seghers de Paris, le critique français Alain Bosquet, et qui sera publiée cet automne.

Enfin, pour terminer, une énumération rapide: un imposant Salon du Livre, en mai, à Montréal; les trois conférences de l'historien Maurice Seguin sur la genèse et l'idée séparatiste au Canada français, données à la télévision de Radio-Canada en avril et mai; les numéros spéciaux de *Liberté* et de *Cité Libre* sur le séparatisme; et la disparition du *Nouveau Journal.*

La disparition d'un quotidien est triste en elle-même. *Le Nouveau Journal* était bien présenté, vivant, audacieux. Mais cela ne suffit pas à pallier aux déficiences de l'administration et à l'à peu près des chroniques et des informations. Par contre *La Presse*, sous la direction de Gérard Pelletier, est devenue un journal très bien fait et indispensable.

C'est un résumé; un aperçu; il faudrait, je le répète, analyser longuement tout cela, et beaucoup d'autres gestes, manifestations et œuvres.

Il se passe quelque chose au Québec. Quelque chose de grave. Mais ne jouons pas au prophète; n'allons rien prédire. Il vaut mieux lire les livres qui se publient ici, suivre le mouvement des idées, le bouillonnement culturel, et . . . espérer.

review articles

BLAKE, THE PROPHETIC REPROBATE

E. E. Bostetter

PETER F. FISHER. *The Valley of Vision: Blake as Prophet and Revolutionary*, ed. Northrop Frye. University of Toronto Press. $6.00.

BLAKE'S anti-rational myths have proved to be an almost irresistible challenge to the rational mind. Ever since Damon's massive commentary in 1924, critics have been convinced, though they may not care to admit it, that the apparently disordered swirl of symbols and action can through patience, ingenuity and erudition be reduced to coherent and logical pattern, susceptible to rational explanation. Each succeeding critic is lured on in all the pride of Manfred to believe that by "superior science" he will make the final breakthrough that subdues the poems to reason. I am no exception; each year I lead my graduate seminar in Blake in a fresh assault on the prophetic poems. This time, by Urizen! I say to myself, I will "make sense" of them. But in the end I am thrown back sulking into my academic den, to find what solace I can in my critical tablets and books of brass. This is, after all, poetic justice: it is Blake's avowed intent in each of his later poems to accomplish the rout of the reasoning power.

On the other hand, he has more or less deliberately — with something of the mischievousness of his devils in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* — encouraged the stubborn effort to reduce the poems to logical pattern and meaning. Indeed, he lays a trap for us when he has Los say in *Jerusalem*, "I must create a system or be enslav'd by another Man's"; we seize so eagerly on the word "system" that we miss the implications of the next line, "I will not Reason & Compare: it is my business to create." Perhaps most diabolical are the neat mathematical groupings: twenty-seven churches, nine nights, seven eyes of God, four zoas, three classes of men, two contraries. And then there are the names of mythic persons and places, always inviting and yet slyly eluding precise definition. Finally, the impressive terminology; "states", "negations", "contraries", suggest a carefully thought-out philosophical "system". The temptation to play Urizen to Blake's Los is overwhelming.

Professor Fisher was well aware of the temptation at the same time that he suc-

cumbed to it, and as a result his book reveals a curious and stimulating tension.[1] What he is primarily concerned with is to provide the necessary intellectual context in which to read Blake's poems, and he makes relatively little effort to look closely at the poems themselves. In other words, he is attempting to reconstruct the total view of Blake the prophet, the range of his attitudes toward man, nature and society which are responsible for and inform his mythic visions. He has added little except in detail to what is already available to the scholar, but he has made his own independent investigations and pulled a great mass of obscure erudition together into a succinct and lucid account.

He begins by presenting Blake as the prophetic "Reprobate", the visionary to whom the ultimate reality has been revealed and who has therefore the duty, like the Hebrew prophets, to communicate his vision in an effort to transform or redeem mankind. He addresses his prophecies to the great body of people who can be influenced and changed, who specifically can be led "to absorb and reconstruct prophetic inspiration into a new cultural form", and who thereby become the "Redeemed." Within the frame of society, this makes him a revolutionary dedicated to the elimination of the "Elect", the "reasonable" rulers of a hierarchically ordered and unjust state, who in turn seek to persecute or drive him out.

Fisher devotes the rest of his book to reconstructing the total vision which underlies the specific prophecies. He proceeds more or less chronologically, taking up first Blake's concept of history as an "Eternal Circle" of destiny revolving from creation and birth to judgment and death, within which revolve in the same pattern the circles of historical periods and individual lives. Politically, this circle of destiny becomes an endless dialectic of revolution turning to reaction, as imaginative vision hardens into the rigid codes of law and reason. Against this large frame of reference Fisher considers the development of the Christian Church as a politico-religious system in which prophetic vision was translated into "allegoric revelation" and ritualized in the moral code and rites of a priesthood. He has a valuable discussion of what Dante and Milton meant to Blake and how he made use of them. He proceeds to explore the rise of scientific rationalism and the mechanistic view of the universe. He traces the line of descent that Blake suggested linked Plato and Aristotle to Bacon, Newton and Locke. He looks at eighteenth-century empirical philosophy through Blake's eyes, concentrating upon Locke and Berkeley. In one of his most interesting chapters he investigates the ambivalence of Blake's attitude toward Methodism, Swedenborg and Wordsworth. He emphasizes the difference between Blake and the Romantics; it obviously offends him to have Blake called a "Romantic": "With certain specific Romantics he may be said to have had some connection, but to read his works in the context of most of the Romanticisms of the period would distort them completely." Perhaps; it also distorts them, or at least severely limits our understanding, to read them completely apart from that

[1] Professor Fisher was head of the department of English at the Royal Military College, Kingston, at the time of his tragic death in a sailing accident in September, 1958. He had virtually completed the book, except for the last half of the chapter on *Milton* and a final chapter on *Jerusalem*.

context. His book would have been the richer for a discussion of the extent to which Blake was a central rather than eccentric figure in English literary tradition, moulded by and reflecting in his work the same forces that produced the Romantics.

In the last half of the book Fisher focuses more directly on the poetry. He is concerned with unfolding the continuous line of development from Blake's earliest political poems to the last prophetic epic, *Jerusalem*. He is not so much interested in analysing the poems as in abstracting the themes and exploring their significance against the background of the world-view already presented. He defines the mythic characters in terms of their particular role or functions as dramatizations of dialectical interplay. In similar fashion he defines and discusses the meaning of the terminology of the poems. All of this is valuable both as reference and in making the reader aware of how closely linked the poems are as parts in an organically evolving vision. But by its very neatness and coherence it tends to lull the reader into a false confidence (which seems to be shared in part by the author) that here is the golden string that will lead through the poems and reveal the hidden logic of their structure — in other words, make them explicit to what Blake calls the "corporeal eye."

But the difficulties in the reading of the poems *as poems* remain unsolved. Perhaps the poems cannot be understood without the knowledge Fisher has provided; but they cannot be understood by it alone. Fisher has brought us to the edge of the valley of vision; in the best sense his book is preparation for reading the poems. On the other hand it points up the inadequacies of the rational and historical methods for carrying us through the poems. Fisher has gone as far as it is possible to go by rational synthesis; if future criticism is to add to our perception of the poems it must proceed in a different way. Any further effort to reduce them to philosophical "system" threatens to do Blake the disservice of turning what is imaginatively magnificent into what is intellectually absurd.

Professor Frye whose student Fisher had been and who has been responsible for preparing the manuscript for publication makes in his preface the final fitting comment, "It is clear that even the revised manuscript was due to be revised again, that the dry Aristotelian style was to be given more warmth and colour, that the sentences were to be tightened up and more examples given, and, perhaps, that less knowledge of Blake on the reader's part would be assumed. Even as it stands, however, *The Valley of Vision* is not simply a contribution to our understanding of Blake, but, as an interpretation of one of the great creative minds of Western culture by a critical mind of singular erudition and power, a lasting contribution to human intelligence."

THE CANADIAN POETRY UNDERGROUND

George Bowering

Than Any Star by Pádraig Ó Broin, Cló Chluain Tairbh, Toronto, 143 pp, cloth $3.50; *D-Day And After* by Frank Davey, Tishbooks, Vancouver, 24 pp, paper 65¢; *The Drunken Clock* by Gwendolyn MacEwen, Aleph, Toronto, 14 pp, paper 50¢; *Poems* by David A. Donnell, Village Press, Thornhill, Ontario, 27 pp, paper (price unlisted).

THE BUSINESS of small poetry magazines in Canada, as in the U.S., is at present busier than it has ever been before, and the same can be said for the business of publishing little books of poetry. The latter usually come from the little mags, and there often emerge little publishing houses that turn out one or two books and then retire as the poet-publishers disperse around the country.

Pádraig Ó Broin has been the editor since 1953 of one of the best of the very little mags, *Teangadoir*, and his new publication is more ambitious than an other venture this year. *Than Any Star* is a thick clothbound book containing most of Ó Broin's poems from his twenty-five year residence in Canada. Ó Broin is one of the most versatile and prolific poets in the Canadian poetry underground. He is presented fairly here, where we can see the poet trying his talented hand in various modes of expression.

Ó Broin always gives the impression of a wise Toronto literary figure, in his poetry and elsewhere. His criticism in his magazine is sensible and informed, and this applies as well to his poetry. But readers who are not "in" — who are neither poets nor their friends — do not know about him. This is why it is so good to see this book appear. It can only be hoped, in view of the alacrity with which readers ignore poetry and avoid Canadian poetry, that it will be followed by a cheaper paperback edition.

The book acts as a family and social history, and Ó Broin seems to have a purpose that entails leaving a record — something that speaks of an artist's sense of *œuvre*, his sense of a unifying purpose in the life-full of work he leaves behind him as he writes along.

Ó Broin chronicles past history, his family, his own growing, with a nice irony, and more important, with a desire to tell the story, to say what it is all about, to keep his attention more on telling than on the technique of telling. Consequently the form is clean and natural in the way Chaucer's is. Ó Broin reminds one of Chaucer often, and this largely because he has a no-nonsense attitude of telling the reader something, rather than trying to impart an appreciation of verbal wizardry. A diligent reader will find the odd *tour de force*, I suppose, but Ó Broin's effort to tell about things makes his journal unusually consistent and straightforward:

> My Father came from County Down:
> Long, low, whitewashed Loughhorne;
> Drumlough, outside Rathfriland Town;
> Newry, where he was born—

The shop in Water Street yet stands;
These fields, where once he played;
The Square, where Green and Orange bands
Held annual parade.

But it would be difficult for the reviewer to resist trying to note a cultural influence in the militant Irishman's work. Of course there are the Irish placenames and strange words used through the man's speech, into which these things, I hope, have come first. And who could help but say something unscientific about the supposed cultural lyricism of the leprechaun poet?:

I said to the Moon, "I love you." She
Whispered "Oh, my dear!"
And other things she said to me
You shall never hear.

She could not come down to me,
I could not climb to her:
I found a warm-lipped girl could be
A tender comforter.

The Moon was angered and she swore
Revenge, and told the tide;
And that is why he hounds the shore,
Hungering for my bride.

D-Day And After is a sequence of poems about thwarted young love, the minute observations of daily life and daily thought after a bombed-out love affair — hence "D-Day."

Here the influence of Romantic lyric meets the influence of the W. C. Williams — Black Mountain rigour of natural expression, and they produce a rhythmic listing of minutiæ and moment. The reader learns to expect it all, the banal detail among the vital lovelost truths. Warren Tallman, in the introduction, an important piece of criticism in itself, makes the point that Frank Davey's is a young talent, and that the reader is the first-hand witness to his promise. This is true, but also, as Tallman hints, the poems do not fall prey to the normal young poet's usual faults. Seldom do you see the tortured and affected syntax that fairly pleads for an appreciation of the poet's passion.

The poems are made to be read aloud, and to this end the variable measure and notation depending on articulation are used around the page, as in the title poem:

and now these dishes

who

can let me hurl them
toast crumbs and tea

What is attempted is a re-enactment rather than an interpretive description of experience. This can result in very subtle and seemingly unedited renderings of mental experience, as in the best of the pieces, "Bridge Poem";

At the end here
a man who communicates
thru an orange piece of cardboard
which I've paid for
and ahead people
people
person
I can never get thru to

Davey's only lack of care seems to be in his swerve into light verse. His re-enacting sensibility is not geared to a sense of the funny that could survive composition of poetry, and the humour is weak.

Gwendolyn MacEwen gives eloquent testimony to the fact that artificial imagery can still be expressed with beautifully chosen sound patterns, and this is what makes her poetry worthwhile. Her very deliberate sound values, the choosing of syllables, result from an impulse to make up for discarded end rhyme. They are usually exactly pleasing.

The images are young and feminine and surrealistic. The poet's guiding intellect is always there in every line, and in the intellective finishing of epigrams:

> crazy damned canasta from the hand of canned Cassandra and the sermon was of vermin and Vermouth.

The wife of poet Milton Acorn, Miss MacEwen has nevertheless escaped the instinctual proselytizing of the middle Toronto group, and already writes better poetry than does her husband. Ezra Pound said poetry begins to atrophy when it gets too far from music. Miss MacEwen's strikes as competent "scored" music. Unfortunately it is often difficult to make out what she is singing about.

David A. Donnell is an unknown poet from Toronto. His book is a beautiful, lovingly produced job of private printing and binding. The poetry is quaintly archaic in expression, given over to describing female genitalia as mythical topography.

Enamoured of his own exaggerated expression, Donnell writes ("pens") poetry that is not response to life, but rather advertisement of the poetic soul in travail and ecstasy. There is too much stock, too much of "azure," of "gold," of "rarest wine." We have not, it seems, heard the last of the Mauberleys.

BIBLICAL SIMPLICITY

William Hall

F. W. WATT, *Steinbeck*. Clarke, Irwin. $1.10.

CRITICS OF STEINBECK'S work, whether well-disposed like Mr. Watt or downright antagonistic like Edmund Wilson, tend to do for Steinbeck what he has always resisted doing himself. They tend, that is — if only in the preference they express for this work or that — to classify the essential Steinbeck as this or that kind of writer. Mr. Watt very consciously leans over backwards, in his excellent if sometimes sketchy critical survey, to avoid doing this. Steinbeck, he tells us, "might best be called an independent eclectic"; but nevertheless it is clear from his discussion that he regards Steinbeck's really significant work to be confined to *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), *In Dubious Battle* (1936) — this with quite serious reservations — *The Long Valley* (1938), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and (rather coolly) *Cannery Row* (1945). To see this as the significant core of Steinbeck's work is to see him, if one must use a tag, as Californian regionalist concerned at times (like his contemporaries Dos Passos and Farrell) with immediate social issues of the thirties.

It would be difficult, on any serious grounds, to quarrel with this list as de-

scriptive of Steinbeck's best work (no matter how one might dislike the label attached to it); but the image of Steinbeck that results if one considers this list in the context of the rest of his work, raises some interesting questions and leads to some interesting conclusions.

Does this Steinbeck — especially when considered as novelist — warrant the same kind of critical attention as do for example Faulkner and Hemingway — to mention two other novelists who have already been treated in this "Writers and Critics" series? I think the answer must be that Steinbeck as a novelist does not.

In Dubious Battle and *The Grapes of Wrath* are the only two of the five books I have listed that can in any reasonable sense be termed novels at all. The other three are all essentially groups of short stories. *The Long Valley* pretends to be nothing else. *The Pastures of Heaven* and *Cannery Row* consist of groups of stories linked loosely together by a particular common setting, a group of characters, a consistency of tone or point of view. Moreover the two novels proper, although they still retain some of their power, are, as Mr. Watt rather reluctantly states, flawed. The nature of their flaws, if we extend our view to include Steinbeck's other novels, is significant. The handling of the strike in *In Dubious Battle* tends to reduce the individuals involved to specimens and results in an oversimplification of character and motive. The idealization of the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the presentation of the family as archetypal pioneers possessed by their dream, as even the original family of man, blurs their existence as actual human beings just as the need to express the ideals of a Whitmanesque democracy in the chapters on the Weedpatch camp and the Hooper ranch imposes altogether too neat and simple a pattern on the fictional facts, no matter how firmly rooted in *actual* fact the conditions as described may be.

Now these flaws suggest that Steinbeck has not so far shown himself capable of controlling large fictional patterns with any great measure of success. In the two examples I've just given he oversimplifies; in *East of Eden* he lapses into incoherence; in *The Wayward Bus* into a too rigid allegory; in *To a God Unknown* and *The Pearl* into the confusion of his own peculiar semi-mystical symbolism. In every case he shows himself lacking in the ability that Lawrence for example in *Women in Love* so clearly possesses: the ability to hold in balance the individual conflict and the larger issues against

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which the individual conflict takes place and with which it is intertwined.

If one then concentrates attention on the three books of short stories, despite the occasional overt comments on society's corruption in *Cannery Row*, and the more implicit comments on it in such a story as that of the Lopez sisters in *The Pastures of Heaven*, the main preoccupation is not at all with social questions but primarily with a personal obsession that is, I think, Steinbeck's constant theme. He is constantly trying to describe and give meaning to a sense of disillusion that hangs, as a thin mist might hang at the edge of one of his sharply etched landscapes, over his characters. This sense of disillusion may descend without warning in a blinding fog on any one of his characters at any time, violently, haphazardly. And when it descends it reduces life for them to a chaotic empty farce. It does this to Doc in *Cannery Row* when he sees the drowned girl; to Raymond Banks in *The Pastures of Heaven* when Bert Munroe reveals to his naïve mind the full horrors of hanging; to Eliza Allen in the story entitled "The Chrysanthemums" in *The Long Valley* when she sees her flowers cast away in the road by the tinker. Mr. Watt quotes Steinbeck's friend, Edward Ricketts, as describing *Cannery Row* as "an essay in loneliness." The phrase, I think, might be extended to include most of his work — essays in loneliness and disillusionment — even the melodramatic fantasy *Cup of Gold* or the sentimentalized *Tortilla Flat*.

The Steinbeck one is left with then is a writer whose major strength lies in the short piece, in a hard clear presentation of a narrow area of surface reality and in an intuitive understanding of a very limited span of the spiritual spectrum. To say this is not to condemn Steinbeck — one might as aptly describe Hemingway in the same terms — but is to make one wonder why the author of some twenty-five books should have so almost perversely refused to develop within his very real if limited talent; obstinately pursuing instead in a great many of his books a significance that appears to lie outside his range. At times one is haunted by the suspicion that he is following the *ignis fatuus* of "the Great American Novel" as did his contemporary Thomas Wolfe. At others one thinks with Norman Mailer that "the world became too complex and too ugly for a man who needed situations of Biblical simplicity for his art."

Whatever the reasons for Steinbeck's erratic performance over the past thirty-three years there is no doubt that the author of *The Grapes of Wrath* cannot be dismissed as lightly as can so many of his contemporaries who "botched their books," as Fitzgerald put it, "by the insincere compulsion to write 'significantly' about America." There is no doubt either that in Mr. Watt Steinbeck has found a sympathetic critic. He does sometimes, in his effort to be fair to Steinbeck, stop short of some conclusions that it seems his discussion must bring him to. And this is a fault. Yet as it must compel Mr. Watt's readers to read Steinbeck in order to see if they also would stop short, one might conclude that this particular fault is not without a certain virtue.

books in review

POET ALIVE

RAYMOND SOUSTER. *Place of Meeting*. Gallery Editions II, The Isaacs Gallery.

Place of Meeting neither adds to nor detracts from Raymond Souster's current place among Canada's leading poets. It adds, however, forty-eight further poems to his substantial achievement, the nature of which will be discussed below.

There are certain games — bullfighting is one of them, basketball another — in which the patterns are limited and the spectator can predict the recurrence of what he has seen many times before. Given, however, the right kind of player, the knowing spectator watches the recurring patterns of the game with an ever-present delight, for the charm lies not in the patterns alone but in the grace, economy, and deftness with which the player executes them. Such a game in words is the Japanese verse-form *haiku*, and, allowing for the lack of concision in the English language, Raymond Souster is a master in *haiku* or in its equivalent. Consider, for example "November, Early":

> Dead leaves, dead leaves, dead leaves
> and brown
> over which the black squirrel
> scampers with his perfect living spring!

or "The First Thin Ice";

> Tonight
> our love-making
>
> ducks
> walking warily
> the first thin ice
> of winter.

These have all the qualities of *haiku*, and of Raymond Souster's poetry in general: the simple, quick running, seemingly effortless diction; the rhythm of colloquial speech; the homely illustration drawn from observation; and the sudden leap of the imagination which from inside himself the reader realizes to be startlingly yet intuitionally true. Souster himself in "Ed Hall at the Westover" unconsciously describes his own poetry at its best when he writes," . . . the same ageless ease / of a man in love with his art, not fighting it, / not trying to prove anything . . ."

Over and over in *Place of Meeting* as in his other volumes of verse, Raymond Souster pulls out the same stops, plays the same tunes. We know before we open his book what his subjects will be and how he will treat them: a thrust at the hypocrisy of religion, another at the stuffiness of small town life in the Maritimes; stronger comments upon the Canadian literati and the phony politicians. None of these we take over-seriously. Souster is more attractive in his loves; he is not himself when he hates. His loves invariably include: the background of natural beauty over which Toronto, like a bloated animal, sprawls; youth and the joy of young bodies; baseball; the pathetic endurance of the crippled in body and / or mind; and those kindred spirits the fellow poets of which he approves. The warmth and humanity of his love, his wistfulness because life is not "the big rock candy mountain" that people wish it to be, and, above all, his clean-cut grace of expression make us satisfied with the same fame in volume after volume. One accepts variations upon a theme when they are played by a master's hand.

In our time of specialization, it is particularly difficult to make genuine poetry of the commonplace and to convey value through the mere presentation in juxtaposition of simple sensory images. Souster's success in writing this kind of poetry over many years has proved that it is still possible for the poet to communicate in completely non-specialized language to a wide variety of men and women. No doubt A. J. M. Smith and Raymond Souster have an approximately equal rating in the minds of Canadian professors of English, for both are poets of great craftsmanship and dedication, and their current positions as Canadian poets are comparable. I have, however, shown poems by both Souster and Smith to labourers and to young people of varied interests. All have responded to the work of Souster; few have responded to that of Smith, even after Smith's aims and techniques have been carefully explained. The words most commonly used to express the difference between the two poets have been "alive" and "dead". Although I do not agree with this verdict with respect to the poetry of Smith, I agree with it one hundred per cent in so far as it relates to that of Raymond Souster. There are many Canadian poets as alive as Raymond Souster in the flesh, but when the flesh becomes word few are as alive in the kinetic attraction of their verse to those in the Canadian population who need poetry the most.

Souster's poems seldom fail. They are the product not so much of books as of observation, work, imagination, and the courage of that stubborn conviction which speaks so well in the last poem of *Place of Meeting*:

That's the way
we've got to hang on—

like the last patch of snow
clinging to the hillside
crouching at the wood edge
with April done

dirty-white
but defiant

lonely
fighting
death

FRED COGSWELL

THE VIRTUES OF URBANITY

ROBERT FINCH. *Acis in Oxford and Other Poems.* University of Toronto Press. $3.00.

ROBERT FINCH is an urbane poet in a nation that is too often content merely with becoming urban. He writes with poise and self-consciousness. The Dionysic fury never leads him where his reason would not have him go, and his craftsmanship is controlled and accurate. Thus, one imagines, Flaubert might write if another incarnation made him a Canadian poet instead of a French novelist.

These qualities, which at once grace and limit his verse, were already evident in Dr. Finch's first volume, *Poems,* published in 1946. The present volume, distilling the work of the decade and a half between then and now, can be taken as confirming the bounds of his possibilities as a poet. His gifts are neither epic nor dramatic; he is not a myth-creator of the kind one encounters frequently of late in Canada, unless one sees a mythological touch in his title sequence, "Acis in Oxford", in which he dwells with ironic tenderness on the echoes a performance of Handel's version of the ancient legend arouses in the minds of hearers and performers; finally, he is not a poet of the Canadian scene, among whose amplitudes his verse sounds with the silvery remoteness of rococo music.

Yet, such limitations defined and granted, *Acis in Oxford* is often true and sometimes very good poetry, its deliberation elaborating on accurate insight and translating, with a conciseness impossible to prose, sensitive observations on human existence and the world of nature. Occasionally, it is true, Dr. Finch falls into shallow triteness:

> No mute inglorious Milton even pined,
> His numbers ravished hearts as well as critics.
> What lacks when beauty is its own æsthetics?
> Whose work of skill falls short because unsigned?

Sometimes also he submits to the temptation of mere virtuosity, of trying to elevate a trivial observation by verbal juggling. This happens in "From a University Window", where he describes a man lime-whiting a playing field on a snowy morning:

> . . . A paler green now snow begins to lime it,
> Powdering the white gulls and the whitened lime-lines
> And the lime-white siren-suit with the man inside it
> Pushing the powdery liming-machine before him.

Yet Dr. Finch, who is concerned almost to obsession with the different rhythms of the outer and inner worlds, can write also with sensitive conviction on the regrets and consolations of the human mind. In "A Certain Age", for instance, he talks of the transient things that we enjoy "unwary of our luck", and thus he ends his sonnet:

> They have all gone and we are far away
> Where every season is a winter's day
> That comes and goes and always is the same
>
> Except that we, more than its atmosphere,
> Still know and feel and see and breathe and hear
> That wind, that grass, those trees, that eager stream.

And in "The Metaphor" he expresses a neo-Metaphysical conceit with power and an admirable verbal percussion:

> Rain lashes
> And washes
> The muck and ruck,
> Leaving the rock,
> There in the bare
> Stone hear it stir
> The seed of groves,
> The meed of sheaves.
> Listen again,
> Listen to rain
> Whisper and roar
> The metaphor,
> For like its boon
> He shall come down.

Dr. Finch is an unfashionable poet, who takes hints from the past wherever he finds them fitting, but those who disregard him for this reason will miss that combination of craftsmanship and fine sensibility which — at its best — makes a good verse-writer into a poet's — if not a popular — poet. GEORGE WOODCOCK

BLUNDERBUSS AGAINST BUTTERFLY

FRANCES BROOKE. *The History of Emily Montague.* McClelland & Stewart, New Canadian Library. $1.25.

WHEN SIDNEY SMITH said that he never read a book before reviewing it ("this prejudices a man so"), he probably perpetrated the canard that a book reviewer has no conscience. Conscience, or fear of righteous indignation, would prevent this reviewer from discussing Mrs. Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* in any popular medium for disseminating information. A discussion of the volume in question, however, is both right and proper in such a journal as *Canadian Literature*. *Canadian Literature* is for specialists, and so is *Emily Montague*. How shocked its author would have been at the thought! She *feared*, she said, that her work was better liked by men than women. One wonders two hundred years later who were those men who were pleased to read the adventures of the sentimental, sensitive Emily and her silly goose of a friend, Arabella Fermor. (Emily should certainly have been called "Clarissa".) We know that nine years after *Emily* appeared, Burke and Gibbon, Reynolds and Sheridan all professed themselves to be doting admirers of another charming young woman, the still more sensitive Evelina, and her creator, Fanny Burney. It is true that Emily was not faced with the endless saga of misadventures that befall Evelina, who put up with vulgar relations, persecutions by the same relations, woeful misunderstandings on the part of the noble hero, near rapes, missing heirs and deathbed repentances; but Mrs. Brooke's is a tale of equal sentimentality, though without the melodrama. Could it possibly have been read, as its author says it was, by "a man of exquisite taste", who was "one of the best judges of Literature I know"? We remember that once in a reckless moment Dr. Johnson confessed that contrary to all rumours and Miss Burney's own belief, he had not read *Evelina,* adding cautiously, "though I don't wish this to be known."

I have suggested that this is a book for specialists, and chiefly for Canadian specialists, since the most significant aspect of *The History* is that the scene is Canadian. Here is authentic Canada in its early days, delineated by someone who was there and who knew. All specialists in the study of the novel, however, must be most grateful to McClelland & Stewart for making available in agreeable format this first American novel; and in that "first" lies its chief distinction. Students of literary criticism will be interested in Mrs. Brooke's place in the stream of eighteenth century literature. She comes fairly early in that procession of novel writers who had produced a new genre in literature. She had known Samuel Richardson, the progenitor of the epistolary novel, the form she follows, and she knew Fanny Burney, whose *Evelina* surely owes much to *The History of Emily Montague*. Historians will find much interesting material on early days in Quebec; although the heroine, in keeping with the age, definitely asserts her lack of interest in politics, the author finds it difficult to leave the subject out entirely. Sociologists will find sprightly discussions of social life in the busy, gay city of Quebec, with equally deft descriptions of aboriginal customs of Indians, and a strangely modern outlook on these

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A selection from *The Tamarack Review*, edited by Robert Weaver, with an Introduction by Robert Fulford.

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OXFORD

early Canadians. All this is set against a background of Quebec scenery which deserves Mrs. Brooke's epithet of the "great sublime".

It is obvious from the novel that Mrs. Brooke was a witty, observant, intelligent woman, and Professor Klinck in his excellent introduction adds a number of biographical facts which must make most readers wish that Mrs. Brooke had written about her own life in Quebec, instead of inventing a far less interesting heroine. She was not a writer of novels. Like Jane Austen, her topic was love and marriage, and three couples occupy our attention, but the resemblance ends there. Of plot she knew nothing. In the last twenty pages, after all the lovers are married off, each with an elegant sufficiency, and safely back in England, she feels that perhaps a moral is necessary. "A worthy purpose" is in the air, since all the world cannot live in the felicity she has bestowed on her characters, so she introduces a complete new set, and in a letter half-a-dozen pages long we have the history of a vile seducer, a too-confiding Sophia, a "sweet infant" left orphaned when Sophia died of a broken heart, and a disillusioned female friend who rescues the infant. All this is deeply touching to the author, and she makes one of her happy bride-grooms write: "The story you have told me has equally shocked and astonished me: My sweet Bell has dropped a pitying tear on poor Sophia's grave."

This is a light untroubled little tale, an amusing period piece, but it bears as much resemblance to life as a flower pressed within its pages two hundred years ago would bear to the real article to-day.

M. L. MACKENZIE

THE RING OF AUTHENTICITY

ARTHUR HAILEY. *In High Places.* Doubleday. $5.75.

LET ME MAKE IT quite clear at the outset — to review a novel which has received a ten-thousand dollar award (the Doubleday Canadian Novel Award) is no simple matter. If you pan it, you may be suspected of wearing the green blinkers of jealousy. If you praise it, perhaps your critical judgment has been blindfolded by another sort of green, namely dollar bills. We must risk it, however, both ways.

Before I read this novel, I had the sour feeling that I was not going to like it, mainly (I think) because I had seen portions of it in *Maclean's,* and had read snatches here and there which seemed to me to be pretty dreary stuff. But this is not a novel which should be read in bits and pieces. Now that I have read it straight through, I have no hesitation in saying that it is one of the most absorbing books I have encountered in the past year. This, despite the fact that the characters are wooden, the conversation is stilted, the writing is frequently drab and at best never rises above competent journalism, and the writer has some maddening mannerisms, such as the habit of listing the menus of every meal consumed by any character, or the trick of inserting at various points in the narrative a reminder of what other major characters happen to be doing at that precise moment — the "meanwhile, back at the ranch" approach — which seems to serve no useful purpose. Nevertheless, this is an intensely interesting novel. Why? Simply because Arthur Hailey, whose strong point has always been well-structured plot plus meticulously researched background material, has come up with a prophetic tale which is both frightening and utterly convincing.

The time is the not-too-distant future. James Howden, Prime Minister of Canada, is faced with the grim knowledge that nuclear war is becoming inevitable and that when it comes Canada will be in the centre of the heaviest attacks. In order to salvage at least something from the holocaust, and to shift the focus of the nuclear attacks further north and away from the country's food-growing areas, Howden and others in his cabinet feel it will be essential for Canada to participate in an Act of military and economic union with the United States. Howden is well aware that this proposal will meet with widespread opposition, for although Canadian independence is to be guaranteed in some matters, many people will feel with considerable justification that it is only a question of time until Canada's identity is lost altogether and our national life submerged in that of the dominant U.S.A.

At the point when he can least afford to have his personal prestige or that of his government threatened, Howden is endangered in both respects. A piece of political skulduggery which he performed many years before, in his determination to gain party leadership, may now be exposed. Secondly, the misfortune of Henri Duval, a stateless stowaway who has been refused admittance to Canada by the Department of Immigration, becomes a national issue and his case is taken up by the Opposition in an attempt to embarrass the government. In the midst of political and legal manoeuvres, the lives and motives of individual men become hopelessly entangled. The situa-

tion makes some men's careers and breaks others, almost arbitrarily — a throw of the dice. Politicians, lawyers and newspapermen all have their moments of honour, when inner conviction corresponds with outer action, and all have moments when conscience bows to expediency or principles prove feebler than the quest for power. Mr. Hailey's story is a complex one, and it is developed with great skill. The inner workings of government, of newspapers, of the law, and even of merchant ships and the dockside — these details have the ring of authenticity.

This novel seems to me to be in a special category. I am not certain whether it should be called political science-fiction or Political-Science fiction, but whichever it is, it is worth reading. Mr. Hailey supplies no facile answers, but he certainly asks some very pertinent questions.

MARGARET LAURENCE

SUSPENSE AND SWEET SUMMER

PHYLLIS BRETT YOUNG. *Anything Could Happen!* Longmans Green. $4.50.

KENDAL YOUNG. *The Ravine.* Longmans Green. $3.75.

THREE YEARS AGO Mrs. Young published her first book, *Psyche,* which was followed a year later by *The Torontonians,* a novel which excited at least the Jet Set of Toronto. It is a novel concerned with nearly-at-the-top executives and their wives who live in a wealthy suburb of The City and have problems like cold busy spouses and upping those Joneses.

In *The Torontonians* (I have not read *Psyche*) Mrs. Young shows up as a sentimentalist and romantic with a disquieting aptitude for collecting clichés. With *Anything Could Happen!* she manages to break her own records.

The book talks — with many soft chuckles—about Mrs. Young's thirteenth summer, which was passed at "the lake" in the company of her father (Professor G. S. Brett, Head of Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto), mother, two brothers, eleven and nine years old, and a dog (not bitch) Lucy. There were also the children of Mr. Holloway ("a sociologist with an outstanding reputation on two continents") who joined the Bretts to prove to the local people "how sharper than a serpent's tooth it was to know a professor's child."

I can't see anything particularly sharp about that tooth. Mrs. Young and her companions occasionally spied on old fellows who took a pull at the flask and younger lovers who circled the hotel at night. Once she borrowed a gun, without Daddy's permission, from Vern "a muscular good-looking young man with very bright blue eyes, thick dark hair, and a colourful vocabulary [e.g. "Jesus Murphy!"] . . . [who] could spit with uncanny accuracy" but she only fired it once, at a groundhog which she intentionally missed. She hid the gun for the summer in a haunted house (no spooks, though), and made a fort in the woods, and won a rowing boat race ("by more than a length!"), and ran down to the dock when the mailboat came in ("custom never staled the infinite variety of this event") and was "literally scared out of [her] wits" when she met "a terror-stricken cow" one dark night.

Mrs. Young does not seem to have lost

the self-absorption of most thirteen-year-olds, for none of the other personalities — and there are quite a few — in her book are anything more than instruments to throw up new lights on thirteen-year-old Miss Brett. Her father, who "reads philosophy" very early every morning, "never said or did anything that was not colourful," but Mrs. Young only tells us that he says "Then he should be horse-whipped" and that Knightsbridge is "a sink of iniquity".

Doubtless the author has enjoyed looking back on her own sweet summer, and perhaps a few (perhaps many: her publisher boasts "outstanding" sales for her other books) will wander happily and foggily with her. But I like snappier summers myself.

Phyllis Brett Young changes, in name only, when she becomes Kendal Young, author of a suspense story, *The Ravine*. Incidentally, I'm bewildered as to why she changes. The book jacket blurb says she's he and, for fear the jacket is lost, this information is printed again on a preliminary page.

Kendal Young has one creditable quality: he can pull a Hitchcock gasp from his reader, at least me, when the murderer sneaks up behind the heroine and strangles her. I'm a sucker for that never - look-behind-you-something-may-be-gaining-on-you stuff.

The setting is a small town with a thickly wooded ravine where two small girls have been raped, one of them murdered. Art teacher Julie Warner's discovery of the second victim drives her into a campaign to expose the mur-

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derer, which she does with the help of Dr. Gregory Markham, "tall and rangy" with "a mouth which, though at all times firm, could also be gentle." Miss Warner has "blue eyes . . . between thick lashes" and, "holding a diploma from the Beaux Arts in Paris and with no necessity to earn her own living", drives a station wagon.

As an artist (occupational therapy) Julie has befriended Deborah Hurst, first victim of the ravine and subsequently an imbecile. Dr. Markham too is interested in helping the child, which brings me to a point about the denouement.

I can't believe that a child in Deborah's state could be shocked back to normal by facing her rapist (even if she's coming out of chloroform). But this is the case in *The Ravine*, and Dr. Markham plans it that way.

Dr. Markham falls in love too.

> When Greg got back to the car, he made no comment, but his hand found hers and held it. They stayed like that, without speaking, for several minutes. Then his mouth was against hers in a kiss brief but possessive.

> More shaken than she had guessed she would be, Julie drew away from him and said uncertainly, "But it can't happen like this?"
>
> "It has happened like this".
>
> "Greg —"
>
> "Yes?"
>
> "You'll have to give me time to get used to it".
>
> "All the time in the world", he told her gently. "Which is not as chivalrous as it sounds, because I don't believe it will take you long."

It really does though.

MARY MCALPINE

REBEL WITH A CAUSE

MARGARET WADE LABARGE. *Simon de Montfort.* University of Toronto. $6.00.

"SIMON DE MONTFORT, though only a Frenchman, was a Good Thing, and is very notable as being the only Good baron in history." This is perhaps the best-known judgment of Simon, but there have been many others, notable among them the scholarly and invaluable work of Bémont. This latest biography by Margaret Labarge owes a good deal to Bémont, as the author is the first to admit, but nevertheless it is a very different type of book. Little new in the way of biographical material on Simon has come to light since Bémont wrote, and a shortage of personal data has remained a problem for Dr. Labarge as it is for all biographers of medieval figures. At the same time she has not utilized to any great extent the considerable quantity of research which has been done in recent years on the baronial movement of the mid-thirteenth century and the constitutional issues and precedents in-

volved. In her attempt to keep her book comparatively short and to preserve an appeal to a wide audience, Dr. Labarge has not probed too deeply into constitutional conflicts. Instead she has sought to set Simon against the general background of his times, and has filled out the rather bare details of his life with interesting sidelights on thirteenth-century life.

Like her great mentor, Sir Maurice Powicke, Dr. Labarge tends to overemphasize the role of Simon de Montfort in the baronial movement as a whole. She imputes more to ambition and personal greed in his actions than to the practical idealism and rigid honesty which have been stressed by some recent historians, notably R. F. Trehearne. She also seems to look with surprise and almost regret on the popular support which Simon got in his lifetime, and the near veneration which surrounded his memory. In fact there is comparatively little attention paid to the whole question of the attempt of the barons to get wider support for their reforms, and their deliberate appeals to the knights and later the burgesses. Nothing new is said about Simon's status as a constitutional innovator or as "Father of Parliament".

But for the non-specialist there is much of interest in this book. The footnotes are sensibly relegated to the end and are kept to a minimum, and there is a useful introduction on the sources. One chapter is devoted to a discussion of life in noble household, based on a published book of domestic accounts of the De Montfort family. This is a fascinating diversion which recalls both in manner and content some of the later chapters of Iris Origo's *Merchant of Prato*.

Simon himself does not emerge too clearly from these pages, but that is partly the result of the paucity of the material. But one suspects that it is not entirely lack of material which is to blame for the unsatisfactory description of Simon and Eleanor's estates. The list of manors given in the Appendix is neither complete nor substantiated; nor is any attempt made to define at what date the list is valid; certainly it does not include the lands conferred by the King in 1259. Furthermore the maps which accompany the discussion of landholdings are extremely misleading and give the impression that Simon and his wife owned more than half of England. One also regrets that diagrams were not found for the battles of Lewes and Evesham; Simon's military ability was undisputed and our appreciation of this would be heightened by plans of his two best known battles.

Trehearne once remarked of Simon that so much remains unknown about him that "when a man is as great and as many-sided as Simon de Montfort, it inevitably means a different Simon from every pen". In this case Dr. Labarge has not produced a new or a different Simon, but she has nevertheless contributed something to our understanding of the period as a whole.

MICHAEL MALLETT

MUSIC AND MYTH

JAY MACPHERSON. *Four Ages of Man: The Classical Myths.* Macmillan. $3.50.

THE PUBLISHER SEEMS to have lent Miss Macpherson every encouragement, in her retelling of the ancient Greek myths, to produce a finished work, allowing her a

free hand with illustrations, tidy notes, helpful charts, a pronouncing index, end-paper maps, choosing an excellent type and good paper and doing a perfect printing job. The result is a dignified little book, as pleasant to leaf through as to consult. For one can treat it as a reference-book and keep it handy for that purpose. The likelihood is that the reader, instantly satisfied on the point he wishes to check, will be drawn to extend his satisfaction to other parts of the book and in short time become a ready-reference himself, a man as accurately informed as he is casual about it.

The book has another infectious quality, making for deeper dye. What looks at a glance like a pretty garland of verses, deftly woven by Ariel (or Miss Macpherson) to beguile the English reader confronted rather matter-of-factly with myths, turns out to be the old myths themselves in poetic metamorphosis, yet literally recognizable. The myths go very well with the quotations, so well that the reader is brought to realize that without the Greek myths most of our English poets would have been short of a great deal of poetry, of much stuff that made up their lines. Thus insinuatingly and gently Miss Macpherson reminds us, in an age when the fable is scorned as too plottily deadbeat and poetry no longer tells tales, that the story makes the poetry; indeed, for such poets as Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Keats — particularly Milton (from whom Miss Macpherson has drawn the largest number of her quotations) — the story creates in a very real sense its own poetry, so that one might say that the Greek myths orchestrate much of our English poetry, and say furthermore that an ear for music is an eye for myth and good poets have both ear and eye. Thus genially Miss Macpherson has transformed her reference-book into a guide to English literature, revealing that the Greek myths are bone of our poetic bone. A skeletal knowledge of what supports the body does not come amiss.

Four Ages of Man is simply classified. It is a book aimed at the child's understanding, everything direct and sometimes stark, tales about a world where violence reigns — storms at sea, rivers bursting their banks, volcanic eruptions, strife between heat and cold, maddened men and women, the life of things constantly threatened. The early gods violently possess, eat their children, and are violently dispossessed; the younger gods and goddesses are most themselves when most opposed, want their own way, rage in defeat, and are immortal in the story and so long as the story lasts. Stories, then, of the gods, of the seasons, of human longings have all the suspense of creation, endurance, unfairness, of the inevitable end, and the strange charm of

existence makes them worth the telling. Miss Macpherson tells the well-known and less-known stories her way, artlessly, and tells them well. If at times she skims off the peak of a climax, as in some of the Homeric and Theban parts of her book, or makes a sad ending sound like one dear to the heart of Little Audrey, no doubt she could suggest that if more climax or pity is wanted there is always Homer or Sophocles to supply it.

R. C. CRAGG

LEGENDS OF THE COAST

ROBERT AYRE. *Sketco the Raven.* Macmillan. $3.00.

THE GREAT RAVEN CYCLE of legends were known and told among many of the peoples of the Northwest coast, the Tlingit, the Haida, the Tsimshian, and the Kwakiutl. Raven was all things to the men who spun his stories; both defender and betrayer; the benefactor of mankind, but also the trickster and boaster. It is this highly complex, mythical and magical being that Robert Ayre translates into terms suitable for children. And very well, too.

He relies most heavily on the presentation of Raven as friend and guardian of man and emphasizes those stories in which Raven uses his wits and magic to bring comfort and hope to the Indians living in a darkened world. He steals fire from the great Snowy Owl so that men may be warm; he releases the sun so that they may have light, and brings game so that they need not hunger. Superhuman feats such as these were part of the

MIRROR OF MINDS:

Changing Psychological Beliefs in English Poetry

BY GEOFFREY BULLOUGH

Some illustrations of the ways in which at various periods English poetry has reflected current views of the human mind or soul, from the microcosmic conception of man inherited from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century and the interior depths below the individual dream.

288 pages $5.75

UTP UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

Raven tales, but these alone do not make the whole, for Raven was not only a god, but also a man. Ayre's stories are on two levels as were the original legends. Raven's destiny is not only that of a magical being but also that of the small boy left to drown by a wicked uncle. That boy, saved by his wits and growing to a man, tracks his uncle relentlessly to meet him at last and fatefully in the shape of the grizzly bear. Ayre integrates this high adventure with the magic elements to bring excitement and dimension to his rendition.

He further shows himself appreciative of the rich, sly and earthy humour of the originals. This humour he retains (although reducing its earthiness), as in the story of Sketco and The Man Who Sits On The Tide. Children will immediately recognize the funny and familiar gurgle of the bath water as the giant leaps up and the sea water escapes down the great hole. It is in the use of humour and in his deft, thumb-nail characterizations — such as the grumpy Fog Man with his hat pulled down around his ears — that Ayre surpasses other re-tellers of the Indian tales. This collection has much more meaning for the average child than, say, Cyrus MacMillan's beautiful, but mannered tales of Glooskap.

The black and white illustrations are bold, patterned on the traditional west coast art, and wholly satisfying.

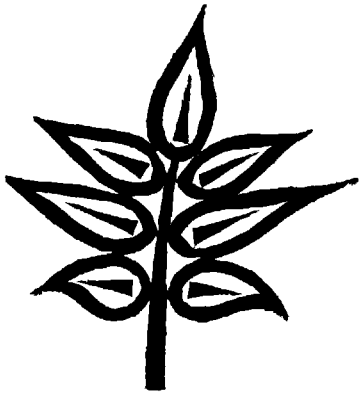
JOAN SELBY

UNEASY NEIGHBOURS

ROBIN W. WINKS. *Canada and the United States: The Civil War Years.* The Johns Hopkins Press. $6.50.

WITH SINGULARLY FEW EXCEPTIONS monographs on Canadian-American relations have been written by Canadian historians or by former Canadian scholars who have become professors in American universities. Recently the tide has turned, possibly because directors of American graduate theses have been looking for new areas that their budding Ph.D.'s might explore. Whatever the reason, the tendency is to be welcomed and it is particularly well illustrated by the volume under review.

The basis for this monograph was Professor Winks' Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Maple Leaf and Eagle; Canadian-American relations during the American Civil War.* In its preparation the author visited the Public Archives, both provincial and federal, in Canada and drew upon almost every conceivable source, the most valuable being the largely untapped bound volumes of American Consular Correspondence. His Note on Sources is a most enlightening analysis and could be profitably used as a model by any seminar on bibliography.



To a surprising degree Professor Winks has cultivated virgin soil, since Canadian historians, with the honourable exception of Professor Landon, have done little extensive research in this field. It is to be expected therefore that he has cleared away some hoary myths, such as the legend of the forty thousand Canadians who fought for the North in the Civil War, and placed the history of this period in proper perspective. For example, it has been customary to focus upon the Trent affair as the episode that most nearly brought war between Britain and the United States and to pass rapidly over the rest of the period. In reality the United States was in no condition in 1861 to take on another opponent, as Lincoln well knew. But after Gettysburg, when the North had the most powerful battle-hardened army in the world, the situation was quite different. The border raids and maritime highjacking episodes instigated by the thousands of Southerners in Canada, "potentially as serious as was that of the Trent affair", might well have led to war if it had not been for the good sense displayed in Washington and the wise leadership given by Governor-General Monck.

One of the most revealing chapters deals with public opinion in the British-American provinces during the war. The author has examined some eighty-four newspapers and finds them almost evenly divided, forty-three being consistently anti-Northern, thirty-three consistently anti-Southern and the remainder neutral or shifting from time to time. In assessing the reasons for so much anti-Northern sentiment (the author describes Macdonald as a bundle of anti-American prejudices) the thesis is rather fancifully stated that there was an "inchoate sense of geopolitics" which created a conviction that " . . . a Southern victory might reestablish the North American balance of power that had been eroded away during the two previous decades."

Few will cavil with the author's appraisal of the results of the Civil War, ranging as they do from "a catalogue of fear" and the loss of reciprocity to variations on the old theme of annexation to the United States and a greater appreciation of the necessity for a strong central government in Canada. But some will feel less comfortable when the author in his closing paragraphs reflects upon the development of the two separate nations since the Civil War. Based upon his wide experience of Canada he warns that this country has been "living beyond her intellectual income" and, with deliberate use of sociological jargon, describes Canada as "an other-directed nation". In words reminiscent of Bruce Hutchison, Professor Winks asserts that "Canada remains a nation in search of a soul, a country unknown to itself."

F. H. SOWARD

SLAVONIC TERRITORY

G. S. N. LUCKYJ (Ed.). *Canadian Slavonic Papers*. Vol. V. University of Toronto Press. $4.50.

THE TEN SPECIALIZED ESSAYS gathered under this general title deal with widely scattered areas of Slavonic territory, cover an equally wide area of subjects and range chronologically from Old Church Slavonic to "policy decisions and the fuel source pattern of the U.S.S.R.". Each of the contributions is by an expert

— most of whom teach at Canadian universities — and presents detailed information which should be of considerable value to specialists.

The two studies which have perhaps the widest interest are Robert H. McNeal's account of Trotsky's interpretation of Stalin and Gordon Skilling's analysis of Lenin's, Trotsky's and Stalin's views on the permanent revolution. Both authors are familiar with the controversial nature of the material at their disposal and display little of the bias which has so often marred similar approaches to Bolshevism and Bolsheviks.

Edmund Heier joins the growing ranks of students of Russian sectarianism with a note on one of the smaller sects, the Pashkovites, and L. N. Tolstoy, who scorned them in his last novel *Resurrection,* though their humanitarian ideals were similar to his own. Charles Frantz's well-documented survey of Doukhobor ideology and political organization provides a convenient summary of the divisions within the Doukhobor community, which have prevented the growth of stability in their ranks and the adjustment of some of them to Canadian society.

The literary side of Slavonic studies is represented in this volume by two articles. The first, by M. M. Deane, deals with Epifanij the Sage, a prominent Russian hagiographer in the fifteenth century. The second contribution consists of three modern Serbo-Croat poems skilfully translated by R. A. D. Ford, formerly Canadian ambassador to Yugoslavia. His presence in this collection of essays may be taken as a sign that Slavonic studies have ceased to be the preserve of a few academics in Canada.

IVAN AVAKUMOVIC

BOOKS, NOT LITERATURE

THE EDITORS OF MAGAZINES that try to nurture and abide by certain literary values, no matter how broad in scope or loosely defined, are always puzzled by the great number of books—particularly among biographies and memoirs—that are published in Canada without any apparent attention to such values. They are books which may inform, which may entertain, which may bore—and all too often do—but which are united in their lack of any ambition to be taken seriously as literature.

What is one to do with them when the review copies come piling in? Clearly a book that has no literary pretensions cannot be praised or condemned by standards it has never set out to meet. It can, in a journal that is concerned only with literature in the stricter sense, at best be regarded neutrally, and mentioned in case it may touch on some special, extra-literary interest of the readers.

And so those who are concerned with military history may find something to interest them in *'Worthy': a Biography of Major-General F. F. Worthington* by Larry Worthington (Macmillan, $5.00); the diplomatically minded may profit from *A Canadian Errant* by James P. Manion (Ryerson, $5.00), which tells of a quarter of a century in the Canadian Foreign Service; lovers of the North may respond to *The Lonely Land* by Sigurd Olson (McClelland & Stewart, $5.00) and *Angel of Hudson Bay* (sic.) by William Ashley Anderson (Clarke, Irwin, $4.95), though there have lately been so

many excellent books on the Arctic and the sub-Arctic that I doubt if these very ordinary narratives will please the real armchair experts on Northern travel, who have always seemed to me a particularly exacting group of special readers.

For those who like "humour", even if it is the usual Canadian tipple of Leacock and water, there is Robert Thomas Allen's reminiscent volume, *When Toronto was for Kids* (McClelland & Stewart, $3.95). And the theatrically minded will gain an informative, irrepressibly chatty inside view of festival dramatics from Joan Ganong's *Backstage at Stratford* (Longmans, $4.95).

G.W.

INTO ENGLISH

THERE HAS RECENTLY been a small flood of translations by Canadian writers from various classical and modern authors. The best of them, undoubtedly, is Warwick Chipman's version of *The Inferno* in *terza rima* (Oxford, $2.00), which forms the first volume of the new Oxford Library of Italian Classics. It is a careful, polished and sensitive version which both catches a great deal of the spirit of Dante and is in its own rights a fine piece of baroque verse writing. Compared, for instance, with John Ciardi's "rendering for the modern reader" of *The Inferno*, published eight years ago, Mr. Chipman's version is greatly superior in scholarship, historical appropriateness and poetic sense. For once we are inclined to agree with a publishers' blurb which claims that "it probably surpasses all other previous efforts".

As much cannot be said for Laura Wood Knight's version of *The Song of Roland* (Vantage Press, $3.50). It is all there, indeed, and in prose terms accurately translated, line even reproducing line, at the cost of some extraordinary verbal contortions, but — like Roland's blast — the poetry has floated into the far air.

Finally, to come to Canada's own golden boy, there is a slight volume of *Selected Poems* by Emile Nelligan, translated by P. F. Widdows (Ryerson, $2.00).

The translations are accompanied by the original texts, on opposing pages, which is just as well, since Mr. Widdows writes a staid and ambling verse that gives one some idea of *what* Nelligan says, but very little of *how* he says it. I quote the first verse of Nelligan's most famous poem, *La romance du vin.*

> Tout se mêle en un vif éclat de gaîté verte.
> O le beau soir de mai! Tous les oiseaux en chœur,
> Ainsi que les espoirs naguères à mon cœur,
> Modulent leur prélude à ma croisée ouverte.

Here is Mr. Widdows' rendering:

> The fine May evening is interfused
> With a bright glow of verdant gaiety.
> Birds at my window trill their melody
> And hope sings in my heart, as once it used.

opinions and notes

POSTSCRIPT ON ODYSSEUS

Since author's reactions to criticism can often provide a useful double light upon a work of literature, we print below a letter received from Hugh MacLennan, whose works were the subject of the article, "A Nation's Odyssey", in Canadian Literature No. 10.

* * *

Dear Professor Woodcock,

I have just finished reading your essay on my novels. . . . It occurred to me that you, as a critic, might find it interesting to compare some of your conclusions with my own actual experience with the novels.

Until I read your essay, it had never consciously occurred to me that I was following the Odyssey-myth in these books. The choice of the name Penelope in *Barometer Rising* may have been subconsciously prompted, but the passage at the end where it seemed most obvious that I was rubbing the symbol in was not much more than a device, and rather a corny one at that, used by an inexperienced author to conclude his book. As for the others, it never once occurred to me consciously that the events were paralleling the Odyssey, least of all the smash-up scene at the end of *Each Man's Son*. I was bothered by the Enoch Arden aspect of Martell in the last novel, but it never occurred to me that once again this was Odysseus returning.

This is all the more curious because I once was a classical scholar and have read the Odyssey several times in the original Greek.

But perhaps there is a simpler explanation which explains why my novels (though in most superficial ways I am not what would be called a "typical" Canadian) seem to reach naturally to a variety of Canadians. This sort of thing really happens in any colonial people. When I was a boy in school in the first war, everyone I knew, including myself, seemed to be waiting for their fathers to return. In Nova Scotia even now the men go away to sea, and in my early days they were often away for several years. Thousands disappear in the north and keep returning. And then there is the almost permanent story of the hundreds of thousands who kept going to the States to make their fortunes and kept returning — even Beaverbrook and Eaton, and Sir James Dunn from England fall into this category. Now the pattern repeats itself with sudden drama in Quebec. In the last ten years, for the first time, several thousand talented young French-Canadians have been discovering France, returning, and rediscovering Quebec, and this experience lies behind the emotional outbreak which at the moment is called the Separatist Movement.

Be that as it may, I did want to write you to say how interesting I found your analysis. I write much more out of the subconscious than I appear to many to do, including myself. That is probably why in some of the books the wires have been crossed. But I think it may be damaging to a writer to worry too much about wire-crossing. The thing is to get the stuff out. If you worry too much

about that you cut down your field too much — a good thing if you have a precise Gallic mind, perhaps. It may be a matter of temperament, and probably it is, but I must confess that I prefer *Hamlet* with all its wire-crossing to the exquisite precision of Racine. It would be wonderful to be as perfect as Sophocles and to retain all that power, but who ever was after him?

HUGH MACLENNAN

KLEIN'S PERCEPTION

Sir,

This letter is a comment on Warren Tallman's review of a new edition of A. M. Klein's *The Second Scroll, Canadian Literature No. 11, called* "Creation Beyond Perception".

Tallman's thesis is that the creation is the realization of the writer's perception of life. His argument is that A. M. Klein's chosen theme (the predicament of the Jew) exceeds his perception of life; that Klein's scene is larger than any one man's perspective; and that Klein compensates — or over-compensates — for this failure by an exaggeration of style.

Tallman's terms are not clear. When is a creation not a perception of life? How does a creation carry a writer beyond his perception? Is a creation the same as its implied theme? (In place of "creation", I suggest "conception" or "concept"; but to make the problem less ambiguous, I would substitute for "creation", "novel".).

The more practical question implied by Tallman's review is: What are the relations of the writer, his style, and his story? I think that Klein's style springs from many years of insecurity (as well as mastery) with language. His poetry demonstrates often a mistake in his choice of the just word. Cause for these mistakes may be found in Klein's personal life, his complex nationality, his mixed allegiances, and his life in Canada's marginal culture with its two languages. Also, many words may *appear* mistaken because of Klein's studied Meta-physical view ("stylistic magnification" — Tallman's phrase — in accord with perception as a coke-bottle, torchless Statue of Liberty). Much of Klein's genius has been used to construct a language. More of his genius has been used in applying that language to realizing his extraordinary perceptions. We note that the climax of *The Second Scroll* is the discovery of a new language amalgam. In the novel, where style changes with changes in geography (as in Valéry Larbaud), the intense language-play forces the question: is this a novel about the Jews or about the language of perception?

Contrary to the "whoppers" Tallman finds in Mitchell's novel, Klein's perceptions of life, in whatever style, are consistently concrete, specific, personal, and immediate in the treatment of the nephew's life and his search for his uncle. Klein's formal conception (the imposition of the Hebrew Bible on a Modern Instance) is made valid by his brilliant realization.

Is not Tallman's complaint that he finds Klein's Mannerism ("ironic opulence" — Tallman's phrase) not proper for a "great messianic archetype"? Why

is it no proper? And, is Tallman's description accurate ?

SIDNEY FESHBACH
Hartford, Conn.

* * *

Mr. Tallman replies:

In reply to Mr. Feshbach's letter may I try to clarify what I meant by "perception" and then re-state my objections to *The Second Scroll.* For me, a perceptive man is a "knowing" man, and this means that perception is knowledge as when Whitman says "I have intelligence of earth." Such perception is the basis for art because what the artist "knows" is the basis for what he can *realize* in his work. But it is a well-known fact that the capacity for perception is variable, intermittent, limited. Every man has dull days, blind spots, blank areas. It is also well known that novelists can write themselves into areas that are beyond their capacity for perception.

Klein's *The Second Scroll* for example. Let me agree with Mr. Feshbach when he says that "much of Klein's genius has been used to construct a language." Or at least a style, which I call "ironic opulence" in order to account for the deliberate portentousness he exerts because he is imagining a portentous event, the exiles return to the promised land. I don't think Klein succeeds because I can't see that he actually perceives (knows) the portentous. For me the sign of this failure is in the style, which I find forced, arch, pretentious — in a word, painful. Irritating.

However, I do think Mr. Feshbach is right to defend Klein on the grounds he has because I also believe that it is the proper business of a man of words to seek his reality among the words. And if a reader thinks that a writer has failed, and says so, the possibility that the reader's perceptions are at fault rather than the writer's is, to say the very least, elementary.

WARREN TALLMAN.

FREEDOM OF CRITICISM?

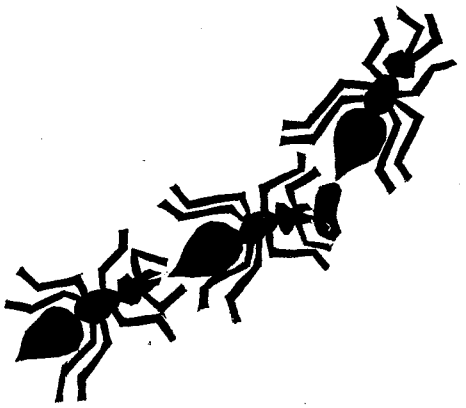
Sir,

According to William H. Whyte, Jr., the academic and literary worlds, by contrast with the world of corporation men, often seem like a jungle. If reviews like that of Finch's *Dover Beach Revisited* by John Peter become typical of *Canadian Literature,* I shall change over to *Business Week.*

EFFIE C. ASTBURY
Montreal

CANADIAN LITERATURE

The First Three Years



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