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CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 37

Summer, 1968

FEDERATION OF LETTERS

Articles

BY A. J. M. SMITH, GARY GEDDES, CARLO FONDA, RONALD SUTHERLAND

Translation

BY JOHN GLASSCO

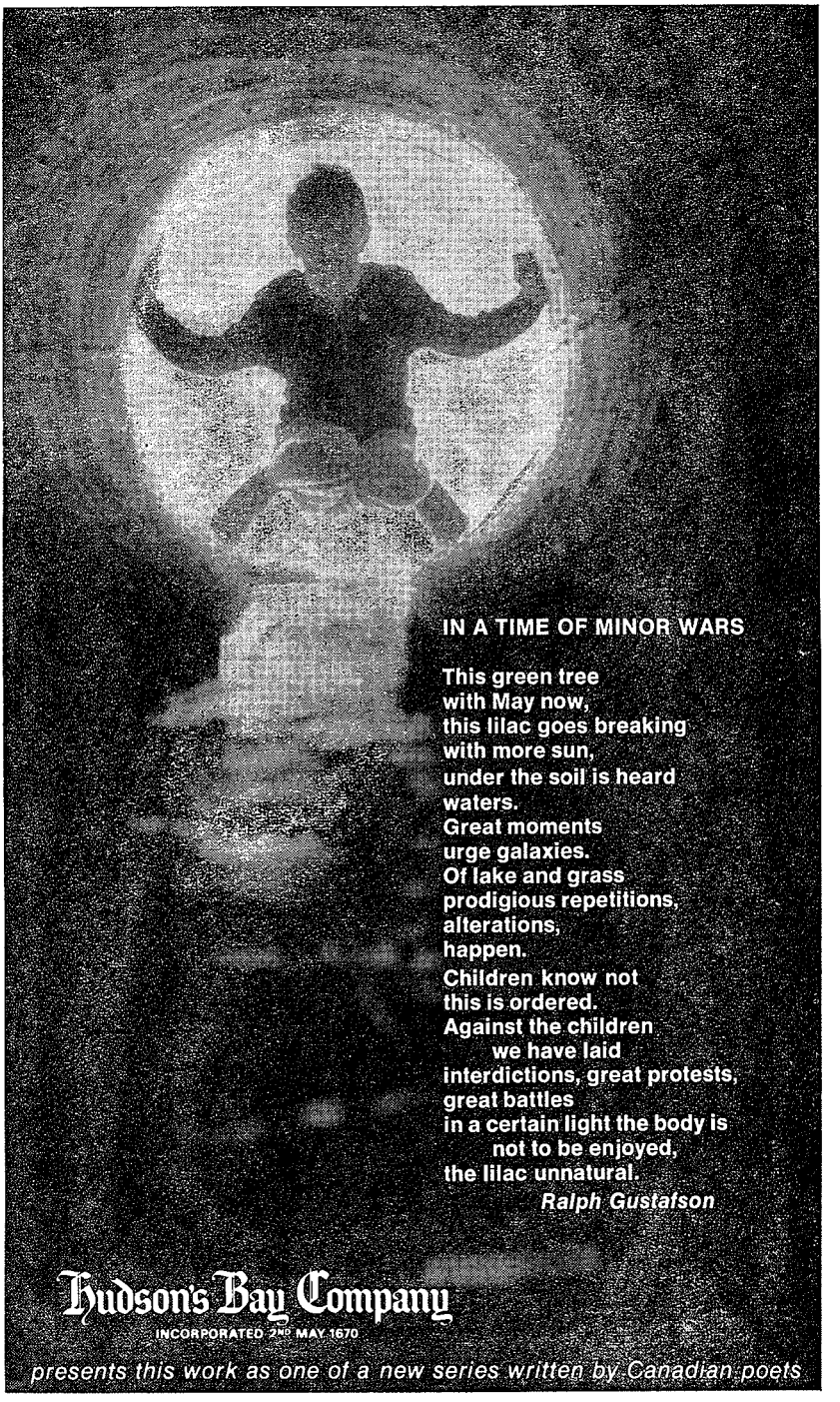
Chronicle

BY NAIM KATTAN

Reviews

BY A. W. PURDY, JULIAN SYMONS, MARY JANE EDWARDS, GEORGE WOODCOCK, GEORGE BOWERING, ROY MC SKIMMING, W. H. NEW, DAVID N. ROBINSON, TONY KILGALLIN, WILLIAM F. HALL, PAT BARCLAY, CHARLES W. HUMPHRIES

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW


IN A TIME OF MINOR WARS
This green tree
with May now,
this lilac goes breaking
with more sun,
under the soil is heard
waters.
Great moments
urge galaxies.
Of lake and grass
prodigious repetitions,
alterations,
happen.
Children know not
this is ordered.
Against the children
we have laid
interdictions, great protests,
great battles
in a certain light the body is
not to be enjoyed,
the lilac unnatural.
Ralph Gustafson
Hudson's Bay Company
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contributors

The most recent of A. J. M. SMITH's distinguished anthologies is the bilingual *Oxford Book of Modern Canadian Verse*, published last autumn.

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GEORGE WOODCOCK's *The Doukhobors*, a history written in collaboration with IVAN AVAKUMOVIC, will be published this autumn by the Oxford University Press in Canada and Faber & Faber in Britain.

editorial

AWARDS AND INITIATIVES

THIS YEAR the jury for the Governor-General's Awards has departed in two directions from past practice. It was not new for them to grant no award for fiction in English; the infrequency with which good Canadian novels appear forced such abstention on at least one past jury. But it was new to take advantage of this lack and to give two poetry prizes instead to books between which the judges found it hard to choose — Eli Mandel's *An Idiot Joy* and Alden Nowlan's *Bread, Wine and Salt.* Everything is to be gained from such flexibility, which, if persisted in, would remove what has been one of the standing objections to annual literary awards — that in lean years undeserving books are rewarded, while in fat years good books go unacknowledged.

The other departure — as I assure myself from a list which forms an appendix to the book in question — has been to issue the non-fiction award for the first time to a work of reference — Norah Story's *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature.* While in 1967 there appeared other excellent non-fiction books which have gone unrewarded as a result of this decision, one cannot dispute that such a monumental work as *The Oxford Companion* deserved special recognition. It has faults — of omission more than commission — but these are matters for a close review rather than for an editorial comment. At the same time, like the *Literary History of Canada,* it is the kind of work of pioneer research which will be permanently valuable to Canadian literary scholarship and whose very shortcomings will stimulate others to compensate for them.

Yet one still wonders whether it should be rewarded under a category manifestly meant for books that make original statements on their subjects rather than for source books. Surely this is a case which reinforces an argument we have often made: that there should be awards that acknowledge *services to literature,* which may take the form of reference works like *The Oxford Companion,* success-

ful and creative editing, or the efforts of those tireless middlemen who still use radio and television for the fostering of Canadian writing and the maintenance of Canadian writers. We are far from grudging Miss Story the recognition she has received; we applaud and echo it. But we also believe this might have been the appropriate occasion for the Canada Council to widen its system of awards so that all kinds of services to literature may come within their scope. We would like, to give only one example, to see Robert Weaver receive some handsome and resounding acknowledgment for the long, dedicated and varied services he has performed for writing in this country by his work as anthologist, as critic, as editor of *Tamarack Review* and as one of the most tireless workers to sustain a standard of excellence in the literary programmes of the CBC.

This brings us, by a devious route, back to *The Oxford Companion*, and to the two important fields of Canadian literary information which it barely touches. One — where Miss Story regretfully admits the limitations imposed by lack of space — is that of literary magazines, which, except for a few very minor and capricious entries, are dealt with in a single summary article. The time has come, surely, for a thorough history-cum-reference book, with decennial supplements, to cover the past history of the literature magazine in Canada and to keep us informed of what is happening in a field which in recent years has shown interesting new departures. We recommend this to the Canada Council as a project worth financing and — if necessary — organizing.

We also recommend a somewhat different approach to another field barely covered by the *Oxford Companion* — the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in its role as the most important single promoter of Canadian writing and patron of Canadian writers over the past generation. A vast task of research and publication is here required. There is a whole history of the CBC in literature to be written. Thousands of valuable radio talks — including important critical statements, occasional essays, fragments of autobiography and biography — have gone unpublished because the CBC has never produced a regular journal like the BBC's *Listener*. And there is a whole genre of radio drama of which only a minute proportion has ever gone beyond the one, two or at most three performances given on the air. At present the CBC has a small publications department which prints selected series of radio lectures. This work should be extended — if necessary with special government aid offered through the Canada Council — so that at least the best of the now buried works of literature which the CBC commissioned and performed may be available in a more permanent shape. It may be objected that the CBC is still faced with an enormous task in presenting

the actualities of the day, without imposing on it a major extra burden of resurrecting and assessing its past. But it could throw open its vast files to controlled research in co-operation with the Universities. What subjects for hungry thesis writers must lie concealed there!

* * *

WE WELCOME a new series of paperbacks, the Laurentian Library, published by Macmillan. Although for several years Macmillan have in fact been releasing paperback editions of many of their books, they have been the only major Canadian house to delay the initiation of an actual series. The Laurentian Library, starting with books by Hugh MacLennan, Morley Callaghan, Ethel Wilson and other leading Macmillan authors, makes a good beginning in terms of quality, and, given the record of excellent books for which Macmillan holds the copyright, one can expect much of the series.

* * *

NEW UNIVERSITY JOURNALS are emerging at such a pace in Canada that it is difficult to give them more attention than mere bibliographical notation. In some cases that is all they deserve; the pressure to publish for survival alone among academics is equalled by the pressure to publish for prestige alone among academies, and many journals now appearing on the North American continent have no other evident reason for existence than the ambition of their initiators. *Mosaic*, whose first number was published in October last year by the University of Manitoba, under the editorship of Kenneth McRobbie, may well be one of the exceptions, for it begins with a definite and attractive purpose. It is a journal "for the Comparative Study of Literature and Ideas", and it has established an ambitious plan of issues, each devoted to a specific theme connected with comparative literature. The opening issue is concerned with "Literature and history", and includes contributions from, among others, C. V. Wedgwood (in condescending mood), Robin Skelton and Michael Hamburger. It is a magazine worth following.

THE CANADIAN POET

Part I. To Confederation

A. J. M. Smith

BEFORE CONFEDERATION there could have been no poet to reflect a national identity because there was as yet no political framework to link the various widely separated regions together and no economic or social factors in common. Until almost the mid-nineteenth century, the task of subduing and settling the wilderness absorbed the energies of our people and though there existed a number of busy communities — Scottish, French, and English — in the Maritimes, Lower Canada, and Upper Canada, they had little to do with one another. What they shared mostly was loneliness and a sense of local self-reliance. The War of 1812 and the rebellions of 1837 brought Upper Canada to an earlier realization of the advantages of union than they did Nova Scotia or, of course, Lower Canada. Actually, it took the War between the States and the accelerating economic and military disentanglement of Great Britain and the Colonial Office from the affairs of England's trans-Atlantic provinces to scare the various colonies into a realization that they would have to stand together or divided they might fall — into the hands of the armed and aroused Northern states, if Britain, as at one time seemed likely, should provoke a war that the colonies feared and did not want.

The *idea* of something in common, the *aspiration* towards union, and the *hope* of an eventual federation found expression in the writings of versifiers and essayists long before social and economic conditions made Confederation at first a possibility and eventually a necessity. The ideal of a national — or rather, perhaps, a continental — identity was found thrilling by poets, or would-be poets, who hoped

that a national bard would arise to hymn the glories of a new nation in the north. Thus, Standish O'Grady wrote in 1842 in the Preface to *The Emigrant, A Poem:* "This expanded and noble continent will no doubt furnish fit matter for the Muse. The diversity of climate, the richness of soil, the endearing qualities of a genial atmosphere must no doubt furnish a just excitement to the poetic mind, and arouse that energy correspondent with a richness of scenery, which the contemplative mind will studiously portray."

In spite of these natural advantages, however, a poet of commensurate greatness was slow in appearing. Twenty-three years later Henry J. Morgan, writing in his valuable *Sketches of Celebrated Canadians,* had to admit that "We in Canada are unfortunate enough not to have had many persons entitled to the distinction of being marked as poets, though possessing every facility that a grand and scenic country possesses, capable of exciting the proper inspiration and spirit of poetry."

We are tempted to feel such remarks — especially a phrase like "the *proper* inspiration . . . of poetry" — to be incredibly naïve. Yet the idea that the Canadian poet or often, rather, *the Canadian,* that mythical figure, is a product of his natural environment and at once in both a regional and continental sense expresses and is formed by his surroundings appeared early, and is with us still. The question has always been, of course, whether the ubiquitous wilderness and the northern climate in a mainly empty semi-continent was to stimulate or intimidate. On the whole, our poets — (and *here* I mean all of them, modern as well as ancient) — have written out of the conviction that the challenge creates its response; and while the terror, that Professor Northrop Frye sees as providing the great tragic theme of our poetry, is real and intense, our poets have fought it.

Occasionally, the wilderness triumphs, as in Birney's "Bushed," where a stoic endurance becomes the only response; but usually it is man's courage and resourcefulness in subduing the wilderness that is stressed, as in Isabella Crawford's "Malcolm's Katie" of 1884 or Pratt's "Towards the Last Spike" of 1952.

The idea that the rigorous climate and the many natural obstacles to be encountered in the north and west preclude the development of intellectual life and the creation of art and poetry had found expression very early and may be taken as presenting a diametrically opposite but equally sentimental point of view from that of Standish O'Grady or Dr. Morgan. Mrs. Frances Brooke, in the first Canadian novel, *The History of Emily Montague,* written as far back as 1769, makes her heroine write home to England from the snow-covered city of Quebec: "I no longer wonder the elegant arts are unknown here; the rigour of the climate

suspends the very powers of the understanding; what then must become of those of the imagination? Those who expect to see 'A new Athens rising near the pole,' will find themselves extremely disappointed. Genius will never mount high, where the faculties of the mind are benumbed half the year."

This is still a note to be heard in English reviews, even occasionally in such capable publications as *TLS* and the *New Statesman,* of Canadian, or rather, Colonial books. This view has the authority of Professor Toynbee, who notes in his *Study of History* that a line drawn somewhere — just a few miles, one gathers, north of Boston, marks the boundary beyond which no intellectual maturity or artistic excellence can be expected.

Another problem that poets and men of letters in pre-Confederation British North America saw confronting them was their belief that this was a country without a mythology. Mrs. Traill, in her account of pioneer life in Otonabee County, *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836) laments the fact that this is a new country, unsanctified by myth or legend, settled by matter-of-fact folk who have neither time nor inclination to people the forests with deities or the mountains with nymphs. This state of affairs was thought of as denying to the poet an audience interested in what a poet (even in the wilderness settlement) is interested in by definition — the traditional classical myths of European culture.

This attitude too persisted a long time, and is responsible for much of the imitative "literary" poetry of the eighties and the nineties. The so-called Confederation poets, in one aspect of their work, sought to import from English romantic poetry a mythology they might well have found elsewhere in the tales and beliefs of the Indian. Both Charles G. D. Roberts and Duncan Campbell Scott made the attempt; but only the latter was successful — and that in a surprisingly small proportion of his total work.

Only very late — after the work of anthropologists and scholars like Sapir, Barbeau, and Alfred Bailey — has it become possible to make genuine poetry out of the native mythology of Canada, as for example in the translations of Haida poems by Hermia Harris Fraser or a few of the poems of Alfred Bailey, or to deal dramatically and sympathetically with the Indian, as in John Newlove's moving poem "The Pride." An exception must be made, of course, for "The Forsaken" and "At Gull Lake" by D. C. Scott, the first dating from 1905 and the second from 1935, both of them products of Scott's lifeswork in the Department of Indian Affairs.

ONE MYTH, however, did seize the imagination of Canadian poets, and that is the *myth of the machine*, especially the machine that becomes a means of transportation and serves to draw us together. Lighthall speaks of the poetry in his anthology of 1889 as a poetry of the canoe; with Pratt it becomes a poetry of steamship and transcontinental railway; with F. R. Scott and Birney it is the airplane — "Trans Canada" and "North Star West."

"In Canada," Northrop Frye has written, "the enormous difficulties and the central importance of communication and transport, the tremendous energy that developed the fur trade routes, the empire of the St. Lawrence, the transcontinental railways, and the northwest police patrols have given it the dominating role in the Canadian imagination." It is Pratt certainly, as Frye affirms, who has most fully and most dynamically grasped this fact, but it is not Frye alone, *nor the modern poet alone*, who has seen the machine as monster or giant. Sangster, the best of the versifiers that James Reaney calls the "dear bad poets Who wrote Early in Canada," has a good descriptive piece, written in dashing couplets, on the noise and excited astonishment as the Iron Horse bursts for the first time into the forest clearing and its sparse settlement. In some of the spirited Spenserian stanzas of his long Byronic poem, *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay*, he describes an excursion steamer winding its way through the channels of the Thousand Islands. He passes easily from the myth of the Red Man to the myth of the ship as fiery dragon, a *living* monster:

> Many a tale of legendary lore
> Is told of these romantic Isles. The feet
> Of the Red Man have pressed each wave-zoned shore,
> And many an eye of beauty oft did greet
> The painted warriors and their birchen fleet,
> As they returned with trophies of the slain.

That was the past. And now all has returned to primeval loneliness once again . . . "Save where some vessel snaps the isle-enwoven chain," and the poet watches with an animating eye "the strong steamer, through the watery glade, Ploughing, like a huge serpent from its ambuscade."

This was in 1856. But already Sangster, and therefore, it is certain, others along the northern shores of Lake Ontario, were thinking of a unification of the Canadian colonies. When the monument to Brock was dedicated at Queenston Heights on October 13, 1859, Sangster wrote a poem for the occasion — a clarion

call to Canadians to unite again as they had been united when they repelled the invader in 1812.

> One voice, one people, one in heart
> And soul and feeling, and desire!
> Re-light the smouldering martial fire,
> Sound the mute trumpet, strike the lyre,
> The hero deed can not expire,
> The dead still play their part.
>
> Raise high the monumental stone!
> A nation's fealty is theirs . . .

A *nation's fealty.* In 1859? This, of course, is not fact, not even at the time it was written a certain feasibility. It was aspiration, hope, an ideal desideratum — not politics but poetry (and, ironically, when compared with Emerson's great "Concord Hymn", written for a similar occasion, pretty hollow poetry). But it demonstrated the birth of a feeling in the hearts and minds of the people of Upper Canada at least that a regional isolation was not enough. Those like Sangster, and others I shall turn to in a moment, who were concerned with the development of poetry and letters in the new country were particularly anxious that a nation should be created that might produce, and be worthy of, a national poetry. The idea of a distinctively national poetry was born at the same time as the idea of a distinctive nation.

The first Canadian anthology of verse was published in 1864, the Rev. Edward Hartley Dewart's *Selections from Canadian Poets*, and the editor wrote a long Introductory Essay that must be regarded as a manifesto of the new national poetry that might be expected from the new nation soon to be born.

> A national literature [wrote Dewart] is an essential element in the formation of national character. It is not merely the record of a country's mental progress: it is the expression of its intellectual life, the bond of national unity, and the guide of national energy. It may be fairly questioned, whether the whole range of history presents the spectacle of a people firmly united politically, without the subtle but powerful cement of a patriotic literature.

These brave words are followed by a realistic appraisal. Dewart continues:

> There is probably no country in the world making equal pretensions to intelligence and progress, where the claims of a native literature are so little felt, and where every effort in poetry has been met with so much coldness and indifference as in

> Canada. And what is more to be deprecated than neglect of our most meritorious authors, is the almost universal absence of interest and faith in all indigenous literary productions . . .

The cause of this lamentable indifference, the critic went on to affirm, was in part the wide prevalence of low and false conceptions as to the nature and influence of poetry itself, but in Canada a more important reason was to be found in the inferior status of a colony.

> Our colonial position, whatever may be its political advantages, is not favorable to the growth of an indigenous literature. Not only are our mental wants supplied by the brain of the Mother Country . . . but the majority of persons of taste and education in Canada are emigrants from the Old Country, whose tenderest affections cling round the land they have left. . . .

This curse of colonialism, it can be added a hundred years later, did not leave us after Confederation; E. K. Brown, writing in *On Canadian Poetry* (1943), puts his finger on the colonial spirit as the chief diluter of our poetry just as Dewart did — and so many years and so many political changes later!

Dewart's anthology appeared three years before Confederation. Its chief interest today is its Introduction. The only poems in it that are worth preserving are one or two by Sangster, a couple of rhymes by Alexander McLachlan, and one or two passages from Heavysege's *Saul*. Canadians had to wait until thirteen years after the first Dominion Day for the appearance of *a second survey of Canadian poetry*. This was W. D. Lighthall's *Songs of the Great Dominion*, published in London in 1889.

Here the cautious and rather gloomy sobriety of Dewart has been replaced by a full fledged patriotic enthusiasm. It would seem that Dewart's faith in the efficacy of a national federation to bring a national poetry into being had already been amply justified by an abundance of good works. "The poets whose songs fill this book," wrote Lighthall,

> are voices cheerful with the consciousness of young might, public wealth, and heroism. . . . The tone of them is *courage* — for to hunt, to fight, to hew out a farm, one must be a man! Canadians are for the most part descendants of armies . . . and every generation of them has stood up to battle. . . . The delight of a clear atmosphere runs through it too. . . . Canada, Eldest Daughter of the Empire, is the Empire's completest type! She is the full-grown of the family — the one first come of age and gone out into life as a nation. . . .

A good many summers ago I was conducting a seminar in Canadian literature and history at the University of Toronto with Professor Donald Creighton, and I remember his bewildered amusement when we read this passage. That this should have been written in the year of Canada's most serious and almost disastrous economic depression was not beyond comprehension perhaps, but it was almost beyond justification.

Yet I must make the attempt. To begin with, Lighthall could certainly look with pardonable pride at the poetry available for his anthology when compared with that of his pre-Confederation rival. Here now were poems of Isabella Crawford, Mair, Roberts, Lampman, Wilfred Campbell, and Duncan Campbell Scott — the earliest, and some of the best, pieces by the poets who were later to be known as The Confederation Poets or the poets of our "Golden Age". Secondly, when you read the poems collected in Lighthall's anthology — it is still by far the best of the early anthologies — you will find that the poems *are* filled with a spirit of cheerfulness and wonder, delight in the beauty of nature, and confidence in man's power to conquer. What actually the appreciative critic is expressing — and so are the poets — is a general spiritual sense of euphoria induced by Confederation — a certain indefinable spirit of confidence that economic difficulties and political differences could not destroy.

Its best expression is the least explicit — in the mythopoeic passages of Crawford's "Malcolm's Katie", in Roberts' sonnets of the New Brunswick landscape, and in Lampman's painterly evocations of the woods and hills around Ottawa in winter or midsummer. These are Canadian *poetry*. Let us look, however, at some of the more explicit treatments of the Confederation theme. In some of the pieces by Mair that came out of the Canada First movement and in the very explicit Confederation odes of Roberts we shall see what people felt they ought to feel. (It is in the true poems of Roberts, Lampman, and Scott that we find what they really felt — and in some cases, to the justification of Lighthall, the two are not very far apart.)

CHARLES MAIR was the poet who most clearly and consciously set himself to advocate and celebrate Canadian autonomy. Like Sangster before him, he had been hailed as a national poet, and he *thought* of himself as one. In addition, he took an active part in politics, being one of the five original members of the Canada First movement, when it was organized by William

Foster and George Denison in 1868 and later he had the distinction of being held a prisoner by Riel during the first Red River Insurrection. As to the "Canadianism" of Mair's poetry, Professor Norman Shrive in his recent biography of the poet, tells us how two of the earliest effusions of Mair, "The Pines" and "Summer" were read in 1862 before the Botanical Society of Canada at Kingston and elicited the praise of the Reverend Principal Leitch of Queen's. Of one, he said, "it is a truly Canadian production, inspired by an acquaintance with and love of the forest"; of the other, that it "has more of the old world stamp." For many of the critics of Canadian verse in the nineteenth and the first three decades of the twentieth these were the comments oftenest made. And they were intended as high compliment. If the Canadian poet could be uniquely and yet vaguely and generally "Canadian" and yet at the same time write like an English poet he was to be given the highest praise. Col. Denison knew better what was wanted of a poet, particularly a practical poet, and after the publication of Mair's first book of poems, significantly entitled *Dreamland*, he wrote in a letter to his friend:

> For God's sake drop the old style. You're living in a new world and you must write in the language of the living to living men . . .

And the good soldier continued:

> Most Canadian poems should be published with mild Eau Sucrée style of names — such as "Midnight Musings" or, what is more to the point, "Nocturnal Emissions."

Mair did occasionally speak out, and the lines he wrote to commemorate William Foster, the leading spirit in the Canada First movement, who died in 1887, are a clear manifesto of the aims and hopes he held for the future of the young Dominion.

> . . . Throw sickly thoughts aside —
> Let's build on native fields our fame;
> Nor seek to blend our patriot's pride
> With alien worth or alien shame!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> First feel throughout the throbbing land
> A nation's pulse, a nation's pride —
> And independent life — then stand
> Erect, unbound, at Britain's side.

This, one feels, is a piece of classical verse in which each word and phrase has a precise significance, explicit or implied. What these are we cannot be certain

from the poem alone, — and this is a defect it shares with a good many other political or patriotic poems — but from the writings, letters, and speeches of the members of the Canada First movement we can learn enough about their views to interpret "alien worth" as British worth and "alien shame" as American shame — an implication in the word "alien" found as late as the Massey Report, by the way — and that "Erect, unbound, at Britain's side" means "courageous, free, equal and ready and able to come to Britain's aid, not timidly depending on her aid." A more independent statement than Kipling's much later famous phrase about Mother and Daughter.

Yet the limitations of Canada First and Mair's views about Canadian unity are very clear. Professor Shrive speaks of the movement's self-destructive weakness. "Decrying provincialism, it was itself provincial, even parochial. Culturally it was militantly anti-Ultramontane and anti-French. Socially its members represented the 'respectable', even, as in Denison's case, the upper classes." The national unity, in other words to be advocated and stimulated, was an English, genteel, and Christian one. It was a union embracing only Upper Canada, the dominant English minority of Lower Canada, and the Maritimes.

This dream of a limited union was shared also by the so-called Confederation poets, particularly Roberts and Wilfred Campbell, and the anthologist Lighthall, but it has been revealed for what it is — only a dream — by the two great events in the history of Canada since the end of the Second World War — the influx of European immigrants into our rapidly expanding cities and the awakening of Québec. Robert's finely phrased and classically modulated lines beginning "O Child of Nations, giant-limbed" are perfectly turned and present a truly inspiring picture of an ideal, strong, free, independent, and unified nation — but it was only a dream, a dream made unreal by the fact that it was dreamed by only half the nation.

PIPER OF MANY TUNES

Duncan Campbell Scott

Gary Geddes

WHAT STRIKES ONE most forcibly about D. C. Scott is his versatility, his wide range of ability and interest; he is, in fact, the one breath of fresh air escaping from the mixed bag of Confederation poets. Scott not only has a deep response to nature, like his contemporaries, Roberts, Carman and Lampman, but he has also added to this a genuine appreciation of the savage, a Browning-esque monologue, and a sophisticated sense of form and mission. And yet, in spite of this diversity, there is an unexpected narrowness in the way in which critics have discussed his poetry. In his own time, Scott complained about "the cant of the more careless critics to keep dinging away that all Canadian poets are nature poets".[1] Half a century later, his public image is equally distorted: Pelham Edgar has found it necessary to rationalize Scott to the twentieth century by singling out Scott's "original response to the wilder aspects of the Canadian scene".[2] Recognition of his primitive verse was necessary and justified, but what began with Edgar as a special emphasis has become in the intervening years an institution. It is now possible, for example, for Professor Daniells, in *The Literary History of Canada*, to conclude that Scott's reputation rests ultimately on a small group of poems, such as "Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon", and that "*only nature* [italics mine], and preferably nature in her most primitive and untamed aspect, is capable of releasing Scott's powers as a poet".[3] This one-sided view of Scott's poetry indicates a failure to see him within the context of the nineteenth century, where most of his best verse belongs; furthermore, the attempt to modernize Scott obscures his larger significance. Scott was already sixty when "The Wasteland" was published and he was too firmly rooted by age and temperament in the nineteenth century to respond favourably, no less creatively, to

the prophecies of Yeats and the arid, shifting sands of the twentieth century. To expect Scott to be concerned with imagistic modes, cross-fertilization of metaphor, and so on, would be tantamount to expecting the later Milton to have written neo-classical satire. If evaluation of his poetry is to have any meaning, Scott must be re-classified; he must be seen alongside not his temporal but his spiritual mentors — Coleridge, Tennyson and Arnold. In what follows, then, I have tried to approach Scott's poetry through the medium of his published letters, with a view to dispelling a number of misconceptions concerning his aims and achievement; at the same time, I have been tempted to look freshly at some old favourites, especially "The Piper of Arll".

To re-classify Scott as a nineteenth-century poet is less seriously limiting than one might think. "Give me some credit for logic as applied to aesthetics", he wrote in 1905, "for I declare that I value brain power at the bottom of everything. If you call *me* a nature poet you will have to forget some of my best work".[4] These are not the words of a man denying his artistic destiny, but rather the sincere expression of a desire to be seen in the right perspective. Scott fully understood the place of nature in his poetry, but he believed that some of his best work derived its stimulus from elsewhere — from man and from the life of the imagination itself. I would like to discuss his poetry from these three points of view — nature, man, and the life of the imagination. This plan is not meant to provide a rigid tripartite division of Scott's poetry or to suggest arbitrary pigeon-holes for poems having an integrity of their own; on the contrary, it is a more fertile and flexible way to approach Scott, and one which is at least consistent with his expressed views of his poetry.

Scott responded to nature in the best traditions of romanticism — appreciation without prostration. While unwilling to prostitute himself emotionally and artistically to the enchanting elements and terrain of Canada, Scott nevertheless recognized their imaginative possibilities. "The life of nature", he declared, "is as varied and complex as the life of the spirit and it is for this reason that man finds in nature infinite correspondences with his spiritual states."[5] Fundamental to this impressionism, however, is the understanding that nature is not a repository of "truth", but rather the means by which man's own important sensations are elicited and activated. Nature remains subordinate to man, a vast reservoir from which he draws at will; it is but one of the means by which man may penetrate to the truth of his own sensations. Scott quoted Amiel's statement that "landscape is a state of soul", insisting that "in the apprehension of some such truth lies the sole excuse for poetry in which nature is described."[6]

In "The Height of Land", his most philosophical poem, nature becomes an incentive to reminiscence and reflection. The poet stands on the uplands in the serenity of evening, brooding about the lives and ideals of men. His senses sharpen to the hush of wind and the play of moths around a low fire, so that he can almost hear the "gathering of rivers in their sources". As he surveys the land in this hyper-sensitive state, a mysterious "Something comes by flashes/ Deeper than peace," as unexpectedly quiet and intriguing as the calm at the eye of a hurricane.[7] At that moment the state of the land may be said to reflect exactly the state of the poet's mind. The symbiosis is prelusive to finding a "deeper meaning" than is written on the surface of things. The poet's emphasis is centred not on the details of the physical scene, but on the impression which it fixes on his mind; thus, it may be seen, his reflections on life constitute a somewhat higher level of participation in nature — that is, a philosophical rather than a purely descriptive involvement.

Scott's insistence, that nature can only provide correspondence to man's spiritual states, is perhaps more rigorous than his practice justifies. In the same poem, for example, a significant change of pace occurs. Suddenly the smell of charred ground transports the poet back in time to a bush-fire he has experienced:

> Then sudden I remember when and where, —
> The last weird lakelet foul with weedy growths
> And slimy viscid things the spirit loathes,
> Skin of vile water over viler mud
> Where the paddle stirred unutterable stenches,
> And the canoes seemed heavy with fear,
> Not to be urged toward the fatal shore
> Where a bush-fire, smouldering, with sudden roar
> Leaped on a cedar and smothered it with light
> And terror.

There is something more instinctive than rational in the way this image is presented. Although the landscape is technically a state of soul, the image of the predatory bush-fire seems rather to have been dragged up involuntarily from the poet's subconscious than to have resulted from a conscious search for secondary correspondences. The sheer force and immediacy of the experience clearly indicates that Scott's response to nature was, at times, stronger than his theory suggests. Certainly this passage supports the emphasis that Daniells and Edgar place on Scott's susceptibility to the more turbulent aspects of his environment.

Similar spontaneous responses to nature occur in "September" and "In Winter", but Scott is at his most lyrical and unrestrained in "Ecstasy". Witnessing the upward flight and the jubilant morning song of the shore-lark, the poet is moved to ecstasy:

> The shore-lark soars to his topmost flight,
> Sings at the height where the morning springs,
> What though his voice be lost in the light,
> The light comes dropping from his wings.
>
> Mount, my soul, and sing at the height
> Of thy clear flight in the light and the air,
> Heard or unheard in the night in the light
> Sing there! Sing there!

Coming in the wake of Shelley's "To a Skylark", "Ecstasy" invites comparison. As Dr. Johnson would have observed, Shelley's imagination soars higher and is longer on the wing; his intellectual and artistic powers equip him for a more profound and sustained flight. "Ecstasy" does not pretend to be profound or philosophical. Whereas Shelley uses the flight as a sustained metaphor, Scott keeps to its simpler, more immediate appeal. Less ambitious in scope, "Ecstasy" is nonetheless skillfully contrived; it is also free from the undue strain which length and poeticality place on Shelley's poem. With an almost breathless rhythmical sweep, a pronounced absence of simile and poetic diction, a predominance of crisp consonants and light palatal vowels, Scott captures the upward flight of the shore-lark. And this is no small accomplishment with a lark of the less sophisticated, Canadian, shore-bound variety!

From the poems already mentioned, it would not be difficult to equate Scott's rejection of the "nature poet" label with Wordsworth's *post facto* denial of his own phrase, "worshipper of nature". No doubt both poets do protest too much. At the same time, however, Scott was too classical in his tastes to countenance an over-abundance of feeling and a deficiency of art. Nature poetry, characterized in his mind by excesses of emotion and description, stands here opposed to "brain power" and "logic as applied to aesthetics". As such it is below the dignity of serious poets. "One of my faiths is expressed by Ben Johnson [sic]," Scott said, " 'It is only the disease of the unskillful to think rude things greater than polished'."[8] Like Jonson himself, Scott was a careful craftsman. "You could find plenty to say about metre and I have invented not a few new stanzas," he insisted. "I have not been self-conscious in practice; my desire was to make the thing under my hands as perfect as I could make it."[9]

Scott was pleasantly surprised to have pointed out to him by E. K. Brown the "intensity and restraint" in his poetry.[10] Consciously or unconsciously, Scott had long been pursuing this elusive goal. In his introduction to Lampman's *Lyrics of Earth*, he quoted Coleridge's famous statement: "In poetry it is the blending of passion and order that constitutes perfection".[11] Scott's respect for the guiding and restraining influence of traditional forms and metres parallels Coleridge's claim that metre originates psychologically, "to hold in check the workings of passion".[12] Control is the standard for both art and life. In "Ode for the Keats Centenary", Scott praises Keats,

> Who schooled his heart with passionate control
> To compass knowledge, to unravel the dense
> Web of this tangled life.

"The Woodspring to the Poet" describes the "vast wave of control"; "In a Country Churchyard" asserts the "moderate state and temperate rule".

THE CLASSICAL BALANCE between passion and order, which Scott shared with Coleridge and Arnold, is best illustrated in "At Delos", a poem which is unexplainably absent from Brown's edition of the *Selected Poems*, but included in A. J. M. Smith's *The Book of Canadian Poetry*:

> An iris-flower with topaz leaves,
> With a dark heart of deeper gold,
> Died over Delos when light failed
> And the night grew cold.
>
> No wave fell mourning in the sea
> Where age on age beauty had died;
> For that frail colour withering away
> No sea-bird cried.
>
> There is no grieving in the world
> As beauty fades throughout the years;
> The pilgrim with the weary heart
> Brings to the grave his tears.

"At Delos" illustrates finely the meeting and mingling of the classical and the romantic in Scott; it is a beautiful and delicate rendering of a romantic grief at

the passing of beauty, handled not subjectively but impersonally, and with classical restraint.

While admitting the influence of nature in his poetry, Scott hoped to make clear that his main interest and stimulus was in man. "It is inevitable that we should deal with nature and somewhat largely," he wrote to J. E. Wetherell in 1892, "but I think it will be found that much of this work rises from and returns again to man and does not exist from and to itself."[13] Even his impressionism, which asserts the superiority of the impression to the object, reflects Scott's humanism. Similarly, he despised all types of artistic escapism and obscurantism as much as he despised the mindless veneration of nature, because both led away from the proper study of mankind. He had only contempt for Yeats, who required a "fund of Irish legends to set imagination aglow".[14]

In "Ode for the Keats Centenary", Scott lamented the loss of beauty from life — "Beauty has taken refuge from our life,/ That grew too loud and wounding" — but his Indian and habitant poems reveal that he discovered beauty again in the very noise and wounds he had lamented, in the beauty of human suffering. In "The Height of Land", Scott paused to "Brood on the welter of the lives of men", but he did not pause long; he plunged beneath the surface of beaver-skins and tail-feathers into the dark recesses of the human heart. And the raw life he found there is quite distinct from anything outside of Pratt in anthologies of Canadian poetry. The tragic killing of Keejigo in "At Gull Lake: August, 1810" is a dramatic *tour de force*:

> At the top of the bank
> The old wives caught her and cast her down
> Where Tabashaw crouched by his camp-fire.
> He snatched a live brand from the embers,
> Seared her cheeks,
> Blinded her eyes,
> Destroyed her beauty with the fire,
> Screaming, "Take that face to your lover."
> Keejigo held her face to the fury
> And made no sound.
> The old wives dragged her away
> And threw her over the bank
> Like a dead dog.

The strength here is not descriptive but dramatic; Scott combines the economy of the ballad, the human interest of the drama, and the suspense of both.

The difficulty Scott had in subduing his subjective and descriptive impulses was largely dispelled when he embraced the human drama. In "At the Cedars", a fascinating dramatic monologue, the narrative is exceedingly stark — boiled right down to the skeleton. Bones, at any time, are provocative, and these are no exception; consequently, the temptation to find allegory in the suggestive names — Isaac, Baptiste and Virginie — and the *diabolus ex machina*, is subdued only by the rapid pace and intensity of the narrative. As in the ballad, much of the success of "At the Cedars" depends on what is left unsaid; the poem gains considerably by the indefiniteness of the motives in the suicide of the nameless sister of Virginie:

> There were some girls, Baptiste,
> Picking berries on the hillside,
> Where the river curls, Baptiste,
> You know — on the still side;
> One was down by the water
> She saw Isaac
> Fall back.
>
> She did not scream, Baptiste,
> She launched her canoe;
> It did seem, Baptiste,
> That she wanted to die too
> For before you could think
> The birch cracked like a shell
> In that rush of hell,
> And I saw them both sink.

To call Scott a poet of nature in these poems can only be justified if one means what Dr. Johnson meant when he applied the same label to Shakespeare — *human nature.*

While responding creatively to man and nature, Scott also rejoiced in the fervid life of his imagination. "The life of poetry is in the imagination," he insisted, "there lies the ground of true adventure and though the poet's mind may be starved and parched by the lack of variety in life, he persists nevertheless to make poetry out of its dust and ashes."[15] Much of his poetry finds its life not in external stimuli but in an internal compulsion, in the "volcano", as Scott called the imagination.[16] And it is there — in the heat of imagination — that one of Scott's finest poems arose, Phoenix-like from the ashes. "The Piper of Arll" stems from, and is itself a poem about the life of the imagination.

"The Piper" has had a poor press; critics seldom fail to mention it, but always for the wrong reasons. John Masefield, the poem's most vigorous supporter, no doubt began this negative reinforcement. Faced with the challenge of defending "The Piper" against a charge of meaninglessness, Masefield side-stepped the issue: "let it escape", he said of the symbolism, the "romantic mood and the author's dream may be of deep personal significance and joy, even if the author's thought eludes us."[17] Criticism of this sort we can do without. Indeed, nothing could have been more damaging to the poem's reputation at a time when wit and intellect in poetry were at a premium. Subsequent criticism reveals quite clearly that Masefield unwittingly closed the doors on serious study of "The Piper": Pelham Edgar, for example, praises the poem as "musical incantation"; W. J. Sykes asserts that it seems "too tenuous, too unsubstantial to induce that 'willing suspension of disbelief' " and lacks "concrete meaning"; Daniells also notes that "Even the often quoted 'Piper of Arll' is lacking the compulsion of true magic"; even E. K. Brown, whom the meaning does not elude, nevertheless finds the poem a "mass of suggestions which do indeed lack definiteness."[18]

Criticism of "The Piper" seems based on the mistaken assumption that meaning and indefiniteness are mutually exclusive. That the poem is intentionally vague and mysterious there can be little doubt. "At the root of everything is mystery," Scott wrote. "Poetry illuminates this mass of knowledge and by inspiration will eventually reach the core of the mystery."[19] He preferred the poetry of Maeterlinck, who was "endeavouring to awaken the wonder-element in a modern way, constantly expressing the almost unknowable things we all feel."[20] To convey the mystery and wonder surrounding our daily lives, the poet requires a special vocabulary. As Scott says in "Meditation at Perugia": "Our common words are with deep wonder frought". Scott laboured, of set artistic purpose, to leave "The Piper" indefinite and suggestive; he aimed at a fusion of form and content. "He may not care for the mystical," Scott said of his critic, Sykes, "but there is more in 'The Piper of Arll' than he seems to have discovered."[21]

"The Piper" may be seen on one level as an allegory of the artist. Living in harmony with his idyllic environment, the artist is confronted with a vision of loneliness to which he responds creatively. When the vision passes and inspiration dies, his remorse drives him to such distraction that he abuses his powers of compassion and communication:

> He threw his mantle on the beach,
> He went apart like one distraught,

His lips were moved — his desperate speech
Stormed his inviolable thought.

He broke his human-throated reed,
And threw it in the idle rill;
But when his passion had its mead,
He found it in the eddy still.

Through conscious self-renunciation the artist begins to heal and he resurrects out of the ashes his initial heart-felt response to the vision. When this is accomplished, in a burst of selfless creative energy he pours out his soul in perfect harmony with the world and is reunited with his dream-vision in a beautiful immortality.

The nature of the poetic experience, thus oversimplified, is essentially religious, and it is almost certain that Scott intended the parallel to run throughout the poem. Given his desire for indefiniteness and suggestiveness, it would be trite to observe that the image of the three pines in "The Piper",

There were three pines above the comb
That, when the sun flared and went down,
Grew like three warriors reaving home
The plunder of a burning town,

is less obviously and less effectively symbolic than the similar image in Eliot's "Journey of the Magi". Scott's simile works well as a symbolic pre-figuring in nature of the piper's experience: as the image of the plunder-laden warriors comes at sunset, is lost in the night, and then returns, so also the piper receives, loses, and then regains his artistic "loot" — his inspiration — from the vision ship. The problem of the loss of inspiration is stated more explicitly in "Prairie Wind":

But the vision you found in the twilight,
You could never again recapture,
It was lost in one careless impulse
In the first wild rush of the rapture.

The piper's loss, however, is not so permanent; he is able to recapture the fleeting vision:

He mended well the patient flue,
Again he tried its varied stops;
The closures answered right and true,
And starting out in piercing drops,

A melody began to drip
That mingled with a ghostly thrill
The vision-spirit of the ship,
The secret of his broken will.

The "secret of his broken will" may mean simply the necessary conversion of inspiration to elbow-grease which all serious artists learn, or it may refer to what Eliot calls "depersonalization" — "a continual surrender . . . to something which is more valuable. The progress of the artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."[22]

The poem does support a religious interpretation of the image of the three pines. The piper responds to God as the bay responds to the ocean's tides. The vision-ship comes with an angel at the bows, who departs just as the piper achieves his immortality. The piper's broken will corresponds, of course, to the Christian paradoxes of life in death, fulfillment in self-sacrifice and knowledge through child-like faith. At the moment of his mastery over passion and power, the piper is standing at the foot of the three pines, "Immortal for a happy hour". The piper must learn the lesson which the woodspring teaches in "The Woodspring to the Poet": "Give, Poet, give!/ Thus only shalt thou live./. . . Give as we give unbidden." This responsiveness or sympathy cannot be achieved otherwise than by instinctive humility, by an unconscious giving of self. This achieved, the piper's powers are restored:

He, singing into nature's heart,
Guiding his will by the world's will,
With deep, unconscious, childlike art
Had flung his soul out and was still.

He has experienced the reconciliation which was achieved by the Ancient Mariner, when he blessed the water snakes unawares.

The intriguing conclusion of "The Piper", in which the intimations of immortality are realized, is the artistic equivalent of Elijah's translation:

And down she sank till, keeled in sand,
She rested safely balanced true,
With all her upward gazing band,
The piper and the dreaming crew.

And there, unmarked of any chart,
In unrecorded depths they lie,
Empearled within the purple heart
Of the great sea for aye and aye.

Their eyes are ruby in the green
Long shafts of sun that spreads and rays,
And upward with a wizard sheen
A fan of sea-light leaps and plays.

The *Tempest*-like sea change implies a concept of art as stasis. Life, in Scott's poetry, is a movement towards eternal rest, a rest which is common to all men — the poet, the religious and the oppressed of every kind. Even the violent death of Keejigo in "At Gull Lake" becomes a release from suffering, a final, beautiful merging with the natural cycle of the universe. The accompanying storm brings the rainbow; the moon changes its shade for the perfect glow of the prairie lily. Her death is a victory, a final reward: "After the beauty of terror the beauty of peace". Like Keejigo, the piper achieves his rest; first his will and then his body merge with the harmonious cosmos.

So much for the lack of meaning in "The Piper". Most of what is best in poetry, as Frost suggests, is lost in the translation. While a too extensive explanation of "The Piper" would destroy a good deal of its magic, existing criticism deserves to be challenged. What is important in the present discussion is that the poem be reconsidered as fundamental to an understanding of Scott's poetic achievement. These remarks are a suggestive rather than an exhaustive step in that direction.

NORTHROP FRYE has cited Scott's poetry as a prime example of what he calls the "incongruous collision of cultures" — the primitive and sophisticated — to be found in Canadian literature.[23] To be accurate one would have to add classical and romantic, natural and mystical. And yet the results are neither incongruous, nor a collision. Scott does not jar by throwing his various interests together pell-mell into a single poem; "On the Death of Claude Debussy", "At the Cedars" and "The Piper of Arll" have an integrity of their own. Scott's many-sidedness stems not so much from his wide areas of interest as from his conception of the function of poetry.

The responsibilities of the poet are outlined in "The Woodspring to the Poet", Scott's poetic manifesto. The woodspring presents himself as an exacting master. He counsels the poet to cultivate flexibility (a good Canadian virtue!), to be all things to all men, a sort of general practitioner whose task it is "To charm, to comfort, to illume." To fill this colossal order the poet must write poems of every

kind: he must write those which will guide and inspire youth, "Till over his spirit shall roll/ The vast wave of control"; he must nurture the creative spirit with poems like "The Piper of Arll" —

> Give them songs that charm and fill
> The soul with an alluring pleasure,
> Prelusive to a deeper thrill,
> A richer tone, a fuller measure;

and, finally, he must administer to the dead souls of academe and the marketplace a particularly metaphysical cure:

> Helve them a song of life,
> . . . Proud pointed with wild life,
> Plunge it as the lightning plunges,
> Stab them to life!

This broad view of the function of poetry beggars the notion that Scott was only a nature poet. Whatever his creative stimulus — whether nature, man, or the life of the imagination — Scott directed his various melodies to the needs of the human heart; and if his poetry has a wide-spread appeal, it is because Scott was a piper of many tunes.

NOTES

[1] *More Letters of Duncan Campbell Scott* (2nd Series), selected, edited and published by A. S. Bourinot, Ottawa, 1960, 68.

[2] Pelham Edgar, "Duncan Campbell Scott," *Leading Canadian Poets*, Toronto, Ryerson, 1948, 213.

[3] "Crawford, Campbell and Scott," *Literary History of Canada*, edited by Carl F. Klinck, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1965, 421.

[4] *Some Letters of Duncan Campbell Scott and Others*, selected, edited and published by Arthur S. Bourinot, Ottawa, 1959, "Autobiographical Note."

[5] Editor's introduction to Archibald Lampman's *Lyrics of Earth*, Toronto, Musson, 1925, 44.

[6] *Loc. cit.*

[7] All citations from Scott's poetry, unless otherwise indicated, are from *Selected Poems*, Toronto, Ryerson, 1951, and *The Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott*, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1926.

[8] *Some Letters, op. cit.*

[9] *Ibid.*, 30.

[10] *On Canadian Poetry*, Toronto, Ryerson, 1943, 122.

[11] *Lyrics of Earth*, 45.

[12] *Biographia Literaria*, II, 49-50.

[13] *More Letters*, 68.

[14] *Ibid.*, 25.

[15] *Lyrics of Earth*, 37.

[16] *Some Letters*, 29.

[17] Quoted in Brown, op. cit., 124.

[18] Edgar, *op. cit.*, 217; "Duncan Campbell Scott," *Queen's Quarterly*, XLVI, 1939, 60, 52; *Literary History of Canada*, 418; Brown, *op. cit.*, 124.

[19] *More Letters*, 28.

[20] *Ibid.*, 25.

[21] *Some Letters*, 47.

[22] "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

[23] *Literary History of Canada*, 825.

LE PRIVILEGE DE VIVRE

Reflexions sur Robert Choquette

Carlo Fonda

COMMENT DÉFINIR l'oeuvre poétique de Robert Choquette, sinon comme une prière que le poète adresse à Dieu pour le remercier du privilège de vivre, d'exister? La plupart des poèmes de Choquette sont, en effet, des chants en l'honneur de la beauté du monde.

C'est Jean Hytier, je crois, qui, dans son étude de styles, donne le nom de thème à "un sentiment spécial et présent qui joue et se satisfait dans les combinaisons d'images." On conviendra que c'est précisément cet état affectif qui fait le fond de la rêverie poétique de Robert Choquette.

Dans le *Proloque* de ses *Oeuvres Poétiques*, le poète dit nettement son dessein. Ainsi la première image qu'il dresse est celle d'un homme que sa passion empêche de s'accommoder de l'existence ordinaire. D'une part, il est possédé d'une soif de plénitude, d'autre part, d'un besoin de s'anéantir. Dans la solitude où il se retire, il s'efforce de s'élever dans sa poésie à une conscience distincte de celle de communs mortels:

> Je monterai toujours, pensif comme le soir,
> Oubliant peu à peu la rumeur des villages
> Et les pactes menteurs qu'entre eux font les vivants,
> Jusqu'à ce que mon coeur soit seul avec les Vents.

Mais le poète n'est certes pas soucieux de construire sa propre image pour les générations à venir et voilà qu'il mettra toutes les ressources de son âme poétique à soutenir un seul développement d'images et d'idées. Une extrême sensualité et une extrême musicalité se trouveront ainsi combinées et entremêlées pour peindre

les beautés, les séductions, les couleurs de son pays natal. Désignant de la main la splendeur qui s'étale devant le voyageur solitaire, le poète se fait prêtre et guide pour évoquer la présence au monde d'un pays unique: le Canada. Thème générateur de sa poésie, ce pays de rêve n'est pas seulement la clé d'un trésor de pensées fécondes, il est avant tout le monde de silence qui force la réflexion à se détacher du songe, où l'isolement mène la contrainte de penser et l'homme à demander pardon pour s'être nourri de mensonges. Enfin, il est le seul refuge où l'âme s'abandonne à la contemplation de l'impérissable pureté de la nature qui alors se confond avec la poésie elle-même.

Il a visité l'Europe où "tout est connu de l'homme à la nature." Il a vu Rome éternelle, Venise, Florence et Vérone, puis la Suisse et "l'éclair des glaciers" et enfin la France "aux sveltes cathédrales" mais ce qu'on trouve là-bas, c'est le passé. Voilà pourquoi c'est seulement dans son grand pays tout neuf et sans mesure qu'il éprouvera l'exaltation presque physique d'avoir tout l'avenir.

Poète, donc, par son amour du sol natal il en chante les grandeurs et le futur glorieux:

> De qui, mon Canada, serions-nous donc jaloux,
> Quand nous tenons encor l'heure préparatoire,
> Ce privilège unique, à bénir à genoux,
> De savoir nos lauriers les plus beaux devant nous,
> D'avoir devant nous notre histoire? (*Retour d'Europe*)

Dans ses poèmes, que nous osons appeler patriotiques, le Canada palpite, respire, se fait chair vivante. On y goûte la chaleur des maisons couvertes par la première neige d'automne. On y respire la senteur des sapins qui en rang nous accompagnent et le charme des bois où "la vierge nature chante le nom du Canada!"; on y hume l'arôme des saisons: le printemps "calme dans le vent pur", l'été "moite", l'automne qui apporte les vents du Nord "diaboliques vengeurs", l'hiver qui "efface les laideurs boueuses des étangs".

Il n'y a pas longtemps, Louis Dantin, dans sa préface à *Emile Nelligan et son Oeuvre*, se plaignait qu'il n'y ait eu qu'un seul poète, Pamphile Lemay, "dont la vision poétique se soit nettement restreinte aux hommes et aux choses de notre pays". Mais en lisant Choquette, on n'y trouve guère de poème qui ne contienne pas un souvenir, une impression, un objet qui rapelle le Canada. A Florence, il se promène le long de l'Arno, et visite les somptueuses églises et les riches musées. Il en rapporte une admiration profonde dont témoignent les vers qu'il compose à l'honneur de la vieille Europe. Mais l'atmosphère qui plane sur ces poèmes, c'est celle de sa terre natale. Sans doute, il a beaucoup admiré les tableaux de

Botticelli et ceux du Pérugin mais, lorsqu'il veut reprendre la palette pour les reproduire, c'est aux couleurs, aux sons, aux impressions de son pays qu'il fera appel. Ainsi, cette Vierge du Pérugin a pour décor un paysage qui n'est pas celui de la Toscane, mais, au contraire, celui d'un pays — le Canada — où les images ne sont limitées que par l'horizon et par le ciel, au sens littéral et au sens figuré.

Dans les vers suivants, on voit la neige indifférente, même implacable, qui pèse sur un pays de rêve. On admire les multiples combinaisons de formes, de couleurs qui unissent mille rythmes d'images au sein de l'univers cependant que le portrait central de la Vierge Marie, par une subtile correspondence, exprime tacitement ce qui unit le monde matériel et l'univers spirituel:

> Votre front est plus pur que les neiges intactes.
> Le murmure confus de nos coeurs moribonds
> Fait à vos pieds sacrés le bruit des cataractes
> Que chantent dans la brume et dans les soir profonds.
>
> Vierge du Pérugin, ô Vierge immaculée . . .
>
> Répandez à jamais la lumière étoilée
> Qui filtre entre vos cils, ô reine des blancheurs!
>
> (*A la Vierge du Pérugin*)

Mais c'est un univers fraternel auquel il rêve, et Choquette essayera de découvrir l'harmonie primitive du nouveau monde pour inviter ses frères à entendre l'appel du Prince-des-Oiseaux et s'orienter vers l'amour humain, comme un peuple en adoration. L'Amérique du Nord était un éden de bonheur car la nature y était prodique de ses dons. Royaume de surabondance et de fécondité, elle était un monde d'innocence et de beauté:

> Alors, les caribous marchant dans les roseaux
> Levaient à chaque pas d'innombrables oiseaux,
> Et les bancs de harengs, au temps des saisons neuves,
> Luisaient, tels que des rais de soleil sur les fleuves.
> Le grand aigle de mer qui rasait les sapins
> Faisait courir son ombre au penchants des collines;
> Et l'aurore emplissait l'oeil rose des lapins . . .
>
> Et tous les animaux dont la forêt regorge
> S'unissaient à la voix des hommes triomphants
> Dans l'ivresse de vivre et d'être des enfants.
>
> Telle était l'Amérique indomptée et sauvage.
>
> (*Le Chant de l'Aigle Rouge*)

Le héros de ce monde était comme un enfant qui porte dans leur plus pur éclat les plus beaux dons de la nature: l'ampleur sereine du ciel, le charme incantatoire des plaines, le chant du désir de vivre et le poème de l'amour humain. Et voici que, "debout dans le jour qui commence", il chante "l'hymne au pays devant le lac immense":

O mon pays, salut dans le ciel élargi! . . .

Et voici que mon âme entr'ouvre sa paupière
Et pose sur la vie un long regard d'amour . . .

Je rêve de courir dans l'aurore, à travers
Les plaines, enjambant les houles des collines
Et portant sur mon dos le carquois du soleil!
Je veux remplir mes mains d'étoiles cristallines
Pour les faire rouler sur la terre en éveil
Et, drapé du manteau de l'aurore fleurie,
Etreindre sur mon coeur le coeur de ma patrie!

Or, cette aurore nouvelle qui a jadis brillé sur le crépuscule de son pays éveille chez le poète beaucoup plus qu'un simple souvenir d'un paradis commun du bonheur primitif. Il découvre que le lieu et le principe de cet antique rêve de la plénitude vitale n'est pas dans ce qui paraît aux yeux du monde, mais en ce qui existe dans le secret du coeur; c'est là la seule demeure de son authentique séjour. Est-ce que ce n'est pas dans le coeur, et dans le coeur seul, que se cache et vit cette loyauté totale de l'homme envers la nature, cette correspondence pleinement harmonieuse entre les créatures de la terre, cette vision, enfin, de l'amour humain dont l'oeil pur d'une époque perdue était capable? Certes, l'homme est devenu sordide et méchant le jour où il est devenu l'esclave des "passions voraces", où il s'est emparé de "la hache fratricide." En apprenant à haïr, il a commencé de mourir. Et le poète déplore l'affreux avantage de la "querelle des races" comparé à l'indéfectible jeunesse, à l'incomparable beauté de son pays:

Car ces conflits mesquins, ces troubles désastreux
Qui retardent tes fils ne sont pas faits pour eux;
Pour eux les fronts virils, les têtes orgueilleuses
Dont la gloire est d'atteindre aux cimes rocailleuses

Il croit que toutes les contradictions, toutes les souillures humaines peuvent être purifiées par l'innocence du coeur. Il veut dire par là l'ignorance enfantine

qui, comme la charité dont parle Saint-Paul, croit toutes choses. C'est ainsi qu'aux misères, aux cruautés, aux aveuglements du monde, l'Aigle Rouge oppose, par la bouche de son barde, la fraîcheur et la jeunesse de son pays. C'est ainsi qu'il portrait la pureté qui épouse le pardon:

> Pays de l'avenir, que tes enfants s'unissent!
> Prête-leur ta jeunesse et qu'ils s'y rajeunissent!
> Fais qu'un grand idéal ou qu'un orgueil fervent
> Illumine leur âme et les pousse en avant!

Mais la jeunesse, cette possession incorruptible, est, comme la pureté, le privilège de la douceur des cieux, de la forêt giboyeuse, des champs de semence. Car qu'est-elle, au fond, sinon soif illimitée? Soif du soleil, donc, du "soleil de l'Amour" que toute conquête exalte et nulle possession n'apaise:

> Ce jour où tes enfants que la brume aveugla,
> Enterrant à jamais la hache fratricide,
> Regarderont monter devant eux, par delà
> La forêt giboyeuse et les champs de semence,
> Le soleil de l'Amour ouvrant son aile immense!

Mais si le pays natal est presque constamment présent dans l'oeuvre du poète, Dieu apparaît aussi dans sa puissance créatrice et paternelle. Pourtant, le Dieu de Choquette n'est pas le Dieu de la Bible. Sans doute, le poète est de famille catholique et pratiquante, et il en garde toujours le souvenir comme en témoignent, par exemple *Cantique du Jeune Prêtre*:

> O mon Pasteur, je t'aime et tu me fais heureux
> Jusqu'au fond ébloui de mon coeur ténébreux!
>
> Que je sois digne au moins de mon saint ministère!

ou *Prière du Matin*:

> Déposes-y, Seigneur, tes vertus éternelles,
> Fais refléter sur nous ta céleste clarté.
> Mets la stabilité dans nos âmes fuyantes,
> Lave l'iniquité dont nos mains sont ployantes,
> Epure jusqu'au fond nos coeurs mystérieux.

Mais la présence de Dieu demeure, comme la vie elle-même, claire et obscure en même temps. Et la vie est un problème qui se pose à chaque instant de notre existence éphémère, même si ce problème trouve sa solution en Dieu qui seul donne à l'homme sa véritable espérance:

Oh! laisser ici-bas la misérable fange,
La chair où l'esprit pur, fait d'amour et d'orgueil,
Se tourmente et se mange . . .

S'envoler vierge et libre et choir au pied de Dieu!

(*Ode aux Etoiles*)

Ainsi, il lui arrive souvent de confondre son amour de Dieu avec son amour de la Nature qu'il voudrait concilier, compléter et justifier l'un par l'autre. Voici *Cimetière au Printemps*, qui voudrait être un rappel de la profondeur de notre misère et qui est, en effet, un hymne admirable à la terre qui recèle le germe de la vie, à la terre qui abrite des valeurs et des êtres qui sont sacrés:

Anges sculptés, ouvrez vos deux ailes de pierre,
Et que toutes les fleurs relèvent leur paupière
Pour voir le soleil neuf grandir à l'horizon!

Et toi, place discrète où repose ma mère,
Où l'arbuste immortel et jeune et frais toujours
Semble avoir retenu le parfum de ses jours
Et ne ternit le sol que d'une ombre éphémère;

Mais, à mesure que nous pénétrons plus avant dans ses poèmes, Choquette nous paraît assez loin de la croyance car il confond tout. Sans doute, Dieu existe pour lui, mais c'est un Dieu de poète, nous voulons dire par là un Dieu symbole d'un besoin d'absolu. Dans *Nostalgie*, c'est sous les espèces de l'amour que Dieu se manifeste, mais cet Amour est à la fois dionysiaque et voluptueux:

Amour germe de l'être, amour, source de vie,
Essence créatrice au Créateur ravie,
Verbe de l'absolu, de l'espace et du temps!
O fontaine, combien mon âme inassouvie
Se plonge en ton cristal et s'abreuve longtemps.

Melancholia où se fait jour l'effort ambitieux du poète pour déchiffrer la vie peut bien paraître une sorte de reproche que l'artiste adresse à Dieu:

. . . . . Seigneur, pourquoi fis-tu
Sans limite notre âme et le corps si fragile?
Pourquoi tant d'idéal, tant d'amour et d'ardeur,
Si l'on est enlisé dans la chair, ô Seigneur?

Cependant, il a besoin de Dieu:

> Seigneur, je ne suis rien qu'une argile souffrante;
> J'ai mon néant dans l'étroitesse de mon oeil.
> Pardonne-moi, Seigneur, mon misérable orgueil.

Fait-il conclure que le poète a voulu illustrer la misère de l'homme qui saurait perdre Dieu ou bien qu'il a voulu seulement décrire, comme du reste l'annonce le titre *Melancholia*, un état de solitude et d'abandon? "Oh! viens remplir de Toi l'abîme de mon coeur!" Mais l'espoir en Dieu demeure, car:

> Sans Toi je ne suis rien que la forme d'un songe
> Un mélange effrayant de boue et d'idéal.

Cet espoir, pourtant, on ne saurait l'interpréter comme une profession de foi. Il réfléchit, dirais-je, un état d'âme singulier, un sentiment beaucoup plus qu'un besoin de l'esprit. Comme dans *Géhenne* d'ailleurs où il nous donne la clé de son doute blasphème:

> O Maître qu'adorait ma mère,
> Ne fussiez-vous qu'une chimère
> Je veux vous aimer malgré moi

Certes, c'est un besoin qu'il exprime, mais c'est un besoin de tendresse et non pas de croire: en fait, c'est de son besoin de tendresse que le poète nous parle, et la tendresse, le sait-on, s'accompagne toujours de la mélancolie, sentiment dont le doute est le symbole, et dont l'écho sont les accents de notre tristesse infinie:

> Fais-moi meilleur, fais-moi meilleur, ouvre mes yeux,
> Que le courage y rentre avec l'azur des cieux!

Le même thème, il le reprend dans *L'Homme*, quoique le sentiment qui habite ou constitue ce poème ne soit plus l'espoir en Dieu, mais le songe permanent que chacun porte en soi et dont l'essor est la conscience d'un manque, d'un vide, qu'engendre l'imperfection de l'existence. C'est l'antique rêve du bonheur adamique qui a formulé la loi intime de la nature humaine et dont l'exigence est cette soif d'absolu qui donne à la vie toute sa valeur et tout son mystère:

> L'homme, éternel trompé que l'espoir désaltère,
> Inlassablement cherche à comprendre la terre,
> A deviner quel crime on lui fait expier . . .

Et que malgré la chair il se souvient du ciel! . . .

C'est cela, cet espoir, le magique levain
Qui fait que l'homme garde à jamais ses chimères.

Et pourtant c'est cette chair tout à l'heure méprisée qui provoque l'esprit, qui est le premier moteur du génie humain:

Eh! comment ferait-il sa route séculaire,
S'il n'avait dans son sang l'héroïque liqueur,
S'il n'avait la jeunesse éternelle du coeur?

Chez Choquette, ce qui frappe, pourtant, c'est que sa poésie n'est pas de nature mystique. Au contraire, c'est une poésie de la vie, de toutes les formes de la vie, c'est une poésie de la nature, de toutes les manifestations de la nature. Certes, il y a une multiplicité de thèmes qui s'entrecroisent dans ses poèmes: la liberté, l'amour, la création de l'oeuvre, la louange à Dieu, l'homme dans son éternité agissante, mais ce n'est pas dans cette richesse que son imagination aime à se mouvoir pour y puiser ses symboles et ses métaphores. C'est la beauté de la nature, la beauté de son pays encore si vierge que le poète a choisie comme patrie de ses songes. C'est là, autour des villages agenouillés de son sol natal qu'il a entendu ces appels et rêvé dans ces silences par qui se crée l'Inconnu divin:

Le ciel net où fleurit l'aurore
Découpe haut le cap sonore,
Et le village de Grand-Pré
Se reveillant tout empourpré
Fait sourire chaque toiture . . .

O vision des chers aieux,
Légende aux parfums merveilleux!
Lumière dans notre ombre opaque,
Doux rêve ensoleillé de Pâque! (*Pâques Anciennes*)

On voit, donc, comment l'âme sensible du poète, toujours soucieuse de saisir l'eurythmie d'un paysage, sait trouver sa charnière autour de laquelle s'ordonne l'harmonie d'un lieu chéri. De même dans cet autre poème *Pâques*:

Sous le soleil d'avril qui flambe dans l'azur
La campagne du Nord s'étale et se déroule
Avec ampleur. Tout est calme dans le vent pur.
La neige, amoncelée aux bras des sapins, croule . . .

Car c'est au vieux Québec la fête du printemps,
La fête du clocher qui fait les toits plus proches.
Jour de Pâques, jour d'or où la Terre a vingt ans,
Eclosion du coeur, renaissance des cloches!

Ainsi, c'est à l'image pittoresque, à la sensation visuelle qu'il faut toujours revenir chez Robert Choquette. Voici, par exemple, comment, sous l'image pittoresque que le poète développe sous son aspect concret et visuel, l'on trouve l'explication d'une réalité spirituelle ou d'une vérité religieuse:

Glèbe féconde où les épis chantent en choeur,
L'âme du peuple a pris racine dans ton coeur
Et tu nourris sa jeune vie . . .

Glèbe dont le blé mûr peut nourrir tant de monde,
Sois généreuse et bonne à celui qui féconde
Et qui met l'avenir dans ton sein . . .

Glèbe d'où monte au ciel un chant laborieux.
(*A la Terre Natale*)

C'est pourquoi, estimons-nous, les visions de Choquette sont si exactes et précises et les accords qu'elles entament entre elles sont toujours "aussi doux à l'oreille que la lueur de l'aube est douce à l'oeil." Sans doute, nous avons tous connu la fraîcheur pénétrante de l'air dans une forêt de sapins. Nous y avons goûté cette légèreté qui renouvelle le corps et le spiritualise. Dans *Sous le Sapin* la saveur de la nature vit à la fois réelle et irréelle:

Est-il rien de plus doux qu'un rêve qu'on habite
Un jour entier, près des sapins, sous le ciel bleu?
On oublie un moment la ville qui s'agite,
On n'a jamais été plus intime avec Dieu.

Ainsi l'amour, que ce soit l'amour de l'épouse, d'un fils, de la nature, pour les morts, a toujours pour décor un coin du Canada chéri. Et (*Aimer*, I, 94) c'est "de plonger son corps parmi les sapins verts."

Mais parmi les images, c'est sans doute à la mer que le poète donne ses préférences. La mer, symbole de perplexité et d'élans sans issue, toujours évocatrice de désirs et de détresse, de violence et de calme mystérieux, renferme en son être l'essence du réel et la fugacité de l'existence qu'elle change, par le mystère de ses formes infinies, dans l'éternité du procès créateur.

Ainsi la mer, qui est constamment présente dans la poésie de Choquette, de-

viendra le maître du chant dans ce deuxième volume d'*Oeuvres Poétiques. Suite Marine*, l'a défini le poète; mais aussi épopée d'un homme qui avec la mer, et la mer en lui, parcourt le beau pays, le ciel qui l'encompasse, la vie qui l'habite et finalement ses rêves.

Dans le *Prologue*, la mer nous est présentée comme l'annonciatrice et la dispensatrice du néant même, hors duquel surgit la création dans toutes ses angoisses, et toutes ses contradictions, et tous ses mystères:

> Masse de nuit féconde où les premiers ancêtres
> Cherchèrent dans l'effroi leur forme et leur couleur;
> Paradoxal abîme où l'animal est fleur,
> Où la plante respire et dévore la bête,
> Où la mort et l'amour et l'amour et la mort
> Passent de l'un à l'autre en une vaste fête

Mais voici qu'une évolution s'opère grâce à laquelle on passe du pittoresque au symbolisme. La mer est comparée au coeur de l'homme et, notons-le bien, la comparaison est très précise, soit parce que les deux termes (mer et coeur) ne sont jamais fondus l'un à l'autre, soit parce que l'image ne quitte pas complètement le domaine intellectuel:

> Mer, image du coeur, changeant, nouveau toujours,
> Cercle d'ombres et de clartés, dont les contours
> Flottent dans les vapeurs floconneuses du songe!
> Ténèbres de la mer, nuit du coeur, que prolonge
> Toujours plus d'ombre encore. . . .

Mais il y a plus, car, lorsque Choquette établit les termes de ses équivalences, il reste toujours dans le domaine de la comparaison. Le point de contact entre le comparant et le comparé n'est jamais quitté par le poète, même dans les détails:

> Et dans le coeur aussi s'avancent tour à tour
> Et reculent, pareils aux puissantes marées,
> Le doute et l'espérance, et la haine et l'amour;
> Et sur le coeur aussi des barques sont parées,
> Et dans la nuit du coeur des carènes sombrées
> Pourrissent lentement autour de leur secret.

En opposition avec cette image en même temps claire et complexe, voici une image de la même mer remarquablement contractée; dans *La Maison sur la Mer*, c'est toute la vie humaine qui est ici déroulée. Les deux termes considérés sont la mer et la mort, mais l'image est une seule: la spirale de la vie:

. . . Entre nous et le rêve
Circule cette odeur qui hante le cerveau,
L'âpre odeur de la mort qui féconde la vie.
Nourrice alimentant l'éternel renouveau,
Tueuse dont la faim n'est jamais assouvie,
La mer jette à nos pieds ses morts et ses vivants.

Finalement, la mer apparaît sans secret dans un flamboiement qui est comme un reflet d'éternité:

La mort, la mer, l'amour . . . Car c'est l'instinct d'amour
Qui, dans la mer, commande à des forces énormes
D'assouplir, d'embellir, de varier leurs formes;
Puis la mort entre en jeu qui, demain, à son tour
Dévorera l'amour qui l'avait fécondée;
Jusqu'au jour où la mer inquiète, obsédée
Par le désir, obscur, l'instinct aveugle et sourd,
Fera recommencer aux êtres comme aux choses
L'enchaînement sans fin de leurs métamorphoses.

Dans *La Plage*, la vision de la mer est statique et dionysiaque. La mer est le sphynx, l'énigme vive qui inspire depuis toujours en tout poète un besoin d'innocence et de pureté première. Besoin antérieur à l'histoire donc et dont la mer est la seule source, car c'est en elle seule que se déploie la lenteur d'une contemplation sans terme et d'une interrogation sans lendemain:

. . . . Et la mer, la grande inspiratrice
D'espoirs bâtis, en écume dissous,
Accompagne ces voix défuntes; la nourrice
Des rythmes des plus forts, des rythmes les plus doux.

Le deuxième volume des *Oeuvres Poétiques*, donc, n'est qu'une suite de variations sur le thème de la mer, semence et fruit de la victoire sans cesse prolongée contre la mort. Certes, chaque poème pousse son ciel et dicte au poète ses préférences. Ainsi, ce sont les paysages marins — parfois des saynètes — qui lui ont été des animateurs et lui ont parfois imposé ces passages de l'alexandrin au verset et même (*La Nuit Millénaire*) au vers blanc.

Mais il a plus car la mer n'est, pour Choquette, que la forme intelligible de cette conjugaison de toutes les existences liées en hymne et s'élevant à Dieu. La mer, qui ne se maintient en elle que par le mouvement et le rythme, est le symbole de cette oscillation continuelle entre l'être et le non-être à travers laquelle l'univers

progresse et se métamorphose. La mer, où la vie ne dure que grâce à des morts partielles, est l'image de l'éternité cachée dans l'unité du temps où "nuit et jour perd son temps à rattraper le Temps". La mer qui s'ouvre, inonde et profère, est la figure idéale de l'amour qui provoque et fait naître le songe permanent que chacun porte en soi, et que le poète nomme ISEUT. De là cette nostalgie informulée, cette indéfinissable aspiration qui hantent cette *Suite Marine*, et dont la douceur n'est ni dans le souffle ni dans le chant, mais dans l'éternité. En effet, qu'est-ce que ce chant sinon une suite de rêves, de songes singuliers, à la fois vagues et puissants comme la mer elle-même, et dans lesquels l'esprit s'enfonce pour se perdre dans l'éternité même du désir amoureux: ". . . . Iseut, vivant mirage, Je volerai vers toi, mais tu fuiras toujours". Mais la mer est domaine plus vaste encore que le songe:

> Et la mer chantera vers notre caravelle
> Comme chante la mer depuis les premiers temps
> Et comme chantera dans la suite des âges
> La mer aux mille voix, mer aux mille visages,
> Qui, toujours plus nouvelle en ses flots palpitants,
> Toujours se rajeunit et se recrée en elle,
> Toujours reste pareille à la mer éternelle. (*La Figure de Proue*)

TO SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD

The long rhymed satire À Sir John A. MacDonald, *which concludes the posthumously printed* Poésies Religieuses et Politiques *(Montreal, 1886), was composed during Riel's exile in the United States and is dated "St. Joseph, Dakota, August 1879". It is the only item in the collection which holds any interest today: all the other fruits of Riel's muse were of a lamentably devotional or panegyric nature, and though affording some interesting comparisons — as when Jesus Christ is praised for being more "affable" than Louis XIV and "even more bewitching than Bonaparte" — they can have little value except to the student of Riel's own compelling, twisted and strangely attractive personality. But this unique example of his political verse — whose eloquence, diffuseness, inordinate length (it runs to almost 500 lines), as well as its tendency to wander, recall the great patriot's speeches themselves — is notable for spirited invective, command of doggerel and macaronic rhymes, and for several passages of genuine fire and pathos. The following translation, an abridgment limited to reproducing the best portions of the poem, is presented as no more than a kind of précis; anyone seeking the whole poem is referred to the original. — In this English version, only such liberties have been taken with the text as were imposed by the absolute necessity of producing a version using the same broken rhyme-scheme; for a literal translation, no matter how much more "faithful", would have failed to convey anything of the force and flavour of the original, or to render the curious mixture of wit verging on buffoonery and rhetoric spilling over into the absurd, which makes this poem a good deal more than a literary curiosity.*

J. G.

By Louis Riel

Translated by John Glassco

SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD doth govern proudly
The provinces from which his power flows;
While his bad faith perpetuates my woes —
And all his countrymen applaud him loudly.

Despite the peace he owes me, and despite
His pledge to honour in the deed and fact
What was our Pact[1]
And is my right,
For seven years now Sir John has warred with me.
A faithless man's a vulgar man, be he
Either a wise man or a witling born:
And so I hold him up to scorn.

He meant to cast into obscure disgrace
The Bishop of Saint Boniface;[2]
Then finding his mistake, he made a show of candour
And sought to save his face
Before His Grace
By bidding this good Pontiff Alexander
Appease the Métis and their proper wrath,
And to be sure to let them understand
They'd followed the right path
In taking up their own defence,

Since the vile Schultzes[3] and MacDougalls[4]
Had all received a rightful reprimand
For causing us, with their damned drums and bugles,
Such dire alarms
When they took arms
Against us, *sans* authority
Of Her Most Gracious Majesty.

He played the Bishop false, and then belied
Him with fair words and with such *politesse*
As cloaked his wickedness,
And pleased his party and his gang beside.

For all his plots in their deceitful dress,
For all his pride in his own cleverness,
He'll answer one day to a wrathful God
For all the injustice he hath sown abroad.
He's a fine speaker is the Parliamentary chief,
And sits among the great ones of the land;
But once Sir John's become so many grains of sand,
God will arraign him at His Judgment Seat,
Where he must stand.

In eighteen hundred and seventy-three,
With poor Lépine[5] in gaol
And Manitoba in her agony,
And I a hunted man with all men on my trail,
Sir John offered me thirty-five thousand dollars[6]
If for three years I would desert my nation
In all her dolours,
And leave my friend Lépine in tribulation,
With bleeding feet and hands
Captíved in iron bands![7]

* * * *

How happy was I one fine day to view
Sir John laid low, with all his wretched crew![8]

But still his projects were much narrower in scope
Than those of Edward Blake[9] and of MacKenzie.[10]

When Blake closed off the future — and our hope —
'Twas then, in a fine frenzy,
That he announced the Price of Blood,[11]
And, bidding justice cease,
Destroyed an innocent people's livelihood
By thus condemning, in its leaders, the Métis.

Almighty God! Protect Thy poor Métis
Almost abolished by the English race . . .

And as for your, Sir John,
I do not wish your death should be
Too full of suffering, of course;
But what I'd like to see
Is that you should feel some remorse,
Because, you Vampire, you have eaten me.

* * * *

Canadians! The English whom you trust
Are neither generous nor just,
But quite the opposite.
Open your eyes, and be convinced of it!

Carthage ne'er boasted of her Punic faith,
Because her sons had still some self-respect.
But see the modern Englishman, erect
In all his shameless brag
Of British justice and the British flag!
Too well we see in all his actions
How he aspires, if none gainsaith,
By every means to make us Anglo-Saxons.

But Lower Canada was never born to perish.
Her bishops are all ready, I believe,
To endure the loss of all they cherish,
If need be, rather than to leave
You, John, to do just as you please
Whene'er you mean to make them hold their peace.

And the good God has given *me* strength and heart,
And I'll not die without declaring war,
The war of sense and art
And of the rights of man
Against all that you are.
My strength is in my gift for suffering;
I am the man to leap into the ring,
And give all that he can
And more than John Bull reckons:
He has gored me all too often with his horn;
I'll beat him yet; and I shall have for seconds
Princess Louise and the Marquess of Lorne.

* * * *

I laugh at those who place
Vile flattery above
The sacred love
A man feels for his native land and race;
And at Lord Dufferin I can laugh indeed,
That still-born child launched from old Erin's womb,
Who did not come
Into the world headfirst, but by his bum.[12]

He and his wife have now re-crossed the ocean.
We saw them leave with no profound emotion . . .

They've had illustrious successors
Sprung from the marquisate and royal line.
A poor and almost peasant stock is mine,
But through it I pretend
Unto the principality
Of moral principles, and will defend
The Good against all bad oppressors;
And this is why
I hate a policy that's based on Vice,
And its employ
Even in a Viceroy.

The unjust man lives peacefully in his house of clay;
But its foundation will collapse some day.
Be sure that Washington is closer, in our view,
Than London, and your neighbours worthier far than you!

If God saw fit to cut us off from France
In spite of all the bonds of our affection,
Remember also that the power she can advance
May in a twinkling break old Albion's sceptre.
Take care:
I, I am watching you. Beware!
Your whole empire, and all those who have kept her
Glorious, fall apart. Too long and much too often
She's thrown false dice upon her mouldy coffin.

And all too long the children of New France
Have borne the English yoke;
And will not miss the chance
Of crushing a decrepit race, and so revoke
The rule of those who, in a pride not to be borne,
Have governed them with such inveterate scorn!

FOOTNOTES

[1] The amnesty promised in 1869 to all métis involved in the Red River insurrection.
[2] Msgr. Alexandre Taché, Riel's early patron.
[3] Dr. John (later Sir John) Schultz, a leading figure in the "Canadian" party in Manitoba, and Riel's arch-enemy.
[4] Hon. William McDougall, Minister of Public Works in Macdonald's first cabinet. Appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Rupert's Land in 1869, he was ignominiously turned back at the border by an armed band of métis.
[5] Ambroise Lépine, Riel's lieutenant throughout the insurrection of 1869-70, and president of the court-martial which imposed the death sentence on Thomas Scott.
[6] This has never been confirmed.
[7] Lépine was arrested in 1873 on a charge of murder.
[8] Macdonald's government was defeated in 1873.
[9] Liberal premier of Ontario in 1871.
[10] Alexander Mackenzie, who headed a Liberal government in 1873.
[11] Blake's government offered $5,000 for the apprehension of Riel and Lépine as the murderers of Scott.
[12] This reference is obscure.

THE BODY-ODOUR OF RACE

Ronald Sutherland

THE PROBLEM OF RACE and ethnic relations has never been a major concern of Canadian Literature. By contrast, the great American classics — *Moby Dick*, the Leatherstocking tales, *Huckleberry Finn* — have all focused upon the communion between persons of different races, and this theme has persisted in the works of Faulkner, Porter, Baldwin, Ellison and many others. These writers, it would seem, either concluded or sensed that the realization of the American Dream, indeed the survival of the American nation, would depend upon the ability of people of different ethnic origins to learn to live with each other in a mutually satisfactory manner. And to the outside observer of the United States, it is becoming increasingly clear that this thesis is all too true. As a matter of fact, we can go a step further than the survival of the United States — it is now clear that the survival of man will be ultimately determined by the capacity of the various peoples of the world to live together in reasonable harmony.

For Canadians, looking at the problems south of the border has long been a comfortable spectator sport. It is right that American authors should be preoccupied with race and ethnic relations — after all, the Americans brought most of their miseries upon themselves, and the Negro situation in the United States, because of hardcore ignorance and prejudice, has progressed no more than from a frightening atrocity into a frightening mess. In Canada, on the other hand, all has gone relatively well. There are not enough Negroes to create a real disturbance, and the most prominent are generally great athletes or football stars who seem satisfied to function as idols in a nation of the under-exercised. Outside of the occasional claim on real estate in downtown Brantford, Ontario, or the

contention that old worm-eaten treaties entitle them to all the amenities of modern medicine, or slight misunderstandings about what constitutes a murder, Canadian Indians and Eskimos have come up with very little that the R.C.M.P. could not handle. The tourist trade, profitable sale of little birchbark canoes, structural steel construction jobs for the more energetic, and the complete annihilation of the Beothuks of Newfoundland before they could become a problem, have all helped to preserve the national peace of mind. And so far as the Jews are concerned, ever since a pioneer farmer called Abraham, as one story goes, supplied the site for a famous battle near Quebec City, people of Jewish extraction have always seemed to fit quite smoothly into the Canadian scene, if not entirely so into the stock exchanges and the school commissions. Indeed, Jewish writers have made such a disproportionate contribution to what is significant in Canadian Letters that without them the field would be a Barebones' parliament, complete with generous share of Roundheads.

There has been, nevertheless, and there continues to be a great deal of friction in Canada between what are sometimes referred to as the two "founding races" — English-speaking Canadians and French Canadians. Of course, in the strictest anthropological sense the term "race" should not be used to distinguish either of the two major ethnic groups of Canada from the other. So far as I can determine, there is no true racial divergence between French and English Canadians. *Les canadiens*, having come largely from Normandy, Brittany and Picardy, are the result of a mixture of many strains, including the Celts, Germanic tribes such as the Franks, Jutes and Frisians as well as the Norsemen or Normans, not to mention a number of exiled Highland Scots and wandering Irishmen. English-speaking Canadians, strange as it may appear to some, are more or less a blend of exactly the same elements, with a good measure of Norman French blood thrown in besides. The notion of a uniform *mentalité anglo-saxonne*, despite the exclamations in Daniel Johnson's recent book *Egalité ou Indépendance*, is about as valid as the notion that British, Canadian and American beer are identical. Like that other catch-all "the Latin temperament," it is a term far easier to use than to justify, and I strongly suspect that both of these expressions, handy as they may be to resolve the irresolute, are completely meaningless.

The fact, however, that there are no true racial differences between English- and French-speaking Canadians has not prevented the emergence, reflected in Canadian Literature, of the ugly phenomenon known as racism. A set of attitudes which has single-handedly filled the chamber of twentieth-century horrors, racism is defined in the Standard College Dictionary as "an excessive and irrational

belief in or advocacy of the superiority of a given group, people, or nation, usually one's own, on the basis of racial differences having no scientific validity." Racism, then, does not require that there be any real differences of race; it simply requires an irrational belief in the superiority of a given group on the grounds of supposed differences. In Canada, compared to the United States and South Africa, racist attitudes have often been well disguised, of a subtle and covert nature, aroused in many instances by individuals and small groups to exploit a particular situation.

In his poem "Political Meeting," the Montreal poet A. M. Klein put his finger on it brilliantly. The poem concerns a rally addressed by Camillien Houde, the former mayor of Montreal, in the wake of conscription in 1942. I can recall as a small boy witnessing such rallies, and I have always marvelled at the power and detailed accuracy of Klein's description — the absence of the religious brothers, signifying the Church's unsure position, the singing of "Alouette," the *joual*, the clever turn of phrase, the hypnotic force of a skilled orator. Here is how the poems ends:

> Worshipped and loved, their favorite visitor,
> a country uncle with sunflower seeds in his pockets,
> full of wonderful moods, tricks, imitative talk,
>
> he is their idol: like themselves, not handsome,
> not snobbish, not of the *Grande Allée! Un homme!*
> Intimate, informal, he makes bear's compliments
>
> to the ladies; is gallant; and grins;
> goes for the balloon, his opposition, with pins;
> jokes also on himself, speaks of himself
>
> in the third person, slings slang, and winks with folklore;
> and knows now that he has them, kith and kin.
> Calmly, therefore, he begins to speak of war,
>
> praises the virtue of being *Canadien*,
> of being at peace, of faith, of family,
> and suddenly his other voice: *Where are your sons?*
>
> He is tearful, choking tears; but not he
> would blame the clever English; in their place
> he'd do the same; maybe.
>
> Where *are* your sons?
> The whole street wears one face,
> shadowed and grim; and in the darkness rises
> the body-odour of race.[1]

BEFORE CONSIDERING the observations made by Canadian writers on racism and cultural identity, however, I wish to examine certain racist ideas which can be found in the personal philosophies of a few Canadian writers themselves. I have tried to limit the examination to certain significant authors, and to those ideas which by virtue of being apparently widespread or especially persistent, continue to have repercussions in our own day. It is necessary, also, to try to distinguish between the conviction of superiority which characterizes racism and simple cases of exaggerated pride in the presumed merits of one's ethnic group.

Among minor writers of English Canada, for instance, there have been many who were carried away by exaggerated pride. One need only glance through Edward Hartley Dewart's *Selections from Canadian Poets* to find choice examples. Here is Charles Sangster, a poet of considerable talent in more sober moments, beginning his "Song for Canada":

> Sons of the race whose sires
> Aroused the martial flame,
> That filled with smiles
> The triune Isles,
> Through all their heights of fame!
>
> With hearts as brave as theirs,
> With hopes as strong and high,
> We'll ne'er disgrace
> The honoured race
> Whose deeds can never die.[2]

More apropos, perhaps, in this time of bilingual cheques and bonused government clerks, are lines such as the following from Pamela Vining's "Canada":

> Forests, whose echoes never had been stirred
> By the sweet music of an English word,
> Where only rang the red-browed hunter's yell,
> And the wolf's howl through the dark sunless dell.[3]

And one could go on and on. But verses such as these merely indicate an overflow of spontaneous patriotism, coloured by a normal enough preference for one's own ethnic culture. There is a profound difference, it seems to me, between this kind of expression and the attitude which can be detected in the work of Susanna Moodie, the English lady who roughed it in the bush — to a certain extent, that

is. For she was seldom reduced so low as to be without servants and a good liquor supply.

Mrs. Moodie was manifestly convinced of the superiority of the particular class of English gentlefolk to which she belonged, and she makes the idea clear in passages such as the following in her book *Roughing It in the Bush*:

> The hand that has long held the sword, and been accustomed to receive implicit obedience from those under its control, is seldom adapted to wield the spade and guide the plough, or try its strength against the stubborn trees of the forest. Nor will such persons submit cheerfully to the saucy familiarity of servants, who, republicans in spirit, think themselves as good as their employers.[4]

Moodie makes the same point many times, always carefully differentiating between "superiors" and "inferiors." She speaks of the "vicious, uneducated barbarians, who form the surplus of over-populated European countries." At one point she observes: "The semi-barbarous Yankee squatters, who had 'left their country for their country's good,' and by whom we were surrounded in our first settlement, detested us . . ." And to this last remark of Susanna Moodie's, one is tempted to reply "No Wonder." In many respects her classification of people is reminiscent of Samuel Richardson in *Sir Charles Grandison*, where he divided his characters into three categories: men, women, and Italians. Only for Moodie the classes would be English gentlemen, English ladies, and barbarians.

Of course, her standards for herself were exceedingly high. Here she is admitting to an "unpardonable weakness":

> In spite of my boasted fortitude — and I think my powers of endurance have been tried to the utmost since my sojourn in this country — the rigour of the climate subdued my proud, independent English spirit, and I actually shamed my womanhood, and cried with the cold. Yes, I ought to blush at confessing, such unpardonable weakness; but I was foolish and inexperienced, and unaccustomed to the yoke.

After having read the works of Susanna Moodie, one is left with the undeniable impression that everybody — Irish, French-Canadian, Scottish, Indian, lowborn English and especially American — who is not of her particular caste has been hopelessly predestined to insignificance, *ipso facto*. Moreover, her attitude, which appears to be essentially unconscious and without malicious intent, led her to remarkable conclusions on occasion. Speaking of the cholera doctor Stephen Ayres, for instance, she comments: "A friend of mine, in this town, has an original portrait of this notable empiric — this man sent from heaven. The face

is rather handsome, but has a keen, designing expression, and is evidently that of an American from its complexion and features."

Now it may appear to some that I have been looking at the writings of Susanna Moodie with a magnifying glass, considering that she did no more than echo the accepted English spirit of her time, but certainly through a magnifying glass is the way Mrs. Moodie consistently looked at herself. I do not deny the merits of her literary achievement — her keen eye for appropriate detail, her ear for dialect, her capacity to capture scenes and moods. Nevertheless, throughout her work, as throughout the works of Ralph Connor, to name one other obvious example, there is always the disconcerting body-odour of race, the undertone of racism. Not the screeching, messianic racism of a Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the man who talked with demons and who sowed the field which Adolf Hitler was to harvest, but something perhaps almost as malignant in the long run, because it is in the form of a deeply ingrained pattern of thought, a conviction which may even be unconsciously held. Furthermore, it is the very conviction which in various guises has haunted and continues to haunt a nation which, if it is going to survive, must perforce develop a *modus vivendi* for people of different ethnic origins.

Moodie herself, it should be pointed out, merely chanted a common tendency of many nations, a tendency which was perhaps an inevitable adjunct to strong cultural identification, a tendency which in most circumstances was probably not of great harm or consequence. What is important to us here is that the Moodie attitude has not died a natural death, but continues to infect the thinking of many English Canadians, and that in the particular circumstances of modern Canada it could be of vital consequence.

It is the kind of attitude, whether conscious or unconscious, which has often thrown up a formidable psychological barrier to satisfactory and harmonious relations between Canada's two major ethnic groups. One becomes aware of it in letters to the editor, in statements by university professors, in articles such as the recent *Chatelaine* feature called "Women of Ontario," in pronouncements of the Canadian Legion, in parliamentary speeches, in the Protestant school boards of the Province of Quebec which objected to the suggestion of the Parent Commission that they integrate with the French Catholic system. For it is well known that the English Protestant system has always been superior to its French-Canadian counterpart, and for obvious reasons.

A NUMBER OF ENGLISH-CANADIAN WRITERS, especially in recent years, have been conscious of the lingering miasma of racism in Canada. They have dramatized and satirized it, moving further and further away from the spirit typified by Susanna Moodie. As Canadian poets have turned from landscapes to social and psychological realities, they have become increasingly sensitive to the false values in established Canadian patterns of thought and have reflected this sensitivity in their poems. Among the more obvious examples are Earle Birney's "Anglosaxon Street", Frank Scott's "The Canadian Social Register", and Ralph Gustafson's "Psalm 23". In several poems by Irving Layton, A. J. M. Smith, or Alfred Purdy, one finds less explicit but equally effective reaction to the Moodie attitude. In the area of prose writing, Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist* reveals a tone in striking contrast to that found in Susanna Moodie's work. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind*, Ross's *As For Me and My House*, Graham's *Earth and High Heaven*, and especially Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* and *Two Solitudes* may be added to the list.

It is of interest to note, incidentally, that whenever there is a confrontation of races or ethnic groups coupled with racist ideas, a variety of myths inevitably springs up. In the United States, there is the well known myth of the extraordinary virility of the Negro, which most probably arose from the fear that the Negro constituted a threat to the supposed purity of the white race. Stressing in its earliest form the idea that the Negro male was possessed of violent, uncontrollable animal passions, it presumably acted as a taboo to protect white women. The cohabiting of white men with Negro women, of course, was always regarded as a special service to genetic improvement.

Now in Canada, one ethnic myth which has developed is that the French-Canadian girl is more highly sexed than her English-speaking compatriot, and this myth, still very much alive, has had a whole complexity of effects. It is difficult to say exactly how such a myth could have taken root. As Gilles Marcotte points out in his *Une Littérature qui se fait*,[5] a series of early French-Canadian novels, seemingly in an attempt to gild the pill of military defeat, presented love affairs between British men and alluring French-Canadian maidens, and in each of these affairs the girl, having reduced her suitor to blubbering incapacity, haughtily refuses to marry him. The best of these novels, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé's *Les Anciens Canadiens*, a book rich in fascinating detail about early Canadian life and mores, tells how the handsome Archibald Cameron of Locheill, desperately in love with Blanche d'Haberville since the prewar days when he had

lived in Quebec as a guest of her family, is forced to take part in the defeat of the French regime and consequently loses his true love.

Perhaps the romance theme in novels such as *Les Anciens Canadiens* had something to do with the emergence of the French-Canadian-girl myth. A more probable explanation, however, is racist conviction of the type seen in Susanna Moodie's writing. Since the possibility of ethnic intermixture in colonial Canada almost exclusively involved English men and French-Canadian women, the English women being either here with their husbands or left at home, the myth focused on the threat of the French-Canadian female rather than the male. When, for example, Frances Brooke, in *The History of Emily Montague*, is not ranting about "the mild genius of our religion and laws, and that spirit of industry, enterprize, and commerce, to which we owe all our greatness," she is strongly suggesting through the tone of the letters which make up her novel that French-Canadian girls are abandoned coquettes, more passionate than sensible, with a definite inclination toward seducing the unwary English gentleman. Thus it seems quite plausible that the myth of *la femme fatale canadienne* traces back to the feeling of superiority and female possessiveness of the colonial English ladies.

In addition to the myth just described, there are several others, such as the notion that French Canadians are deficient in business sense, or that Roman Catholicism and the French language are mystically interdependent. These last two are now in a state of decreasing currency and may soon disappear entirely. The sex myth of the French-Canadian girl, however, like the sex myth of the Negro, continues to hold ground because of an intriguing reversal of social perspectives. When these myths emerged, the ascendency of the animal passions was generally held to be the essence of human depravity. But in the last few decades, positions have changed drastically, and now any indication of powerful heterosexual drive, reasonably free from neuroses, perversions and inhibitions, is regarded as a recommendation rather than a condemnation. Consequently, the erstwhile targets of these sex myths have now become the contented guardians. And as the American Negro writer James Baldwin might put it — the chickens, baby, have come home to roost!

TURNING TO THE LITERATURE of French Canada, it must be said at the outset that the kind of racism which has found its way into the works of certain French-Canadian writers is more obtrusive than that in English-Cana-

dian books, sometimes entirely devoid of subtlety. This fact is both a good thing and a bad thing. It is good in that readers have been able to apprehend immediately the position of a particular author and to react accordingly. It is bad in that some have reacted by embracing the racist attitudes extolled. In the case of Lionel Groulx's *L'Appel de la race*, for instance, such distinguished critics as Camille Roy, who was to become Rector of Laval University, Louvigny de Montigny, and René du Roure, Stephen Leacock's old friend, reacted immediately against the thesis presented by Groulx. On the other hand, the influence of Lionel Groulx, through his writings in history and literary history as well as the novel in question, has been immense and remains unbelievably strong. Seldom has a man with such misguided ideas been able to guide so many. Though there *are* some other obvious examples.

L'Appel de la race is the story of a man called Jules de Lantagnac who goes to a classical college, then completes law studies at McGill. He sets up practice in Ottawa and manages to build a clientele of prosperous businessmen. Eventually he marries an English-Canadian girl called Maud Fletcher, after she has changed her religion. They have four children — Wolfred, Nellie, Virginia and William — who, naturally enough, grow up speaking the language of their mother, the boys eventually attending the Jesuit's Loyola College in Montreal, and life for a time is peaceful, prosperous and pleasant for everyone. But then Jules de Lantagnac visits some relatives back in Quebec, and while there he hears *l'appel de la race*. He becomes possessed of guilt feelings about having betrayed his ancestry. Upon his return to Ottawa, he begins regular visits to an Oblate priest, Father Fabien, who becomes his personal confessor. He also begins to practice French again, to teach it to his children, and he tries to create in them a sense of their French heritage.

The rest of the book presents a number of startling developments. Jules is elected to parliament and becomes entangled in the controversy over Bill 17, an unfortunate piece of legislation pertaining to the teaching of French in Ontario schools. Lantagnac is asked to speak against the bill in parliament, and for reasons that are not made clear his wife Maud decides that if he does make the speech, she will leave him. Lantagnac, accordingly, must choose between his immediate family and his ancestral loyalty. Egged on by Father Fabien, he decides in favour of his ancestors and makes the speech. Then unlike those legions of women who periodically threaten to leave their husbands, Maud sticks to her word, packs her bags and gets out. Nellie and William decide to go with her, while Wolfred and Virginia stay with the old man. Virginia finds herself moved to enter a con-

vent, and Wolfred changes his name to André, which is understandable enough under any circumstances.

Now we need not be concerned with the intricacies of the plot of *L'Appel de la race*, nor with the political implications. I, for one, agree with Lionel Groulx that the treatment of French Canadians in school systems outside of Quebec has often been an injustice, brought about mainly by an overdose of the Susanna Moodie creed. What does concern us here, however, is the authorial comment on race contained in Groulx's novel.

Mason Wade, the American historian of French Canada, has observed that "Groulx is a disciple of the historical school of the Count de Gobineau," and "was greatly affected during his studies in Switzerland and France by the anti-democratic ideas of Charles Maurras and Maurice Barrès."[6] Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, of course, is the man who influenced Houston Stewart Chamberlain and whose racist theories prepared the way for Fascist ideology. Gobineau himself, it would appear, never entertained the thought of genocide, but he was greatly instrumental in bringing about that cruel, ironic twist of fate which caused the Jews, whose ancestors invented racism, to become victims of the unspeakable perversions and atrocities which racist theories can so easily promote.

In *L'Appel de la race*, Groulx actually quotes from Barrès and from Dr. Gustave Le Bon's *Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples*, published in 1894. Le Bon, a French doctor and sociologist who died in 1931, published some 17 volumes over a period of fifty years. The passage from his work cited by Groulx is as follows:

> Between two superior races as close to each other as the English and Germans of America, crossbreeding may be an element of progress. But it always constitutes an element of degeneration when the races, even if superior, are too dissimilar.
>
> To interbreed two peoples is to change at the same time their physical and mental constitutions . . . Thus at the beginning the personality remains very irresolute and feeble, and it requires a long accumulation of hereditary traits to become established. The first effect of interbreeding between different races is to destroy the racial soul, that is to say the complex of ideas and common sentiments which is the strength of a people, and without which there can be neither a nation not a homeland . . . It is therefore right that all those peoples who have attained a high degree of civilization have carefully avoided mixing with foreigners.[7]

Lionel Groulx's novel is essentially an application of these ideas, granting the premise that French and English Canadians are too dissimilar to be successfully crossbred, to the situation in Canada. In a conversation with Lantagnac, Father Fabien says:

> Who knows if our former Canadian aristocracy did not owe its decadence to the mixture of bloods which it accepted too readily, and too often actually sought after. Certainly a psychologist would find it of great interest to observe the descendants of that class. Does it not seem to you, my friend, that there is a good deal of trouble and silly anarchy in the past of these old families? How do you explain the delirium, the madness with which the offspring of these noblemen have thrown themselves into dishonor and ruin?[8]

Frantic condemnation of mixed marriages, meaning primarily those between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians, is splashed throughout the pages of *L'Appel de la race*. Groulx speaks of the "cerebral disorder, the psychological dilution" which results from such ignoble combinations. He is careful to point out, incidentally, that the English are a "superior race" along with the French, but the true texture of his thought comes to the fore in an illuminating manner when he has Lantagnac make the following observations on his four children, to whom he is giving lessons in French:

> Lantagnac had only distantly followed the education of his sons and daughters. He knew the basic qualities of their temperaments, but little or nothing about their essential characters. Their success having always been assured by a good measure of intelligence, he had never bothered to think more about them. But now he was discovering in two of his pupils a kind of unhealthy imprecision, a disorder of the thought, an incoherence of the intellect which he did not fully grasp. It was a sort of incapacity to follow a line of reasoning to a conclusion, to concentrate diverse impressions or slightly complex ideas around a central point. It was as if they had in them two souls, two warring spirits which alternately dominated. And strange to say, this mental dualism manifested itself especially in William and Nellie, the two who were predominantly of the well defined type of the Fletchers. Whereas Wolfred and Virginia almost exclusively resembled the French race, with the fine, bronzed features of the Lantagnacs and the equilibrium of body proportions, the older daughter and younger son, in contrast, with their blond hair and pale complexions, their lanky and somewhat thread-shaped builds, strikingly resembled their mother.[9]

It does not seem to have occurred to Canon Groulx that William and Nellie were hardly the products of virgin birth, that they had as much redeeming Lantagnac blood in them as Wolfred and Virginia. He takes an almost diabolical delight in describing the younger son, William. At another point in the story he says:

> William remained always the same, with his stubborn and choleric spirit. As he grew older the Saxon traits became stronger in his face and long adolescent's body.

> The set of his forehead became more rigid, the pout of his lips more arrogant, and one nearly always saw him walking along with his neck arched and his fists half closed, like a rugby player.[10]

With regard to "Saxon traits," by the way, there is some difference of emphasis between Lionel Groulx and Susanna Moodie, as might be expected. Describing her son Donald, Mrs. Moodie says that he had been nicknamed "Cedric the Saxon; and he well suited the name, with his frank, honest disposition, and large, loving, blue eyes." As they say in French, *chacun son goût.*

In the matter of "superior races," then, it is clear that Groulx felt some races to be more superior than others. As a matter of fact, the good canon's most bitter invective is reserved for the Irish Roman Catholics, whom he accuses of serving their Anglo-Saxon masters with a "slave mind." For a historian, incidentally, Lionel Groulx was on many occasions superbly indifferent to history — no "slave mind" his. He seemed to feel so strongly about what he calls "les affinités profondes" between French Canadians and Catholicism, that one wonders if he would include the Pope as a legitimate believer.

But it will serve no good purpose to explore *L'Appel de la race* further. The book is a racist, idiosyncrasized morality play, lacking even the merits of a good description or a clever turn of phrase. Outside of a small, privately published treatise by Pierre-Paul Rioux called *L'Espoir du Canada français* and the various pamphlets written by Adrien Arcand, former leader of the former Quebec Nazi Party, there is nothing else I know of in Canadian Literature that is quite in the same category. A hint of racism occurs in Félix-Antoine Savard's *Menaud maître-draveur,* but Savard is too sentimental to be vicious.

So much, then, for the racist ideas in English-Canadian and French-Canadian Literature. If the expression of these ideas is stronger and more bitter on the French-Canadian side, the difference in degree is no doubt explained by the fact that French Canadians have long felt themselves to be fighting for survival. Susanna Moodie spoke from a position of security; Lionel Groulx had his back against the wall. It is therefore partly understandable that the attitudes of Groulx and his followers should have gone to extremes, especially when one considers that they are reactions to similar attitudes in a presumed opposing camp. Which, of course, is the ominous aspect of racist tendencies in a society of mixed ethnic groups — they inevitably produce a reaction, which inevitably results in a setback for the cause of tolerance and compatibility. Or to use a phrase which would perhaps be more meaningful for the Reverend Canon Groulx, the cause of Christian brotherhood.

THE REAL PURPOSE of this study, however, is to provide something more than a display of the dirty linen of Canadian Literature. When a nation is composed of two major cultural groups, with, as Earle Birney aptly put it, "parents unmarried and living abroad," and when each of these groups is susceptible to the very notions most certain to create misunderstanding and hatred, can a complete breakdown of relations be avoided? Assuming that we want to preserve this single nation, and I think that we have a commitment to do so, a challenge to our resources of humanity and understanding, and a chance to prove a vital principle to the world — assuming that we want to preserve the union, is there any way to solve the disease of national schizophrenia? I believe there is, and I think that certain Canadian writers have already provided the diagnosis and treatment.

But before we have a look at these writers, it is necessary to determine exactly what is meant by the terms culture and cultural identity. For clearly the major concern of French Canadians such as Lionel Groulx, and the motivating force behind Quebec separatism, is the avowed desire to preserve an established cultural identity; while for English Canadians the big problem of recent years, a problem which has been discussed so often that it is becoming a national neurosis, is to discover whether such an identity actually exists.

The famed comparative ethologist Konrad Lorenz, in his latest book, called *On Aggression*, offers an important insight into the nature of culture. In answer to his own question, "What is culture?" he says:

> A system of historically developed social norms and rites which are passed on from generation to generation because emotionally they are felt to be values. What is a value? Obviously, normal and healthy people are able to appreciate something as a high value for which to live and, if necessary, to die, for no other reason than that it was evolved in cultural ritualization and handed down to them by a revered elder. Is, then, a value only defined as the object on which our instinctive urge to preserve and defend traditional social norms has become fixated? Primarily and in the early stages of cultural development this undoubtedly was the case. The obvious advantages of loyal adherence to tradition must have exerted a considerable selection pressure. However, the greatest loyalty and obedience to culturally ritualized norms of behaviour must not be mistaken for responsible morality. Even at their best they are only functionally analogous to behaviour controlled by rational responsibility.[11]

To people like Susanna Moodie, Frances Brooke and Lionel Groulx, this simple, scientific explanation by Konrad Lorenz would be the blackest of heresies

against all that is noble, pure and praiseworthy in human experience. Yet, what Lorenz says is unquestionably, indeed startlingly true. Cultural identification is no more and no less than an emotional involvement, an infatuation if you will, with a particular set of social norms and rites. And in the majority of cases, what are thought of as values are merely the arbitrary "sweet nothings" of an ethnic love affair. It must be pointed out, however, that because cultural identification is not attended by bolts of lightning and a voice from the heavens, it is none the less a necessary condition for the average human being, and particularly for the creative writer. It is as necessary as emotional involvement with other human beings is necessary for the normal person. It provides the framework, the pattern of attitudes and approaches to life which permit the individual to begin functioning meaningfully. But as Konrad Lorenz explains, there is the danger that cultural identification will be confused with rational responsibility, that a person will hold those norms which are sanctioned by his own culture to be absolute moral principles. And because of the high emotional element involved, any attempt to re-establish a proper perspective is like trying to explain reality to a lovesick adolescent.

Taking into account these observations on the significance of culture, one must come to the following conclusion: Since the worth of any cultural identity resides in its usefulness in permitting individuals to function meaningfully, to adapt to the social and psychological realities of a particular time and place, then it is a mistake to think that a culture ought to be preserved simply because it exists. Fanatic devotion, such as that of Lionel Groulx, to any established culture for its own sake can become childish irresponsibility. Cultures must evolve with changing patterns of life. Those aspects of any culture which become obsolete, which become impediments rather than aids to the individual in his struggle to achieve a measure of success and happiness, should not be preserved. Let them enter the realm of nostalgia; let them become art forms along with Marshall McLuhan's superseded media. For when it so happens that a particular cultural mystique is prevented from evolving to fit with reality, the people who are inadvertently engulfed by that mystique will suffer undue anxiety and frustration. Lorenz describes in detail the situation of the Ute Indians in the U.S.A., for instance, whose apparatus of cultural identity has not undergone sufficient adjustment to the modern American way of life. These Indians suffer more frequently from neuroses than any other human group, says Lorenz. But even more fascinating is the fact that the Ute Indians have a rate of automobile accidents which "exceeds that of any other car-driving human group." Now anyone who has had occasion to

drive a car in Quebec Province does not have to be told that the rate of automobile accidents there is not far behind that of the Ute Indians.[12] And anyone who has read Hubert Aquin's *Prochain Episode*, or Jacques Godbout's *Le Couteau sur la table*, or any of a dozen other recent French-Canadian novels, will immediately appreciate how involvement with cultural elements which are maladjusted to reality can produce frustration and despair.

Many French Canadians, of course, have long been aware that the established ethnic culture of French Canada, with its emphasis on unwavering continuity and its isolationist tendencies, represents an obstacle to progress in a number of fields, including industrialization and education. But one does not erase an emotional involvement in a day or two, as the Lesage government found out in the last provincial election. If, however, the culture of French Canada has up to now hindered the group's adaptation to the Twentieth Century, then the culture of English Canada has been equally effective in hindering that group's adaptation to the fact of French Canada. Distinguished English-Canadian scholars are still descanting upon what was guaranteed or not guaranteed by the British North America Act, as if that mattered a damn when there are social realities to face. And the question remains — what, if anything, can we conclude about all this?

I mentioned earlier that certain works of Canadian Literature offer insight into the problem of ethnic groups and cultural identity. In particular, there are Yves Thériault's *Aaron*, and Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes*. The first of these novels, *Aaron*, does not in fact deal with relations between French and English Canadians; the story is about a Jewish boy in Montreal. It is of interest to note, moreover, that almost all the recent French-Canadian novels which discuss relations between ethnic groups have involved Jewish characters. These novels include Claire Martin's *Quand j'aurai payé ton visage*, Jacques Godbout's *Le Couteau sur la table*, Robert Goulet's *Charivari*, Claude Jasmin's *Ethel et le terroriste*, and the book which nearly won France's Prix Goncourt, Réjean Ducharme's *L'Avalée des avalés*. It is evident, however, that in each of these novels the Jewish figure operates as a symbol with which the French Canadian can identify, and that in effect the authors are more or less vicariously exploring the situation of the French-speaking Canadian in North America.

In THERIAULT's *Aaron*, three possible approaches to culture and cultural identity are outlined. First there is the position of Aaron's grandfather and guardian, Moishe, who sticks to every detail of the Orthodox Jewish

culture, ready to endure every inconvenience, refusing to adapt in any way, satisfied to remain poor and despised by many of those in the community around him. Secondly, there is the attitude adopted by Viedna, the beautiful Jewish girl whom young Aaron loved and lost. She decides that the solution to the problem of racial discrimination is simple — one becomes assimilated to another ethnic group. When Aaron meets her again after a long separation and calls her by name, she corrects him. "Je ne m'appelle plus Viedna. Je m'appelle Cécile," she says. Then she goes on to explain:

> You remember I spoke to you about it, Aaron. The only condition of survival is this — stop being Jewish. The Jew can accomplish anything, provided he is no longer Jewish. Consequently we . . . we are French, you see! My father is pulling certain strings to obtain French citizenship for us.[13]

The third position is that initially decided upon by Aaron himself. He will continue to think of himself as a Jew, he will not try to be what he is not. At the same time, he does not wish to follow in his grandfather Moishe's footsteps. He wants to abandon the isolationist aspects of Judaism and to adapt to the society in which he finds himself. Eventually, however, before throwing Aaron out of the house, Moishe manages to make him feel such a painful sense of guilt that the boy reacts desperately. At the end of the story the reader is told that Aaron has changed his name and is left to speculate what will become of him.

Of the three attitudes to cultural identity presented by Thériault, clearly the author, despite his understanding and admiration of it, is not recommending the standpoint of Moishe, for whom there is no question of adjustment to social realities. Governed by a multitude of restrictions and taboos, the leftovers of adjustment to the realities of an age more than two thousand years in the past, subjected to constant pressures and inconvience, Moishe's position invites frustration and tragedy. This point is made clear in other Canadian novels besides *Aaron*. One thinks immediately of Abraham in Adele Wiseman's gripping story *The Sacrifice*, or of the Zeyda in Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, and *Son of a Smaller Hero*, or the parallel examples of Father Beaubien and the Westmount group in Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes*. The Moishe attitude, then, is that a culture must be preserved simply because it is there. Generally, this attitude is reinforced by a great super-structure of rites, traditions and religious dogma within the culture itself, and of course, it is the prime cause and sustenance of racist philosophy.

The Moishe attitude thus coincides in essence with the position of Lionel

Groulx and the various extremists of English Canada; and when it happens that any culture is preserved unchanged beyond the point of usefulness, then the continuity must be partly attributed to the Moishe way of thinking. I say partly attributed because, as happened in the case of Aaron, excessive coercion to embrace an ideology which is too prohibitive, too far removed from actuality, can very often drive a person to total rejection of it. Or as happened with the hundreds of thousands of French Canadians who emigrated to New England, when a static and obsolescent set of values is confronted by a strong, dynamic culture, more favourable to the self-realization of the individual, the result will be complete assimilation into the new culture within two or three generations. Thus when a static culture is maintained without change, the Moishe-Groulx attitude is only partly responsible. Of greater significance is what can perhaps be called the facility for assimilation of surrounding ethnic groups. Ironic as it may seem, the English-Canadian attitude typified by Susanna Moodie, with its exclusiveness and its tendency since the days of Thomas Haliburton to shun the dynamic, has probably done more to preserve French-Canadian culture in North America than the attitude exemplified by Lionel Groulx.

Which brings us to Thériault's second approach to cultural identity, that of Viedna-Cécile. The tone of *Aaron* strongly suggests that the author does not favour Viedna-Cécile's solution. She has decided to become completely assimilated; and to do so she is prepared to deny her true identity. The first weakness in this approach is that it may not work, and Viedna-Cécile will be caught in a ethnic no-man's land. In another of his poignant short poems, A. M. Klein captures the idea precisely:

> Now we will suffer loss of memory:
> We will forget the things we must eschew.
> We will eat ham, despite our tribe's tabu,
> Ham buttered . . . and on fast days . . . publicly . . .
> Null, then, and void, the kike nativity.
> Our family albums we will hide from view.
> Ourselves, we'll do what all pretenders do,
> And like the ethnics mightily strive to be.
> Our recompense? . . . Emancipation-day!
> We will find friend where once we found but foe.
> Impugning epithets will glance astray.
> To gentile parties we will proudly go;
> And Christians, anecdoting us, will say:
> "Mr. and Mrs. Klein — the Jews, you know. . . ." [14]

The novel *Under the Ribs of Death*, by John Marlyn, provides a vivid dramatization of the same idea. Sandor Hunyadi is ashamed of his Hungarian cultural identity, and he attempts to submerge it completely. He changes his name to Alex Hunter. Eventually, however, in a scene reminiscent of Anton Chekhov, he finds himself alone staring at a beetle; he has not been accepted into the English-Canadian establishment, and he is no longer able to join even the circle of his immediate family. Noah, in Richler's *Son of a Smaller Hero*, has a similar experience.

Assimilation, evidently, is a more complicated process than one would suspect. As I intimated earlier, it can take place involuntarily when a static culture encounters a dynamic one. Yet, as Thériault, Klein, Marlyn and a number of other writers make clear, when an individual consciously sets out to become assimilated by another ethnic group, the consequences most likely will be isolation and demoralizing loss of self-respect. A person cannot simply dismiss all the habits and associations which result from emotional involvement with a culture. Moreover, the great majority of people, it seems, would never dream of attempting to do so. Assimilation is like romantic love — it cannot be charted or forced; if it is going to happen, it will take its own natural course.

Thériault's third approach to cultural identity, that which Aaron first considers adopting, is both more simple and more complex than the other two, but to my mind it is the only intelligent and legitimate approach. It is a course somewhere in between blind devotion and total rejection, and it is motivated by the normal human desire for self-realization. In effect, it is an attempt by the individual to adapt to the social realities in which he finds himself without denying his identity. But he must of necessity abandon those aspects of his ethnic culture — the taboos, the racist notions of purity and superiority, the inculcated pseudo-religious duty to protect and preserve traditions — which interfere with accommodation to a broad community of human beings.

In other words, the individual must treat culture not as an untouchable mystical force, but as a set of social norms which permit him to be himself, to be part of a special community, and at the same time to live with people who are not of his special community. His self-respect must depend upon himself and his personal achievements rather than upon identification with a culture, and once he comes to that realization he will regard other people accordingly. Reversing the decision of Jules Lantagnac in *L'Appel de la Race*, he must put his natural inclinations, his own happiness and that of his dependents, before any duty to pro-

tect a cultural mystique. For surely a culture is there to serve people rather than people to serve a culture.

In both *Barometer Rising* and *Two Solitudes*, Hugh MacLennan, the author who has probably examined the problem of Canadian cultural identities more closely than any other, provides a strong tonal endorsement for our third approach. The characters Geoffrey Wain, Marius, Athanase Tallard, Huntly McQueen and Father Beaubien are all warped one way or another by their feelings of obligation to an ethnic ideology. Each one is prevented from obeying his natural inclinations. Wain and McQueen are materially successful, but from the human point of view they are grotesques, both given to ruthlessness disguised as duty, Wain finding human contact only in the paid-for embrace of his pitiful little mistress and McQueen sharing his dream mansion on the mountain with a Persian cat and a photograph of his mother. Marius and Father Beaubien stew in their own venom, while old Tallard re-enacts a Greek tragedy. On the other hand, Wain's daughter Penny and her boyfriend Neil free themselves to adjust to life abandoning the prejudices of the old Halifax society. Yardley, Paul and Heather in *Two Solitudes* also insist upon being themselves rather than the serving vessels of a cultural ideology. And it is clear that Hugh MacLennan presents their attitude as the only acceptable approach to cultural identity in Canada.

But as illustrated in *Two Solitudes* as well as in *Aaron* and *Son of a Smaller Hero*, even for those who see culture in the proper light, there is one major obstacle to uneventful and natural implementation of the third approach — the accusation of being a traitor to one's ethnic group. Moreover, as Lionel Groulx contends in *L'Appel de la race*, once the barrier is lowered just a bit, once the exclusiveness is dropped, total assimilation is sure to follow sooner or later. My answer to Groulx is simply this: whenever there is danger of an ethnic culture disappearing, then there is something seriously wrong with it, and it is ready for the museum case and the social history textbooks. When, to use the Lorenz phrase, a set of social norms and rites are impediments rather than aids to the individual, then it is time for them to be either modified or permitted to die.

In the case of French-Canadian culture, incidentally, the influence of Groulx and his disciples notwithstanding, modification is indeed beginning to take place. From all appearances, the cultural ideology of French Canada is becoming less static, stronger and more practical. It is being put to the

test of twentieth-century reality, and the revered traditions *du bon vieux temps* — huge families, classical college education for the elite, distrust of everything foreign and especially of France, pea soup instead of chicken in the pot, the parish priest as a unique link with absolute truth — these traditions have already gone the way of the snows of yesteryear. There is now a strong possibility, indeed a probability, that French Canada, released from the duty of preserving an obsolescent status quo, will emerge with a viable, distinctive and highly dynamic new cultural identity. The phenomenon is reflected in the vigour and variety of recent literary production, in the works of Bessette, Godbout, Major, Martin, Blais, Aquin, Ducharme and a number of others, and especially in such novels as Jean Simard's *Mon Fils pourtant heureux* and Richard Joly's *Le Visage de l'attente*, where the customs of the good old days are significantly treated as subject matter for nostalgia rather than patterns for modern living.

Some of these authors, as I pointed out earlier, also dramatize the frustration and anxiety which are in large part the lingering effects of the old static culture. For the influence of the philosophy of Lionel Groulx can no doubt be more accurately calculated in automobiles wrapped around trees at a hundred miles an hour on antique roads, than in genuine French-Canadian accomplishments. But undoubtedly the most fascinating aspect of the emerging new cultural identity of French Canada is that it may well replace the old group inferiority complex by a sense of confidence, which, coupled with the right attitudes on the part of English Canadians, could lead to a highly satisfactory *modus vivendi* in Canada.

It would appear that attitudes in English-speaking Canada are also being modified. Whereas the racism of French Canada simply perpetuated the vicious circle of racist action and reaction, producing only antipathy, Quebec's current "quiet revolution" has aroused a great deal of interest and sympathy. The changes taking place in English Canada are, of course, not quite so dramatic. Having never been homogeneous in the first place, and having always been quite unavoidably affected by the culture of the United States, an awareness of which has too often led to the neurotic pointlessness of anti-Americanism, the English-speaking elements of the Canadian population are now searching for the kind of cultural distinction French Canadians have always had. And ironically enough, if there is indeed the possibility that one of the major ethnic groups of Canada is eventually going to be assimilated by the other, it could well be the new French-Canadian cultural identity which comes out on top. One need only witness the recent frantic rush among English-speaking businessmen in Quebec and else-

where for courses in French conversation, to realize that such a speculation is not entirely groundless.

Whatever might come to pass in the far distant future, however, need not concern us here. Free from stunting racist philosophy, this nation will grow in the natural way that it should, adapting to the exigencies of each successive age. Canada may always have two principal ethnic groups and a variety of other smaller groups, but what all these groups already have in common has in fact created a distinctive, all-embracing Canadian mystique, something independent of and transcending the separate ethnic identities. For as I pointed out in a previous study,[15] it can be shown that the major literary works of both English and French Canada share a common spectrum of basic themes.

The problem of ethnic relations, on the other hand, as we observed at the very beginning of this analysis, has so far never been a basic theme of Canadian Literature. And perhaps this fact is a good omen. It can be said, nevertheless, that certain Canadian writers have provided insight into the subject of ethnic co-existence. As Susanna Moodie, Lionel Groulx, John Marlyn, Hugh MacLennan, A. M. Klein and Yves Thériault each in his own way makes clear, with regard to cultural identity both fanatical devotion and total rejection are negative attitudes, tending to foster racism, hatred, frustration, isolation or needless discord. These attitudes have existed and continue to exist in Canada, but there are indications, reflected in the more recent of the works examined, that as a nation we are steadily evolving away from the limitations of Lionel Groulx and Susanna Moodie. We are beginning to comprehend the significance of the Rilke lines quoted by Hugh MacLennan in *Two Solitudes* that "Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect, and touch and greet each other." We are rightly not about to lose our separate cultural identities, but we are beginning to realize that the value of any ethnic culture in a nation such as ours can never depend upon its power to isolate people from one another, that Canadian consciousness can be a good deal more than, to use MacLennan's own phrase, "race-memories lonely in great spaces."

FOOTNOTES

[1] *Canadian Anthology*, ed. C. F. Klinck and R. E. Watters (Toronto), pp. 392-393.
[2] *Selections from Canadian Poets* (Montreal, 1864), p. 106.
[3] Dewart, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
[4] *Roughing It in the Bush* (Toronto, 1923), pp. xviii-xix.
[5] *Une Littérature qui se fait* (Montréal, 1962), p. 15.
[6] *The French-Canadian Outlook* (New York, 1946), p. 124.

[7] Cited in *L'Appel de la race* (Montréal, 1962), p. 131.
[8] Groulx, pp. 130-131.
[9] Groulx, p. 130.
[10] Groulx, p. 168.
[11] *On Aggression*, trans. Marjorie Latzke (London, 1966), p. 236.
[12] Although I have been unable to obtain exact statistics pertaining to the various regions of Canada, Insurance company officials have assured me that accident rates in Quebec, especially in the Chicoutimi area, have always been significantly higher than elsewhere.
[13] *Aaron* (Montréal, 1965), p. 143.
[14] *Canadian Anthology*, p. 383.
[15] "Twin Solitudes," *Canadian Literature*, No. 31 (Winter, 1967), pp. 5-24.

chronicle

LETTRE DE MONTREAL

Une ville internationale

Naim Kattan

GRÂCE À L'EXPO 67, Montréal fut durant six mois un centre culturel international, la capitale mondiale des arts et des lettres. Le festival mondial en fut vraiment un: orchestres symphoniques, troupes d'opéra, compagnies théâtrales se sont succédés à un rythme déchaîné. Sur le terrain même de l'Expo, spectacles, conférences, manifestations folkloriques complétaient la fête architecturale que tous les pays, ensemble, s'offraient.

De tout cela que reste-t-il? Bien sûr, le public montréalais est maintenant plus exigeant. Il sait ce que les meilleures troupes peuvent accomplir. De plus, il a pris le goût du spectacle et il est fort possible, qu'au cours des mois et des années qui viennent, ce goût se traduira par un appui beaucoup plus manifeste aux artistes du cru. Je voudrais toutefois souligner d'une manière particulière deux manifestations, moins spectaculaires sans doute, mais dont les conséquences peuvent être, à long terme, considérables: la rencontre internationale des poètes et le colloque sur le théâtre.

Depuis de nombreuses années les écrivains et les artisans du théâtre canadien vont d'une capitale à l'autre à la rencontre d'écrivains, de poètes, de metteurs en scène, de décorateurs, de techniciens du théâtre. Ce furent toujours les Canadiens qui faisaient les premiers pas, invitant parfois à Toronto, à Montréal ou à Vancouver telle ou telle personnalité, ou bien, faisant eux-mêmes le voyage pour aller la voir chez elle. Et voilà que soudain la métropole canadienne devient un pôle d'attraction. Sans se faire trop prier, des artistes et des écrivains de tous les pays

voulaient faire le voyage à la Terre des Hommes. Ainsi, Montréal méritait le dérangement. L'on voulait bien traverser l'Océan pour y venir. Les échanges avec les autres pays s'équilibrèrent ainsi. Ils s'effectuaient désormais dans les deux sens. Pour les Montréalais, et dans une plus large mesure pour l'ensemble des Canadiens, il s'agit d'un changement profond dont les répercussions psychologiques sont difficiles encore à mesurer. Ainsi, nous Canadiens nous pouvons être intéressants. Nous pouvons attirer chez-nous les autres pays, non pas à cause de notre richesse naturelle, à cause de nos étendues et nos possibilités économiques, mais en raison du dynamisme de notre culture, et cette culture prouve qu'elle est, manifestement, au diapason du monde.

Les discussions qui eurent lieu au cours de ces rencontres ne bouleversèrent pas la vie littéraire ou théâtrale d'aucun pays. Mais ce n'est là qu'un détail, fort secondaire après tout. L'important, comme c'est le cas de toutes les recontres du genre, c'est le contact personnel qui s'est établi entre Canadiens et étrangers. Il est difficile de savoir quels projets furent élaborés au cours de ces quelques jours brefs et intenses. D'ores et déjà l'on peut en apercevoir les augures. Un metteur en scène vient déjà cette année travailler pour une troupe de Montréal et une pièce sud-américaine sera présentée à l'Université Simon Fraser. Ces projets ont pris naissance à Montréal. A Montréal des poètes canadiens se sont entretenus avec des poètes américains, polonais, français, non pas comme de jeunes admirateurs réceptifs, mais comme des égaux qui ont autant à donner qu'à recevoir. Et les écrivains de tous les pays sont partis avec la conviction que le Canada existe sur le plan culturel. Certes, c'est un pays déchiré mais qui étale ses contradictions. Est-ce le moyen de les assumer et de les dépasser? L'on ne sait encore. Mais ce pays divers a un respect tel de la liberté que des écrivains venant des antipodes se sentent à l'aise et c'est ici qu'André Frénaud a fait la connaissance de Denise Levertov et que Guillevic a pu converser avec Robert Lowell. Les Canadiens étaient des participants et Montréal offraient son hospitalité.

Ainsi les Canadians peuvent être des partenaires et s'ils s'aperçoivent ainsi que leur culture est entrée dans une phase nouvelle, qu'elle atteint l'âge adulte, ils ne peuvent pas ne pas prendre acte du défi que cela leur pose. Il n s'agit plus d'être des coloniaux, des parents pauvres, des frères cadets que les aînés protègent de leur hauteur. Ils doivent désormais se défendre à armes égales. C'est le point de départ; l'on traverse la ligne du risque, mais la bataille n'est point gagnée.

Il y a un an, les écrivains canadiens étaient à l'honneur à Paris: Marie-Claire Blais remporta le Prix Médicis pour *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*; Réjean Ducharme suscita un intérêt vif et parfois équivoque; l'on a parlé de Jean Basile, d'Hubert Aquin . . . Cette année d'autres écrivains poursuivent leur carrière en France: Jacques Godbout avec *Salut Galarneau*, Jean Basile avec *Le grand Khan*. Et les Français vont connaître le poète Jacques Brault puisque les Editions Grasset publient son recueil de poèmes paru précédemment à Montréal. Les Français s'intéressent-ils aux Canadiens comme des régionalistes de la littérature française? Les considèrent-ils comme des écrivains américains de langue française? S'accordent-ils à penser qu'il existe une littérature bien définie de ce côté de l'Atlantique? Ce sont là des questions auxquelles l'on ne peut donner de réponses définitives car ce sont les oeuvres qui parlent. Et il serait hasardeux de conclure dans un sens ou dans l'autre. Ce qui est important c'est que les Canadiens français sachent que les Français tiennent compte de leurs tentatives et de leurs découvertes littéraires et artistiques. Et ce n'est plus la parure exotique dont on les affublait de force qui assure maintenant leur présence à Paris. Et l'on ne considère plus leur manque de raffinement culturel comme l'attribut de cousins aimables mais peu évolués, mais plutôt comme une caractéristique d'un groupe qui a gardé intactes les sources primitives de l'instinct.

En d'autres termes les Canadiens français introduisent dans la littérature française actuelle un courant qu'ils sont seuls à pouvoir exploiter. Ils relèvent ainsi le défi qu'a posé l'Expo 67 aux Canadiens français: faire leur entrée sur la scène mondiale tout en gardant leurs caractéristiques. Bien sûr, il ne s'agit là que de premiers pas. Les réussites ne sont pas encore suffisamment nombreuses pour que cette route que l'on commence à explorer ne soit pas semée d'embûches. Ce n'est là qu'une étape. L'étape suivante, plus ardue sans doute, permettra aux Canadiens, non seulement de prendre la mesure de leur autonomie culturelle, mais aussi d'en assurer la persistance. Les Canadiens n'auront plus besoin d'une avalisation étrangère, fut-elle française, britannique ou américaine, pour reconnaître les talents d'ici. Il faut que, pour cela, l'on atteigne suffisamment de maturité, que l'on soit sûr de son propre jugement. Une telle attitude n'a rien à voir avec le désir de protéger les écrivains et les artistes, locaux, mais de les traiter selon leurs mérites.

Cette démarche n'est point facile car l'on chemine sur un sentier bordé de deux provincialismes. D'une part, l'on ne reconnaît que les avis de l'étranger pour s'assurer que ce que l'on produit au Canada mérite l'attention. Le second pro-

vincialisme, non moins néfaste, recèle des relents de chauvinisme: l'on applique un traitement spécial aux oeuvres canadiennes. Il est normal, bien sûr, que l'on s'intéresse à ce qui exprime la réalité du pays où l'on vit. Mais, de là à ne pas exiger que cette expression ait une résonance, non pas uniquement locale, mais universelle, il y a un pas que certains esprits franchissent sans hésitation. Et c'est là encore que l'Expo 67 a fourni aux Canadiens l'occasion d'une confrontation avec le monde, car une culture n'est vivante que si elle est contestée, non pas uniquement à l'intérieur des frontières d'un pays, mais également sur le plan mondial.

GROVE'S LETTERS

I have been authorized by Mrs. Frederick Philip Grove to attempt to collect and edit the letters of her late husband, the Canadian novelist Frederick Philip Grove. I should be most grateful if any of your readers who have Grove letters in their possession would get in touch with me. I should be glad to receive copies of these letters, or the letters themselves. Any letters entrusted to me would of course be treated with the greatest care and returned to their owners once copies have been made.

I should also be glad if your readers would supply me with the names of persons who, they believe, might be in possession of Grove letters.

DESMOND PACEY,
University of New Brunswick

review articles

ACHIEVEMENT AND MONUMENT

A. W. Purdy

Poets Between the Wars. Edited by Milton Wilson. New Canadian Library (McClelland & Stewart). $2.95.

THIS BOOK IS THE THIRD in a series that has presented the work of better-known Canadian poets in large-sized chunks, in opposition to the usual practice of a few poems each from many poets. In this latest book there are five poets, and the title has the implication for me that poets were writing frantically before the inevitable war stopped their writing.

Of these five poets, Smith and Scott are associated with the beginnings of modern poetry in Canada. They collaborated in the 1920's on the *McGill Fortnightly* (the inevitable English-sounding title), with Smith becoming since then the grand panjandrum of anthologists and critics, and Scott achieving fame as lawyer and civil rights leader as well as poet.

Looking at their poems now, Smith seems to me more closely bound to the restrictions of technique than Scott. The latter has an amazing variety of themes and construction, and shifts from metrics to loose speech rhythms with practiced ease. His ability to extract snobbish quotations from the invitation sent to prospective members of the Canadian Social Register and blend them with his own sharp asides, makes an hilarious poem.

I see F. R. Scott as a nationalist poet, but also humanist in a wider sense, satirist and lyricist. His "Lakeshore" is still, after many years, a magnificent portrait of humanity. And "Laurentian Shield" is clear and explicit, a poem realizing that the perennial possibilities of Canada have always remained unfulfilled in the north. Scott has never been anything else than clear and easy to understand, a quality difficult to achieve and which certain unperceptive critics have derided. If only through the sheer variety and diversity of his poems, I think Scott will be around for a very long time.

A. J. M. Smith is, of course, a proponent of classicist diction and philosophy, as perhaps exemplified by his poem, "Like an Old Proud King". Smith's poetry, however, has moved from this ascetic stance to something more personal which surely amounts to a late blossoming. But the selection in this book does not fully indicate Smith's poetic renaissance.

E. J. Pratt, from the time of his first emergence in the 1920's, has achieved

the greatest reputation of any Canadian poet. The selection here of "The Great Feud", "Towards the Last Spike", and three shorter poems, is probably the best that could be made in keeping with space limitations. Any description of Pratt I ever read labels him as one of those grand-sounding creatures, "epic poets". He deals with large themes, man against nature, scaly breeds versus mammals, disaster and triumph on sea and land. His lines are generally marked by a heavily stressed metric beat; he avoids entirely anything personal in his own poems. In this minority view, Pratt's metric beat and reiterative polysyllabic habits have the effect of making many of his poems excruciatingly dull. Some do not share this opinion, but even apart from method I find little to interest me in an imaginary battle between the race of reptiles and the clan of mammals.

However, in Pratt's narrative poem of the C.P.R.'s construction, the aforementioned heavy beat becomes softer and not so obtrusive. One hears of Scots whose "oatmeal was in their blood," and the food bequeathed "The power to strike a bargain with a foe,/To win an argument upon a burr—" And the Canadian Shield above Lake Superior is conceived in the well-known lines:

> On the North Shore a reptile lay asleep—
> A hybrid that the myths might have conceived,
> But not delivered, a progenitor
> Of crawling, gliding things upon the earth.

Also a picture of John Macdonald getting drunk and hearing part of a contemporary song in his imagination:

> "We'll hang Riel up the Red River,
> And he'll roast in hell forever,
> We'll hang him up the River
> With a yah-yah-yah."

That fragment of song from the past retains a curious authenticity across the years.

"The Last Spike" seems to me the most readable of Pratt's poems. Certain others have brilliant and memorable passages, but remain indigestible as a whole. I think Pratt's large reputation will gradually subside until it finds its proper level, that of something more than competence, but something far less than genius.

Milton Wilson says in his note on Dorothy Livesay that she has an "imagistic and epigrammatic quality" in her earlier poems. And that in the Thirties "she added to this a new expressiveness of form and style and a new range of social and industrial material." At one time I thought that accurate and slightly forbidding description of Livesay's earlier self would apply forever, and that it was all that could be said for her. But on her return in 1963 from a teaching stint in Rhodesia, she encountered the so-called "Black Mountain" verbal and idiomatic techniques, and adopted them, with some personal variations, as her own.

In some ways Livesay was always a deeply personal poet, though her language was not particularly original in those early days. But recently a new frankness and more modern idiom have resulted from both experience and encounters with "new" techniques whose prime concern is the live "sound" of poems.

> And what fantasies do you have?
> asked the psychiatrist
> when I was running away from my husband.
>
> Fantasies? fantasies?
> Why surely (I might have told him)
> All this living
> is just that

every day dazzled
gold coins falling
through fingers.

So I emptied my purse for the doctor
See! nothing in it
but wishes.
He sent me home
to wash dishes.

A. M. Klein has written no poems since 1951, but he remains a compass point and beacon of comparison for other Canadian poets, particularly Jewish ones. Layton has learned from him, and probably Leonard Cohen has too. Klein wrote poems of tremendous "Jewishness" with an erudition and knowledge of his own tradition that is probably without equal. He used conventional metrics, but varied them in surprising ways so that monotony is rarely present in his poems. And above all, his poems contain transmissible emotions:

And those assembled at the table dream
Of small winds that an April wind doth scheme,
And cry from out the sleep assailing them:
Jerusalem, next year! Next year, Jerusalem!

This vivid Zionist emotion is one reason why I would place Klein near the top of any list of Canadian poets. It is a quality entirely absent in E. J. Pratt, whose persona seemed to remain always aloof from his poet's voice.

All the poets in this book are nearly 60 years of age or well past it. (Of course, Pratt is dead.) It is doubtful if any of them will add very much to the quality of work already written; but their total quantity of work will probably increase. None of them is great, but all are more than competent. They compare, I think, favourably with a similar group of poets from any other country — unless such a group should include one of the very few outstanding figures like Neruda or Quasimodo.

The reader is not likely to be enthralled or fascinated or carried away by these poems, but he can and should be very much interested by what has been done in the past. For that is the key: all these poets seem to me to belong a little behind the present moment, embalmed just five minutes ago. They recede while you look at them (and this is not a writing-off or dismissal). Their work is both achievement and monument. I think that none now will break from the self-imposed bonds of style, idiom and personal mentality. At least it seems unlikely, despite Livesay's recent mutations of style.

And that is not to take anything away or lessen this body of work. But in some way, fulfilment negates potential. The trails have all been blazed, the roads cut through the jungle, and one stays on the known paths.

And since this is an odd way to end a review, here's another incident that might be relevant. A few weeks ago at Kingston, Irving Layton told me he was going to the Far East, and planned to remain there for some time — in an attempt to break out and away from the paths and trends of his previous poems. After the first vital rush and the authentic un-selfconscious voice falters, such a break (not a retreat) might be the way to do it — find something somewhere that may trigger the undiscovered reality in your mind.

MAN OF THE THIRTIES

Julian Symons

GEORGE WOODCOCK, *Selected Poems.* Clarke Irwin. $3.50.

I SUPPOSE THE FIRST THING to be said about these poems is that almost all of them date back twenty years or more. Perhaps not quite all, for the dust wrapper is not correct in saying that all of the poems come from Mr. Woodcock's three previous books of verse — there are half a dozen previously uncollected, which I gather have been written in Canada. This is not just a pedantic note. The point is that as a poet Mr. Woodcock belongs to England, and to the English Thirties. The poetic style and social attitude shown here could, indeed, hardly have been nurtured in any other time. He is very much a "period" poet, a still rather neglected figure in the movement of which Auden was the head and shoulders.

To say that George Woodcock worked under the shadow of Auden is not to deny him a distinctive personal tone. His best poems fall into two groups. The first, and more powerfully imaginative, deal with an invented scene or story in realistic yet fabulous terms. "The Island", which is rightly familiar from anthologies, is one of the finest of the poems in this kind. A group of men come to an island, and find, capture and torture an inhabitant in the attempt to make him tell some secret about hidden gold. Under the torture his joints burst, fire jets from the ruptures.

> Then lay before us on the rigid rack
> Straw limbs and a horse's polished skull.
> Gulls mocked as walked away across the sea
> The man we hunted but could not keep
> or kill.

A parable is intended, but what is it? Is there a significance in the fact that the leader of the men has the name of the Antarctic explorer, Scott? The final meaning remains evasive, but the deliberate ambiguity increases rather than diminishes the effect of the vivid images and the direct narrative style. Other poems like "Gods" exploit this vein of fable, sometimes ironic, sometimes mysterious. With it goes a powerful visual sense, seen particularly in "White" and "Snow in London", which is perhaps the finest poem in the book.

The other group of poems show that sense of a doom both dreaded and desired that is the particular Thirties hallmark, together with the flatness of tone and the optimistic belief in an ultimate virtue resting in the working class that also characterized the period. A poem like "Sunday on Hampstead Heath" shows exactly what I mean. The flatness is here, quite deliberate and rooted in a distrust of histrionic gestures, but still a little dismaying:

> Here on the hilltop my friends and I sit
> down.
> They talk of prisons; the conversation
> falls
> And I say: "One evening we must drink
> at the Spaniards".

The optimism comes in a later verse which envisions the ugly and stunted creeping "towards a world more great

than the moneyed hopes of masters can ever shape". The attitude conveyed in poems like these is alien to the young who begin today in total distrust of all group merits. Today the optimism looks too easy, but for all their illusions about the working class the Thirties poets expressed the essence of their time at least as well as Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti convey theirs. Poems like "Wartime Evening in Cambridge" and "Waterloo Bridge" (and some which are not reprinted here, like "Now", the first poem in Woodcock's first collection) lose nothing by their sense of immediacy. They are tied to events at the end of the Thirties and the beginning of the Forties, yes, but a great deal of what was felt at the time, the anguish, the desire, the hope, still comes across the bridge of years. Which is saying simply that these are good poems, inspired by genuine feeling, and composed in a tradition which demanded of a poet a high degree of visual accuracy and of intelligent craftsmanship. The social realism (nothing to do with Russian social realism) which demanded that the poet should compose with his eye upon the subject, and which deeply distrusted abstractions, was in many ways a fine discipline. In the Thirties tradition George Woodcock has an honourable place, and it is a pleasure to see the best of his poems collected in a single volume.

CONTACT

Mary Jane Edwards

MICHAEL GNAROWSKI, *Contact 1952-1954. Being an Index to the Contents of Contact, a little magazine edited by Raymond Souster, together with notes on the history and the background of the periodical.* Delta Canada. N.P.

CANADIAN PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS have played an important role in the history of Canadian literature. As early as 1778, Montreal's *Gazette littéraire* published original poetry and essays by Canadian writers. A similar role has been played since then by such periodicals as the *Literary Garland,* published in Montreal from 1838 to 1851, and *Contemporary Verse,* published in Victoria from 1941 to 1953. Sometimes called "little magazines", these periodical publications have generally had a similar history: they have been the special concern of one person or one small group; they have had a small circulation and little financial support; and they have been published for a relatively short time. But despite their ephemeral and precarious existence, they usually have included the works of the most exciting writers of their time in Canada. Their policy of publishing works by Canadian writers has been particularly important for Canadian poetry, for poetry has been usually the major, sometimes the sole, staple of these little magazines.

One such periodical which appeared in Toronto in the 1950's was *Contact.* Edited by Raymond Souster, it was a

mimeographed magazine with a circulation of about 150 published in ten issues between January 1952 and March 1954. Dedicated to poetry, it published the works of Canadian poets. Thus, it was a typical Canadian periodical publication. However, it was also unusual because *Contact* endeavoured to be an international little poetry magazine as well.

Souster's editorial policy was suggested in the epigraph of the first issue of *Contact* and in a note on the title in the second issue. Quoting from Jean Paul Sartre, Souster announced in the epigraph that *Contact* was designed for poets who wished to achieve immortality "by fighting passionately in our time, by loving it passionately, and by consenting to perish entirely with it". Reminding readers of the first *Contact*, a magazine edited from 1920 to 1923 by William Carlos Williams and Robert McAlmon whose policy was "faith in the existence of native artists who are capable of having, comprehending, and recording extraordinary experience", Souster confirmed that his *Contact* was designed to provide an outlet for poets in Canada. Then, adding his own note on the title, Souster stated that *Contact*'s pages were "open, not merely to Canadian poets, but to poets everywhere" and thus defined *Contact*'s international character.

The contents of the magazine show how well Souster carried out his rather complex editorial policy. He published poems by Canadian writers like Louis Dudek and Irving Layton, older poets in the sense that they had been publishing poetry in volume form since the 1940's but newer poets in the sense that they had not received much critical attention. that they were passionately committed to contemporary life, and that they were experimenting with new forms and diction to express this commitment. He published poems by Canadian writers like Eli Mandel, Gael Turnbull, and Phyllis Webb, whose poems were not issued in a volume until 1954. He published poems by contemporary American writers like Cid Corman, Charles Olson, and Robert Creeley. He published translations of poems by contemporary European writers like Gottfried Benn, George Seferis, and Jean Cocteau. And he published reviews, articles, and notes on poets and poetry. These included Robert Creeley's "Note on Canadian Poetry" in which he analysed the influence of English diction and rhythms on Canadian poetry and decided that they "dulled" the Canadian poet's sense of place and prevented the development of a "major" poet in Canada.

The importance of *Contact* in the history of Canadian poetry stems from this combination of poetry and critical material from Canadian and non-Canadian writers. By including Canadian material, Souster provided a magazine where Canadian poets could talk about, and experiment with, new forms, diction, and content in their poetry. By including non-Canadian material, he put Canadian poets in contact with American and European poets who were also experimenting with, and talking about, poetry. And by combining Canadian, American, and European poets, and by ignoring British poets, he implied that the future of Canadian poetry was not with British poetry but with American and European poetry, an implication which did, in fact, point to a new emphasis in Canadian poetry.

Contact also served two, more practical functions. It helped to establish

Contact Press which published between 1952 and 1954 such books as *Cerberus: Poems by Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, and Raymond Souster*; *Canadian Poems 1850-1952*, edited by Louis Dudek and Irving Layton; Irving Layton's *Love the Conqueror Worm*; and *Trio: First Poems by Gael Turnbull, Phyllis Webb, Eli Mandel.* The notices which these volumes received in *Contact* helped bring attention to their authors both in Canada and in the United State and Europe. In Irving Layton's case, this attention led in 1956 to William Carlos Williams' introduction to a volume of Layton's selected poems, *The Improved Binoculars*, an introduction which resulted in Layton's critical recognition in Canada and in the United States.

Unfortunately, despite its interest and importance, *Contact* itself has received little critical attention. Furthermore, it is virtually unavailable today. Recently, however, Michael Gnarowski prepared *Contact 1952-1954: Notes on the History and Background of the Periodical and an Index*, the third in his series of Indexes to Canadian little magazines. As well as an author-title-subject index to the contents of the magazine, *Contact 1952-1954* includes a collection of material relevant to *Contact*: "Some Afterthoughts on *Contact* Magazine" by Raymond Souster; "Notes on the Background and History of *Contact* Magazine" by Michael Gnarowski; a "Select Bibliography of Articles and Readings Having Reference to *Contact* Magazine"; and a reprint of four letters written by Ezra Pound to Louis Dudek in 1951 and 1952.

In "Notes on the Background and History of *Contact* Magazine", Gnarowski tells in a carefully researched and well-documented article *Contact*'s story. The story begins in June 1951 when Raymond Souster, in a letter to Louis Dudek, first suggested the need in Canada for "a poetry mag with daring and a little less precious an attitude" than *Contemporary Verse* and *Northern Review*. It ends in February 1954 when Souster announced that the last issue of *Contact* would appear in March 1954. Gnarowski's article focusses on the influence of Louis Dudek, Cid Corman, and Robert Creeley on the editorial policy of *Contact*. And he argues that these three were involved in "a tug-and-pull situation" in which Corman and Creeley saw *Contact* as "a purely international little magazine" and Dudek "saw *Contact* not only as an international little magazine, but also as an emancipating agency which would free Canadian poetry, and be instrumental in countering the influence and authority" of John Sutherland's *Northern Review*.

From the evidence that Gnarowski presents and from *Contact* itself, there is no doubt of the validity of Gnarowski's argument. But there is also no doubt, as Gnarowski says, that Souster shaped the magazine to suit himself. Souster, for example, printed as the leading editorial in the first issue of *Contact* Louis Dudek's Polemical "Où Sont les Jeunes?", a call for young Canadian poets with imagination, concrete images, energy, and thought to write poetry which communicated "something worth saying" in a world where it was "beginning to rain bombs". However, he later ignored Dudek's suggestion that he should be allowed to "editorialize more". Similarly, he continued to publish Canadian poetry despite Cid Corman's comments that the Canadian poems which appeared in the

second issue of *Contact* were "amateurish". Thus, Souster maintained *Contact*'s dual character as a typical, although non-polemical, Canadian periodical publication and as an international, although unusually Canadian, little poetry magazine.

Since *Contact 1952-1954* with its valuable articles about, and index of, *Contact* has appeared, one hopes that the periodical itself will be reprinted. In "Afterthoughts" Souster mentions that the Island Press of Toronto plans to offer an offset reprint of *Contact*. Such a reprint would increase the usefulness of *Contact 1952-1954* and allow more readers to contact this important little magazine.

DISTANT FOREBEARS

George Woodcock

MARGARET WARD LABARGE, *Saint Louis*. Macmillan. $9.25.
MICHAEL MACKLEM, *God Have Mercy: the Life of John Fisher of Rochester*. Oberon Press. $6.25.
ROSS WILLIAM COLLINS, *Calvin and the Libertines of Geneva*. Clarke Irwin. $4.50.

CANADIAN WRITERS still do not produce many biographies of figures outside the history of their own country, and when three such books appear close together, and all concern men of religion who died more than four centuries ago (in one case almost seven centuries ago), one is tempted to wonder whether there may be in this very fact a Canadian implication. Are we beginning to reach farther back into our roots than the English eighteenth and the French seventeenth century? Are we re-asserting our links with the greater past of European civilization? Examine the figures chosen by these biographers, and an interesting pattern emerges. Margaret Ward Labarge, Canada's leading mediaeval historian, writes the life of that saintly crusader, Louis IX of France. Michael Macklem rearranges the modest known facts on John Fisher, the Bishop of Rochester who was executed at the orders of Henry VIII, and joined King Louis in the company of the Saints four hundred years later. In *Calvin and the Libertines* Donald Blackley gives its final form to a study of the famous reformer which Ross William Collins left incomplete at the time of his death.

That a Canadian historian, sister of the Mason Wade who wrote the classic history of the French Canadians, should be interested in St. Louis becomes the more comprehensible when one reflects that Louis not only lived in her chosen period in European history, but also created a pattern of religious militancy among French rulers which re-emerged at intervals until the end of the seventeenth century, and which gave much impetus to the establishment of New France. One has only to read seventeenth century documents like the Jesuit Relations and the letters of Marie de l'Incarnation to realize how close to the mediaeval world of St. Louis were so many of the people who came to Quebec

four centuries after his death. The first Canada was in fact a product of the last and only successful French crusade. The St. Lawrence might more appropriately have been named the St. Louis.

There is no need, of course, to elaborate on the appropriateness of a Canadian scholar having chosen Calvin for his subject. The wonder is that we have not produced more books on that unloveable dyspeptic, but perhaps the reason is that his heritage, transmitted through our Scottish ancestors, has even now not wholly left us. Still, too many Canadians follow Calvin in being reluctant to accept the elementary proportion that a man's life — no matter how grotesque he chooses to make it — is his own and that within it he should be allowed to act in any imaginable way that does not demonstrably harm others.

If St. Louis can be seen as the distant patron of a Quebec that is only just passing away, and Calvin as the malign genius of much that our fathers practiced and endured in Halifax and Toronto and Vancouver, it seems at first sight more difficult to fit John Fisher, that unfortunate man so tortured in mind as well as body, into the ancestral pattern. And yet is there not here something that suggests the characteristically English contribution to our history — a self-conscious rectitude, a stubborn standing out in the stream of history which has brought more than one great Canadian figure to tragic or ludicrous ruin, which has characterized whole communities like Victoria and Westmount, and which, foursquare in the way of Quebec's angers, seemed until very recently to reenact that situation which exists only in the minds of problem-weavers, the immoveable object confronting the irresistible force?

For, much as Michael Macklem tries to present a convincing picture of his subject as a gentle and appealing man killed by others for his principles, one feels a deepening conviction, as one reads the evidence, that Fisher was at least in part the victim of his own deep obstinacy. Perhaps such an obstinacy, on a more than human scale, is what provides martyrs, and perhaps that is what in the end makes martyrs repellent to ordinary men. I confess to being repelled by Fisher, as I am by St. Louis and by Calvin, not because of their beliefs, not because of their austerities, but because their righteousness was merciless not only to themselves but to others as well. Self-sacrifice is generally admirable. The sacrifice of others is always detestable, and none of these men whose biographies I am discussing had any scruples when it came to adding to the holocaust of victims to religious bigotry.

To quote only one incident in *God Have Mercy*, in 1530 a priest named Thomas Hitton, who had accepted the heresies of William Tyndale, was arrested.

> In due course he was brought before Wareham and Fisher and examined for heresy. For five days the two bishops laboured to persuade Hitton to return to the community of the faithful, but he steadfastly refused and at length, on the fifth day, they turned him over to the secular authorities. In accordance with the law, he was duly burned as a heretic at Maidstone. Fisher no doubt saw Thomas Hitton as one of those who laboured in the vineyard to despoil the people — as he himself put it in his address to the Lords — of "their auncient and catholyke faith" . . .

No doubt he did, but that cannot justify him. However, we might pass this passage over without criticizing Macklem's

presentation if we assumed that his failure to condemn Fisher was due to a desire not to judge the past by the standards of the present. But he ends his book with an appeal to compassion that overleaps Fisher's age and takes no account of his nature.

> We have learned that the last word was not spoken when this helpless man was broken on the wheel, nor when the Armada was driven from the coasts of England, nor even when the map was painted British red in latter days. For we have learned at length that no last word will be spoken as long as any man remains outside the community of history, beyond the reach of pity and love.

Apart from the fact that Fisher was not in fact executed by being "broken on the wheel" but by beheading (or is the author merely being clumsily metaphorical?) in glossing over Fisher's negative acts and concentrating on the aspect of the Christian martyr Mr. Macklem himself is taking his subject out of the "community of history" by dividing him from the age he helped to make. We are bound to ask at this point the burning question about that other "helpless man", Thomas Hitton, whom Fisher handed over for burning and whose fate Mr. Macklem passes over so lightly. How were pity and love shown to him? Hitton, standing on his principles, was the victim of Fisher's bigotry. Fisher, also standing on his principles, was the victim of Henry's policy. As victims we must pity both, but not forget that Fisher and Henry stand together as destroyers of the helpless. Fisher was killed by a merciless code he willingly used against others. It is the effort to gloss over his hero's deadly bigotry that spoils

exciting / absolute
ly superb / protean

"David Helwig is one of the most exciting poets in a long time . . . his book is absolutely superb . . . full of verbal energy. There are no poses . . . his work is marvellously controlled . . . a virtuoso performance . . . protean." (Eli Mandel and Keith Harrison, CBC Toronto).

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Macklem's book. *God Have Mercy* is eloquent special pleading; it is not objective biography.

The same is true of *Calvin and the Libertines of Geneva.* The facts that Professor Collins provides about Calvin's life are the familiar ones, and his attitude is clearly partisan, though it is an oversimplification for the blurb-writer to declare on the dust cover that

> Professor Collins saw Calvin as an essentially likeable man, husband and friend, and not the harsh "Protestant pope" of the popular imagination.

No-one can be moved to "like" the man who destroyed Servetus so mercilessly once he got him into his hands, or who so cruelly eliminated his enemies in the contest for political power in Geneva.

These incidents Professor Collins does not wholly gloss over. He gives Servetus his due as a man of prickly sincerity long ahead of his time; he tells us that his execution was "the great blot on Calvin's career". But by isolating the episode for special attention in this way he fails to perceive — or at least to admit — that such "blots", far from being exceptional, provide one of the dominant patterns of Calvin's life. Was the execution of Servetus really any worse than that of the obscure Jacques Gruet, whose principal offense was that he believed the state should not interfere in matters of conscience and who had the temerity to call Calvin "a 'great hypocrite' who wished to have himself adored and to have 'the dignity of our holy father the pope'"? Was it worse than the executions of Calvin's Libertine enemies in 1555 for having raised a riot — executions bungled by the headman so that the victims suffered agonies unintended by the court that condemned them? On this occasion, with a revolting and typical callousness, Calvin remarked:

> I am certainly persuaded that it is not without a special judgment of God that they have both undergone, apart from the verdict of the judges, a prolonged torment under the hand of the executioner.

In spite of such cruel episodes, in spite also of the puritan dictatorship in Geneva which Calvin engineered with such political skill, Professor Collins clearly prefers him to his Libertine opponents, and in demonstrating this preference he does the Libertines notable injustice. They were people of a variety of natures, and there were among them, as well as honest pioneer free-thinkers, those who loved wealth and power and had their moral frailties. But bigotry and the peculiar form of physical cruelty that accompanies it were not among their faults. They stood, in their own ways, for the freedom of personal life against the impositions of state and church, and to give them insufficient credit in order to build up the case for Calvin is to distort history.

Such criticisms cannot be brought against Margaret Wade Labarge. Her *Saint Louis* is a notable successor to her biography of Simon de Montfort, published a few years ago, and, in my view, an improvement. It fills an astonishing gap, for only one biography of St. Louis had been published in English, and that 67 years ago. In no way can *Saint Louis* be regarded as fitting into the traditions of hagiography as commonly understood. It is the Life of a king who was also a pious man, and whose piety combined with policy in determining his actions. There is the same mingling of self-mortification and cruelty to those who do not share his faith that one encounters in

Fisher, and Mrs. Labarge does not attempt to conceal or to excuse the extent to which Louis suffered from the faults of his age or the peculiar narrowness of the holy man's life as it was seen in the thirteenth century. She shows adeptly how private austerities were reconciled with Louis's conceptions of a king's rights and duties, so that the royal Saint was also an expert politician who carefully built up his power at the expense of his barons, and who saw the crown of the religious life in terms of the knightly codes of ritualized violence that characterized the warrior caste to which he belonged; the highest homage he felt capable of giving to God resulted in the grandiose and expensive follies of his crusades.

Besides creating a portrait in the round of this extraordinary man who was one of the most important rulers of mediaeval Europe, Mrs. Labarge has constructed the picture of an age that could build — as well as the grimly utilitarian military installations of the crusade port of Aigues Mortes, which still stand among the dismal salt lagoons of the Camargue — that Sainte Chapelle which also survives as a monument to all that was admirable in the mediaeval world. Within its crystalline felicities one feels a gratitude to St. Louis which few kings inspire at such a distance or at all, yet his reign, like the lives of Balzac's courtesans, had its miseries as well as its splendours. Mrs. Labarge presents them all.

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CANADIANA ACCUMULATES

An Editorial Michelin

Centennial Year and the months that have followed its end have deposited a vast jetsam of books on the Canadian past and present, which pile our editorial desk like a Pacific coast after a high storm. Most of them are not, strictly, literature, though some have literary merits, but they have too much to do with the world which the Canadian poet and novelist and literary critic interpret to be entirely ignored. Last year, trying to make our way in the flood, we published a potted survey of such books to mid-Centennial ("Centennial Tide", *Canadian Literature* 33). Now there are too many even for that kind of treatment, so we have taken a leaf out of the Michelin guide, graded our piles of books by the stars, and gone one better than Michelin by eliminating the non-books and sheer bad books that scored One Star and Two Stars. Those that remain, we consider, have enough merit to have made them worth writing, and publishing; that there are so many of them which are in some way worth recommending suggests that, if the Centennial did nothing else, it did foster the production of a fair number of useful books that otherwise might never have seen print.

***** *The Polar Passion* by Farley Mowat (McClelland & Stewart, $12.95). A fascinating anthology of the narratives of men who, from the beginning of European exploration, sought the North Pole. Spectacular contemporary illustrations.

***** *The Opening of the Canadian West* by Douglas Hill (William Heinemann, $8.50). An excellent, highly readable and ably condensed account of a complex and fascinating period of Canadian history. The best yet in its field.

***** *The French Canadians, 1760-1967* by Mason Wade (Macmillan, 2 volumes, $8.95 each). Another best. Wade's book, for years out of print, is the most copious and authoritative account of French-Canadian history and culture in English and the present edition brings it completely up to date. An indispensable background volume for the understanding of Quebec today.

***** *Canada: Europe's Last Chance* by Claude Julien (Macmillan, $6.50). A French journalist considers Canada today, and argues Canadian survival is essential to save Europe from American domination. An antidote to the pessimism of those who see Canada possessing no function in the contemporary world.

***** *This was Expo* by Robert Fulford (McClelland & Stewart, $12.50). Probably the best account we shall have of a strange interlude that may have become as much a landmark in our political as in our cultural history. Fulford not only describes brilliantly; he also draws eminently sound solutions. Profusely illustrated.

***** *Word from New France, the Selected Letters of Marie de l'Incarnation,* translated and edited by Joyce Marshall (Oxford, $6.50). Letters of one of the great personalities of seventeenth-century Quebec, which reveal vividly the motivations of the first French in Canada, and their response to the barbaric world they entered.

***** *Attack on Quebec* by Harrison Bird (Oxford, $6.75). The most recent of Bird's excellent series of books on hostilities on the Canadian-American border. History in the school of Parkman, vivid, human, carefully studied and constructed.

***** *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871* by J. Mackay Hitsman. Account of Canadian

defence policy from the Conquest to the withdrawal of the British garrison. Detailed, lucid, independent in its conclusions. A good successor to Hitsman's *The Incredible War of 1812.*

**** *Canada: A Geographical Interpretation* edited by John Warkentin ($12.95). The centennial project of the Canadian Association of Geographers, a massive volume of nineteen detailed essays on Canadian regions and themes. An admirable presentation of the physical background, and a very useful source of information.

**** *Confederation at the Crossroads: The Canadian Constitution* by E. Russell Hopkins. (McClelland & Stewart, $22.50). A lucid and well-constructed account, by a parliamentary counsel, of the evolution of the Canadian constitution, its working and the problems that presently assail it. Absurdly priced, though, for a 400-page book with no illustrations!

**** *Canada's North* by R. A. J. Phillips (Macmillan, $7.95). Sound, all-round survey of our Arctic and sub-Arctic regions, mingling geography and anthropology, natural history and anecdote; interesting out-of-the-way facts; an intelligent look at future needs.

**** *Frozen Ships* by Johan Miertsching (Macmillan, $6.50). First published version, edited by L. H. Neatby, of the diary of a German Moravian missionary who spent four frozen-in winters, 1850 to 1854, on an Arctic expedition in search of Franklin. Naive and moving account by a likeable man of a most unlikeable experience.

**** *The Colour of Canada* by Hugh MacLennan, *Canada North* by Farley Mowat, *Historic Headlines*, edited by Pierre Berton (McClelland & Stewart, $4.95 each). Probably best volumes to date in Canadian Illustrated Library Series, whose standard to now is extremely uneven. MacLennan writes with a slightly hazy, nostalgic style that suits an anthology of romantically chosen Canadian scenes; Farley Mowat tells with appropriate vigour and condensation the story behind the white man's penetration of the north, well illustrated with prints and photographs; Pierre Berton assembles a group of literate journalists who write, with varying eloquence, on sensational Canadian episodes.

**** *The Big Ship* by Henry A. Larsen (McClelland & Stewart, $7.50). Posthumous autobiography of the last great Arctic explorer, who took the *St. Roch* through the North-west Passage.

**** *Saskatchewan* by Edward McCourt (Macmillan, $6.50). An excellent roving account of the most typical of the prairie provinces, and an eye-opening experience to those who have merely darted through what they consider an endless monotony on the Trans-Canada Highway. Variety, history, atmosphere.

**** *Contemporary Canada*, edited by R. H. Leach (University of Toronto Press, $10.75). Twelve scholars, eleven of them Canadian, writing under the auspices of Duke University's Commonwealth Studies Centre, discuss Canada's character and problems. Some bludgeon one with jargon; others write with clarity and brilliance, and the book is packed with sound information.

**** *Changing Perspectives in Canadian History*, edited by Kenneth A. MacKirdy, Vyes F. Zoltvany, John S. Moir (FitzHenry & Whiteside, $10.95). Another useful, American-sponsored handbook (this time by Notre Dame). Copious extracts from contemporary documents and later historians are used to document points of view on key events in Canadian history.

*** *Newfoundland: Island into Province* by St. John Chadwick (Cambridge University Press). Needed, knowledgeable and not-too-dry account of constitutional history of Newfoundland from anarchic beginnings to Smallwood's present.

*** *The Newfoundland Journal of Aaron Thomas, 1794*, edited by Jean M. Murray (Longmans, $8.50). An eighteenth-century sailor's account of Newfoundland. Tall tales and true ones.

*** *Canada and the American Revolution, 1774-1783* by Gustave Lanctot (Clarke Irwin, $6.75). Mainly a study of changing attitudes of *canadiens* to both Americans and British during the War of Independence.

*** *Yankees at Louisburg* by G. A. Rawlyk, (University of Maine, $2.50 U.S.). A well-organized account of the siege and capture of the fort of Louisburg by New England militia in 1745.

*** *Community in Crisis* by Richard Jones (McClelland & Stewart, $5.00). A sympathetic Anglophone puts the Francophone case. Well written of its kind.

*** *My Country, Canada or Quebec?* by Solange Chaput Rolland (Macmillan, $4.50). Narrative of a French-Canadian journalist's trip, seeking acceptance, through English Canada. Madame Rolland wears her heart on her sleeve, and sometimes uses it as a weapon

*** *Canadian Annual Review, 1966* (University of Toronto Press, $25.00). The summary of a year's events, useful as ever in public affairs, but inexplicably omitting the customary chapter on literature, though there are two chapters on Canadian drama, so that playwrights appear bilingual and poets dumb.

*** *An Independent Foreign Policy for Canada,* edited by Stephen Clarkson (McClelland & Stewart, $4.95). A timely collection of views on our foreign policy and where it should go.

*** *So Little for the Mind* by Hilda Neatby (Clarke Irwin, $2.95). Paperback reprint, with new introduction, of a famous denunciation of Canadian educational approaches. Alas, it is still almost as pertinent as when it appeared fifteen years ago.

*** *Confederation 1867; Riel; Canada Votes, 1791-1891; Dieppe 1942; 1837: Mackenzie;* (Clarke Irwin, $2.50 each). Canadian Jackdaws: draw-your-own-conclusion kits, each album containing contemporary prints or photographs, maps, facsimile posters, newspapers, relating to its event, with concise historical summaries. As well as the facts of history, they bring its ghostly touch.

*** *Approaches to Canadian History,* edited by Carl Berger ($1.50), *Upper Canadian Politics in the 1850's,* edited by Craig Brown ($1.50), *Confederation,* edited by Ramsay Cook ($1.95), *Politics of Discontent,* edited by Ramsay Cook ($1.50). First volumes in the University of Toronto Press's useful Canadian Historical Reprints series, consisting of important essays rescued from the back numbers of historical journals.

*** *The Nation Makers* by Joseph Schull (Macmillan, $3.95). A light, summary account of events leading to Confederation and the men who made it. Conciseness rather than originality is its virtue.

*** *The Assassination of D'Arcy McGee* by T. P. Slattery (Doubleday, $7.95). A mistitled book. It is really a Life of McGee, with only the briefest account of the event that made him Confederation's martyr. A further volume, on the assassin's trial, is to contain what we are led to expect in this book.

*** *The Gunners of Canada* by G. W. L. Nicholson (McClelland & Stewart, $12.50). An account of artillery in Canada up to 1919. Important as a pioneer book in its field, but liable to get bogged down in detail like gun wheels in mud.

*** *Ideas in Exile: A History of Canadian Invention* by J. J. Brown (McClelland & Stewart, $15,000). Fascinating in its early chapters, dealing with Canadian pioneer technology, but somewhat axe-grinding when the author reaches modern times. The price leaves one reflecting that an invention missed by Canadians was the cheap book.

*** *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean* by William Broughton (General Publishing, $23.00). A handsomely produced facsimile edition of the narrative of a famous voyager who touched on Pacific Canada in the 1790's.

*** *Brant County: A History, 1784-1945* by C. M. Johnston (Oxford, $4.50). Good local history, keeping minor details in check, and describing important trends and personalities with appropriate conciseness. The slight rustic pomposity is curiously fitting to the subject.

G.W.

books in review

UNIT STRUCTURES

LIONEL KEARNS, *Pointing*. Ryerson. $3.95.

IN A LETTER IN an early issue of *Tish* (no. 11, July 1962), Lionel Kearns wrote: "Prehension and articulation, the *form*ulation of speech, are one and the same act... The poem's linguistic function can be called communication, but its musical function is evocation. And this musical-evocative characteristic is most important, because it is *the* distinguishing feature of poetry."

Those early issues of *Tish* were not popular among Eastern Canadian poets, critics, and especially reviewers, who looked down on the Tish Coast movement and Kearns in particular, because they still felt that they had to protect the lyric ignorance which was the established stance from which to compose Canadian poetry. They were scared off and into unqualified mockery, by any signs of study and knowledge of the makings of speech and the poet voice.

Kearns has a large talent, firmly based in any tradition we have from modern Canadian poetry, but he is also a student, a craftsman, the like of which is seldom seen here. He is by profession a linguist, by impulse a poet.

These are early Kearns poems for the most part, his collected short-takes. There are other books soon to come out, in which he presents the longer forms and social addresses. But here we have the clean short lines (not lines, really, but phonemic clauses), concrete nouns, Japanese-like clarity and resonances, as in one poem where he re-enacts the sound of an axe heard across a Kootenay lake:

Each
stroke
distinct

Echoing
once
in the distance

This poem, like many of them, shows a concern with the poetic act, the poet looking for his lyric base before singing on any world stage.

Fortunately that is not the sole "subject matter" of the book. The scenes include B.C. mountains, Mexican towns, and Vancouver streets. Two people who show up consistently as thematic personages in the poems are the poet's father, recently gone, and Jesus, as the man mistrusted and mistreated and finally misused by hurried and unthinking men. He is seen as hounded by the Shrine circus, lonely on his tree, getting hung up for love.

For these men, and for others, there is a sense of compassion makes itself felt strongly throughout the book, compassion for old and poor men, suicided women, dead animals. And there is also a curious laconic sense that goes with it, something that makes itself felt in images almost surreal, but presented in a candid voice. Kearns is, after all, the unusual successfully ironic poet in the country, naive-macabre where Canadian poets have so far been only successfully naive or successfully macabre.

This time in the darkness
a twelve-foot pleasure-launch
sleek and gleaming white

The crew (both male
and female) in bikinis

And in tow
two water-skiers
doing acrobatics

At the back of the boat
instead of an outboard-engine

A man
has been bolted into place

He kicks his feet
in frantic propulsion

His arms are fastened
to the steering cables

Blood trickles
into the water

His neck
Seems broken too

But now
there is scarcely any noise

For the boat
is moving faster
than the speed of sound.

GEORGE BOWERING

SUBVERSIVE LIGHT

Nevertheless These Eyes by Roy Kiyooka. The Coach House Press. $2.50.
One / Eye / Love by Victor Coleman. The Coach House Press. $2.50.

THE WORD common to both these titles is their authors' ruling metaphor: *eyes*, not only as the instrument for seeing, but as the anguished need to see, to apprehend that light that Victor Coleman defines as necessarily subversive. Both poets have conceived their books as journeys towards such light, to be read as unities, rather than interim collections of poems whose only relationship is that they were written by one man during a certain period.

Both poets are also hungry, and that gives a sharp edge to their vision. But Roy Kiyooka is far less omnivorous than Coleman; you picture him as a decidedly thin, ascetic figure, who chooses with great fastidiousness what will make his meal. In *Nevertheless These Eyes* he begins by trying to understand the contradictions inherent in ever seeing at all

my eyes my eyes, are they
only a prism a plaything for
dreamers with idle hands?
poised in mid-air my hand
remembers yesterday's colours
and tomorrow's too

As a painter concerned with another form of seeing, Kiyooka struggles with the failure of any beautiful surface to realize the complexity of human feeling. In the first part of his book he expounds this theme almost exclusively through the imagery of faces reflected in mirrors: the distorting mirrors of love and memory.

Who
among you
can say
what mirror
held
her image
most perfectly?

But the mirror-image metaphor wears thin in several of the poems. Sometimes Kiyooka finds no very original use for it but arbitrarily sticks by it any way, instead of moving on to something fresh. He finally escapes this restriction in the book's second part, exploring his ambivalences more concretely and under a greater variety of terms: the beauty of "ugliness", the deathliness of art, "angels and dirt". It is as if the poet is beginning to fulfil his own instructions from part one, where he wrote "the task / is to paint her / in a thousand guises". But these poems, varied in execution as they

are, adopt a tiresomely didactic tone, and it is only in the third and final part that Kiyooka really frees himself from rehearsed conclusions. In the one long poem that makes up this section, he regains the ability to surprise with a swift grace of rhythm and line that distinguished his earlier book, *Kyoto Airs*. Moving spontaneously through a series of lyrical impulses, he sustains so lightly in these lines the burden of the rest of the book:

> I am
> waiting
> for what —
> ever pleasure
> Love. Go
> then
> in quest of a gleam
> in an eye,
> phosphorescence
> in a transparent skull.

Victor Coleman in *One/Eye/Love* also writes about mirror images. But instead of simply contemplating them, he smashes them and draws the blood of poetry with the fragments.

> The dream saw the suicide
> then, the wrist or the jugular
> cut thru with pieces of
> the shattered whole image.
>
> The dream saw the blood there
> pucker up from veins,
> fall over the wrist to find
> its own image.

To divine his own image, Coleman juxtaposes poetic fragments of very individual natures. These fragments can be considered as the poems within the book, as the numbered sections within a poem, the stanzas within a section, and sometimes even the lines within a stanza; that is how resourceful a poet he is, and how dense he has made the texture of his verse. Each of the fragments has its separate tone, rhythm and colour, so that the interplay among them achieves a swirling, self-transforming motion, like the fine accompanying drawings by Bob Snyder. Coleman's own phrase for it (while speaking of "lucidity") is that the fragments "concuss one another into speech".

All this might amount to little more than clever word games, as admittedly some of Coleman's previous work has been, were he not so ready to risk a great deal of self-revelation in these poems. In *One/Eye/Love* Victor Coleman ceases to be one of the new academics of North American poetry, satisfied with exemplifying the Black Mountain poetics; he achieves an individual vision in an individual way and comes very close to achieving Lawrence's ideal of making a book out of everything you are at the moment of composition.

Writing in a variety of senses of broken communication, burnt-out love and mutual exploitation by lovers, nations and races, he can be painfully detached in analysis or painfully intimate in sadness, moving from the joylessly cerebral perception of sex in "Cunnilingus" to the affecting simplicity of these lines:

> It is good to hear your voice once more
> in this poem; good to see the real color
> of your hair & eyes here;
> good to hear the breath fill up
> your wasted breasts although they speak
> of not wanting me.

But more often Coleman moves on a delicate balance of tensions between these extremes of mind and heart: "the eye sees / where mind's heart's trod". His poetic line and his line of thought are both constantly interesting, because the rhythm of both is constantly capable of surprise. He may begin metaphysically,

but is ready to get physical at any time ("shitty diapers I can't bear to touch"). Similarly, he achieves great power through a fusion of public and private realities:

> & a flag raised
> on Iwo Jima or Seoul or Da Nang or
> in The Dominican Republic
> is not worth a stiff prick
> to the man who raises it

It is such resilience of mind and heart that is most striking about *One/Eye/Love*. Combined with Coleman's ability to write *dramatic* verse, the absence of which in *New Wave Canada* caused Ralph Gustafson to lament so sadly, it produces an undeniably rich and original book of poetry.

ROY MAC SKIMMING

POEMS FROM ALL SEASONS

HOWARD SERGEANT, ed., *Commonwealth Poems of Today*. John Murray.

No ANTHOLOGY ever assembled ever satisfied its readers — perhaps not even its compiler, whose first choice of poems will often not coincide with what the copyright holders allow him to use. Non-literary matters like politics also complicate the issue. Howard Sergeant notes some of these things in the introduction to his *Commonwealth Poems of Today*; we accept his apology for the omission of some poets [omitted: P. K. Page, Phyllis Webb, Wong Phui Nam, R. A. K. Mason, A. R. D. Fairburn, etc.], for the many who are represented make this the most usable Commonwealth anthology to date, even if the "ideal" one remains to be assembled. His limitation of the poems to those in English is understandable, though the few translations he includes make his policy a little inconsistent. His method of contending with the South African question, moreover, is, though somewhat clumsy, all that is politically allowed him. "South Africans Within the Commonwealth" includes writers of the quality of William Plomer who are living in Britain, but we also know about younger South Africans like Sydney Clouts, whose excellent work we would (perhaps inconveniently) also like to see represented.

Mr. Sergeant's book is full of lyric poetry, but all this means is that narrative writers — E. J. Pratt, Roy Campbell — have been left out. It is a twentieth-century book, with a concentration on recent writers. It is artistically a highly inconsistent book, but this is to be expected when poets are chosen because they are "representative" rather than "good". Yet there are good poems here. Some of them are largely unknown in Canada, like the work of the Malaysian poet, Goh Poh Seng. Undoubtedly much of the Canadian work is unknown elsewhere, equally unjustifiably. Poems by Atwood, Avison, MacEwen, Birney, Layton, Cohen and Newlove are excellent. The list *seems* comprehensive: but how much use is an anthology that represents a poet by generally one and certainly (Souster being the sweepstake winner) a maximum of four poems? It could encourage close reading of given texts, but all too often a book like this simply lends itself to the construction of mammoth overgeneralizations. Herewith some of them:

1. The opening section (Australian verse) is interminable because it's bad and bad because it's wordy, but it is

offset by the lyrics of Randolph Stow and Judith Wright.

2. It is remarkable how few really good poets there are today in the British Isles — Ted Hughes, Philip Larkin, Norman MacCaig maybe — and how many seem so incapable of escaping the past, of using details, and of letting their poems create their own forms. Too many are artificial and too obviously so.
3. Restraint and precision characterize much recent Indian writing. The poems build philosophies out of perspectives; landscapes viewed from various angles become images for states of mind. Singhalese and Rhodesian poems present interesting contrasts, for their value lies in their evocation of character, which in turn involves us in trying to understand human complexity.
4. There is an immense variety of outlook in the African countries represented here — Gambia, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia — and it would be disservice to their writers to class them as one group. The wry humour, the insistence on human dignity, the use of drum rhythms, myth, and metaphors of conflict, camouflage, and metamorphosis all take varying forms. One interesting difference is that between Ghanaian visions of a hopeful future (Kwesi Brew, George Awoonor-Williams) and Nigerian visions of sadness (J. P. Clark, Christopher Okigbo, Gabriel Okara) — perhaps reflecting the societies themselves?
5. New Zealand poetry is better than Australian poetry — witness Allen Curnow, Kendrick Smithyman — but extraordinarily introspective, and partly for this reason bears the closest affinity with Canadian writing.
6. Pakistani poetry shows substantial talent — particularly interesting because it is so recent. The best selection is a recent one: Shahid Hosain's anthology of six poets, *First Voices* (Oxford, 1965).
7. Much liveliness pervades West Indian literature, but there are more good novelists than good poets.

When Derek Walcott speaks of his "sense of season", however, he brings us back to one of the pervading themes of the entire anthology: the relationship between man and his environment. Awoonor-Williams speaks of the vultures coming "in the season of burning feet"; Irving Layton notes "how unseasonably / leaf and blossom uncurl / and living things arrange their death"; Ted Hughes writes that "The sun is behind me. / Nothing has changed since I began. / My eye has permitted no change." And Allan Curnow writes: "the eye scans risky horizons of its own / In unsettled weather, and murmurs of the drowned / Haunt their familiar beaches. . . ." The landscape begins as an external reality, but it ends by being an internal one. Time has the power to recreate landscape; landscape and time together influence man. Possibly nowhere is man's complex response to these influences shown more clearly than in such an anthology as Mr. Sergeant's, where the material allows a comparative study of literature from every season and from all parts of the world.

W. H. NEW

THE TOTAL I

P. K. PAGE, *Cry Ararat*. McClelland & Stewart. $4.95.

EVERY TEN YEARS or so Canadian readers are offered a book of poetry by P. K. Page. *Cry Ararat*, a collection of poems new and selected, is the offering for the decade since 1954. By reasonable calculations, the book is at least three years overdue. The wait, however, has been worthwhile, for *Cry Ararat* is a well-edited, highly integrated book. It brings together P. K. Page as a poet and a visual artist, creating for herself a new world in which to function.

Of the seventeen new poems featured in *Cry Ararat*, the eight which form the section, "Landscape with Serifs", show the direction that Miss Page, in recent years, has taken. It is a section in which the eye of the artist and the ear of the poet are particularly evident, and in which landscapes of foreign countries dominate. The poem, "Bark Drawing", for example, is set in Australia. Miss Page's artist's eye, looking at a bark drawing, sees men as "string thin" and fish as "fine-boned as a comb." Both are hieroglyphs, part of "an alphabet the eye/ lifts from the air", that the poet must learn to sound. Miss Page listens and from the landscape represented by the drawing comes an intricate pattern of sound, sound that she records in the latter half of the poem. Only when the eye and the ear come together, "two senses/ threaded through/ a knuckled bone," as they do in this poem, can the full power of P. K. Page's poetry be realized.

Image and sound merge in most of the new poems in *Cry Ararat*. In "Cook's Mountains", where the sight of Australia's Glass House Mountains silvers the poet's tongue with "paradox and metaphor", with the power to transform the world with words, the scene is described both visually and auditorily:

> Like mounds of mica,
> hive-shaped hothouses,
> mountains of mirror glimmering
> they form
> in diamond panes behind the tree ferns of
> the dark imagination.

In this poem, sound quite appropriately captures the wonder of the poet's vision as she matches the "shape and name" of the mountains to her perception of them.

The main weakness in the poetry of P. K. Page, if there is any, is the tendency to be carried away by sound patterns or to have unusual imagery obscure the meaning of a poem. Miss Page is aware of this. In the poem, "After Rain", she says:

> And choir me too to keep my heart a size
> larger than seeing, unseduced by each
> bright glimpse of beauty striking like a bell,
> so that the whole may toll,
> its meaning shine
> clear of the myriad images that still —
> do what I will — encumber its pure line.

It is precisely these tendencies about which she speaks in her title poem "Cry Ararat":

> A single leaf can block a mountainside.

Yet, the mastery of intricate patterns of sound and the use of unusual imagery are the characteristics that distinguish her poetry. Continuing the metaphor of the leaf from the poem, she proclaims:

> all Ararat be conjured by a leaf.

P. K. Page can do no more than conjure a world by using the techniques that

she knows. "Cry Ararat" is a statement of those techniques. It is also a testimony to them. It is in this poem that Miss Page reveals her process as a poet and as an artist:

> Do not reach to touch it
> nor labour to hear.
> Return to your hand
> the sense of the hand;
> return to your ear
> the sense of the ear.

Cry Ararat contains the best of P. K. Page's work. The eye and ear that have given us the poems, and the hand that has given us the line drawings which illustrate them, are extremely fine.

DAVID N. ROBINSON

WAITING FOR THE END

JIM BROWN, *If There are Any Noahs,* Very Stone House.

HARRY HOWITH, *Total War.* Contact Press.

JOHN NEWLOVE, *What They Say.* Weedflower Press.

BROWN: "it doesn't make a fuck of a lot / of difference / how your poems get published"; Howith: "Reader, my poems are / written to move you. / Are you moved?" Newlove: "But what if I refuse to let a category / you can usurp trickle / out of a poem . . ."; Pound: "I believe in every one writing poetry who wants to; most do . . . but I do not believe in every man . . . printing his sin."

If publication is really the auction of the poet's mind, the bids for this trio are going to be low. The average life of most of these poems is 10 minutes; after that, euthanasia for ¾ of each collection, and a harvest of the wheat among the chaff, for the remainder. He who would save his poetry must first lose it.

First, Jim Brown's corpus. After correcting the spelling of Radison and Grossiellieurs, Marvel, and recepticle, the reader is confronted with an apocalyptic viewpoint stressing the necessity for "some eternal submarines", à la *On the Beach.* Smile you may, but Jacques Piccard, son of the inventor of the bathyscaphe, also doubts that mankind will last out the century, and plans immediately to submerge himself in a 4-6 week trial underwater free drift from Florida to Nova Scotia. As for Brown, "we will lie / in suspended animation / under the polar ice / until the questions / have been solved." His Book of Revelations, guilt-edged, for "Guilt is a perfect disease", is at times impressively chameleonic. "Chasing Daphne" is a commendable variation on Pound's *Mauberley,* out of Gautier. "Poem for my father" applies an *Old Man and the Sea* verbal clarity to an Izaak Walton-like vignette. "A tree person" updates Dante's woods-men and Whitman's leaves, while "Project" makes phrase-waves out of lines like "Days crash inward like blown eggs". Cut the early Cohen- narcissistic hair-saving poems, and immature fragments, still embryonic still-born inclusions, and you have a precious handful, worthy of entering two by two into that eternal submarine.

"The Secret Life of Hank Hemingwith" is indicative of Howith's aversion to "pisspot poetry" in favour of more stridently moving chamber music. As "a careerist in pee-are", he regards old-fashioned poetry as "an anachronism, like spats". Remedy — a pastiche of pun-is-mightier-than-the-word poems; "it was

the Holland Tunnel that got her in dutch"; whore-and-piece parodies, "the hero took twice as many women as he'd ever met", political potshots, surprisingly few "advertisements for myself", and globaloney anecdotal one-liners ranging from the "Viet King Cong", to a potato blurb by the Duchess of Idaho, to Broken Bottle, Labrador. McLuhanesque in his interpretation of war in this global village as an analogue of experimentation, his Howithzers scatter shrapnel at a wide variety of targets. Among his best poems are "In This False Dawn", an execution resonant of Orwell's "A Hanging", "Song For An Early Autumn", the book's last poem and one of the few that reveals the serious face of the jester, "Break" with the silences of separation unchanged since Meredith's "Modern Love", and "A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance" which contains his neo-Virgilian criteria for poetry: "Of total war, and of the dance / of humid seasons, / of love and loss I sing. / And they are everything."

Newlove's fifteen poems centre predominantly upon garbage, disease, civilization, sadness and death with an apocalyptic despair closer to hand than Brown's. Newlove's eyes see a "redone redundant civilization" as befitting a student of urbophrenics, the science of sick cities. As in his previous poetry, he allows phrase and fragment to multiply as jigsaw pieces to create a poem, often a confessional explanation as in "By Main Weight" where "that which appears is never / just what is want". Unlike Brown and Howith, he knows when "there's no getting near / the centre tonight", the difference between a hit and a near hit. He does strike the bull's-eye in "The Witch", evoking "the infinite one a.m. of the mind's backwater /where solid objects melt, brain's ice melts & / one small stick floats in the liquid to poke out poems." The title-poem delineates the frustration caused by the poet's inability to derive an inner sustenance from his life, "no matter / what they say." Using McLuhan's mélange of Wordsworth and Riesman, "I wandered lonely as a crowd", he sees himself as "innocent garbage" in a weird and horrific nightmare sequence. The remaining poems fall short of his best.

Surprise being the least durable of aesthetic responses, all three poets fail at times to transmute the personal into the poetical. To quote Frank Kermode, "Novelty becomes the inflation of triviality; the apocalypse is signalled by trivial games, mostly not original". The villain? Question the pseudo-poet, the seductive typewriter which, according to McLuhan, "fuses composition and publication, causing an entirely new attitude to the written and printed word." When all the poet can present are his privates, it's time to throw these minnows back for creative processing.

TONY KILGALLIN

BANKS AND DRIFTS

BERNARD EPPS, *Pilgarlic the Death.* Macmillan. $4.95.

AT ONE POINT in Mr. Epps' novel, its lively if somewhat hackneyed hero, Dougal the School, buys a book. He likes it. It seems to him superior to "windy Victorian treatises in praise of virtue and windier modern novels in praise of God knows what." A neat way of putting it but double-edged and dangerous when

it appears in a new novel ambitious to be taken as in praise of "Life".

> All is one. The life-force is the miracle, the common-or-garden miracle the only miracle. . . . One thing is as good as another. Praise the Lord. . . . Birth is a miracle. Life is a fascinating mystery. Death is of no consequence — a little bald-headed twirp with knobby knees and a runny nose. Pilgarlic. [Thus Dougal the School in his diary.]

As with so many novels in praise of "life" (from Joyce through Lawrence, Sherwood Anderson, to Steinbeck and John P. Donleavy — and possibly Kerouac — the names that suggest themselves to me as Mr. Epps' literary ancestors) the logic of fictional event and action rather contradicts than confirms the extended Whitmanesque meditations on Life, Death, the tyranny of "things" and so on.

Dougal the School (-master, that is, in the small Quebec village of Stormaway) detests his wife, drinks a lot, teaches school, visits Milly-on-the-Hill (the village whore with heart of gold), hates T.V. and modern conveniences, and, after a scene of joyful destruction in which he punches his wife, and wrecks his home "climbs . . . (naked and new as a babe) . . . through deep woods to the untouched Crown land on the highest and roughest country where beaver and deer live and hide. Alone with the hills and the wind, alone with the trees and the racing clouds, alone with his rushing blood and the weathers of his mind, he can listen for poems and nothing interferes."

As he wanders up and away he is passed by Pilgarlic the Death, the preacher, going down, predictably and symbolically towards Stormaway, its lights "winking in the cup of the hills like a handful of fallen stars". Need one say more? Dougal drops out; of Death into Life says Mr. Epps, insistently; out of the only life there is into the void is what the events of the novel tell.

It's unfortunate that Mr. Epps should be so intoxicated by this stuff. It inflates (as the examples suggest) while debasing his style; it leads to images at which the senses boggle and the mind faints. It makes parts of his novel (particularly its prologue and first chapter) ridiculously pretentious and smothers others that show real energy, control and fictional talent.

One such part involves the story of Alan the pigman's wife. Her husband cannot give her a baby. She suggests to Long George (who lives happily in sin with Missy and their eight children) that he "make" one with her. He agrees. Alan, when he learns of this, rejects her, but in a final scene, melodramatic but powerfully rendered, in which the child is born and she dies, he accepts the child, takes it to Milly-on-the-Hill (grubby white-goddess) and a few days later cuts his throat. It's in the telling of this tale (I use the word "tale" deliberately) that Mr. Epps' style shows bite, that the action (as in the "seduction" of Long George) has a fine comic edge. This is true also in some of the action of the tale of Dougal the School. It's in the simple unpretentious presentation of dialogue and action and setting — in the simple telling — of these tales that one feels one is tasting something of the experience (at times horrifying in its bleak emptiness) of the village life of Stormaway that Mr. Epps knows.

To get to these passages, however, one must struggle to clear away or plough through huge snow drifts and banks of

blank pretentious "significance". Mr. Epps has organized these banks and drifts neatly in places and with great economy (his novel is short) but it's my opinion that if he had been content to tell the tales of Dougal the School, Alan the pigman and Milly-on-the-Hill, instead of attempting a Great Canadian Novel, his success might have been small but would have been quite real.

WILLIAM F. HALL

UNCONSOLING TALES

Canadian Winter's Tales, edited by Norman Levine. Macmillan. $4.25.

Canadian Winter's Tales is a volume of short stories collected with a subtle touch. Not only are the tales *not* about winter; they are not even aggressively Canadian. Norman Levine, who both edited and contributed to the collection, has had the enterprising idea of selecting a group of stories on the basis of theme. Thus his title alludes to a remark Mamillius makes to Hermione in Act II of *The Winter's Tale*: "A sad tale's best for winter." The total effect of the book is not unlike that of a "mood" recording which might have been designed to create or accompany a feeling of sadness — "Music to Remain Unconsoled By", perhaps.

The writers included in the collection are, in order of appearance, Malcolm Lowry, Brian Moore, Morley Callaghan, Hugh Hood, Margaret Laurence, Mavis Gallant, Mordecai Richler, Norman Levine, and Ethel Wilson. "Under the Volcano", the short story which Lowry wrote in 1936 and which, we are told, was "the first version of what later became the novel", makes a splendid beginning to the book. Although all that happens is a bus trip taken by the Consul, Yvonne (here his daughter), and her fiancé Hugh to the fiesta at Chapultepec, Lowry brilliantly infuses this simple plot with incredibly rich, poetic and characterizing detail. It is the most impressionistic of the stories, developing its theme of moral degeneracy with many-layered symbolism and mellifluous wit, as in the description of the Consul "wishing profoundly he could get as far

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away from the scene as possible... to somewhere where great gourds of mescal crouched".

Unexpectedly, the disappointment of the group turns out to be provided by Morley Callaghan, whose "It Must Be Different" describes a situation which might have interested Chekhov if he had written for a girls' magazine. A young girl, newly in love, is left frightened and insecure by the sight of her old and tired parents asleep. We are *told* that she wants to "resist the things that had happened to them", but Mr. Callaghan does not *show* us the alarming "things". The result is that the reader's understanding of the heroine's problem remains as fuzzily defined as her own.

Among the more successful stories Hugh Hood's "The End of It" stands out as a perceptive character study in a carefully built-up setting. Like Bud Schulberg's "Sammy", Hood's producer hero has the obsession to run, although he earns our sympathy in his pursuit of the perfect documentary film.

The collection is aptly rounded off with Ethel Wilson's absurd but undeniably eerie story, "Mr. Sleepwalker". Up to this point, a whole spectrum in sombre tones has been presented, from the understated tragedy of Margaret Laurence's "A Bird in the House" to the sour humour of Richler's "Playing Ball on Hampstead Heath". By ending the book on a sly note of surprise, Levine neatly purges the emotions previously aroused.

Canadian Winter's Tales is a book which deserves to be read. Once read, it is likely to be remembered and reread, whenever the age-old desire to hear a "sad tale" recurs.

PAT BARCLAY

THE PROVOKER

My First Seventy-Five Years. Macmillan. $2.95.

ONE OF CANADIAN HISTORIAN Arthur Lower's former Queen's students said of him: "... his bark is far worse than his bite. He only speaks provocatively to wake the class up, and to try to get them to do some thinking of their own." And that, surely, is the real purpose of his candid autobiography. He is still teaching, still using the Lower method: overstate and thus agitate and stimulate the student, forcing him to formulate but never, never regurgitate. The autobiography is one more set of lessons from an elder teacher; not lessons to be learned by rote, but lessons designed to brush away the mental cobwebs. As a consequence, he offers those sweeping Lower generalizations throughout his life's story, and a few of them must be quoted.

Lower on society: "the majority is invariably vulgar." On education: "Today relatively few high school students can spell more than simple words or write understandable, simple English, a situation which did not exist one lifetime ago." On writing local history: "Why practise on a bicycle if you intend to try to drive a car?" On Queen's: "I would hardly give it high marks for imaginativeness or originality." On being Canadian: "If we skip the state of nationalism we become not internationals (there are no such animals) but Americans. It is as simple as that." There are many more similarly provocative statements scattered throughout the book in biting English.

Some people, wounded to the quick

by such remarks, would quickly respond that Lower was at it again, being opinionated, pompous, arrogant, or even foolish. But they would be wrong and they would be wrong because they were wounded; after all, he must have struck a tender spot, he must have hit a raw nerve. That is what he is out to do: force a reaction which causes the reader to ponder what has been said. As a result the book is something more than an autobiography; it is a prod for the mind.

There are, of course, the customary features of an autobiography and these in themselves make for useful reading because of his frank statements and honest recollections. His early days in Barrie, Ontario, occupy some of the best pages as he dissects both the town and its product, himself. He notes how Methodism shaped him in one fashion while his father's brand of imperialism helped to produce a Canadian nationalist. He details his formal education at the University of Toronto and his informal enlightenment in the summer forests of Northern Ontario, forests which affected him in much the same way as Canada's landscape touched the Group of Seven. This section is followed by his naval experience during the First World War and his civil service career in Ottawa under Adam Shortt. Post-graduate work at Harvard removed him from the gray dullness of the nation's capital and his first academic appointment was at Wesley (United) College in Winnipeg just one month before the Great Crash of 1929. His removal to Queen's at the end of the Second World War took him away from the prairie city whose physical state he loathed but whose people he loved.

His battles — big and little — are also duly recorded, the most important being his perpetual struggle in the interest of civil liberties; a particularly neglected issue when wartime patriotism and post-war hysteria caused much of the public to ignore the matter. The reader can also follow the author as he agonized over what Canada should do in the face of Hitler's rise: how to go to war and make it clear that Canada did this as an independent nation and not an imperial ally (it could not be done, a saddened nationalist realized, because Canada was just a pawn). And it is comforting to find that he, too, finds H. A. Innis' writings obscure — or worse — although the economist's ideas are still brilliant.

Arthur Lower has written an autobiography that is full of life and the reader speedily acknowledges that the author has had a life that is full. And it all comes down to this: he is still educating, in the best sense of that word, because he finds all around him an education.

CHARLES W. HUMPHRIES

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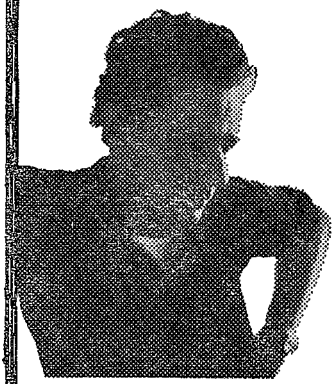

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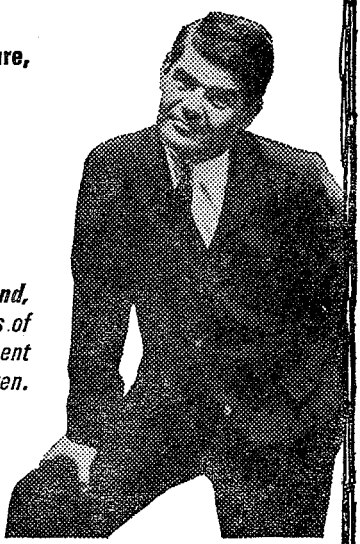

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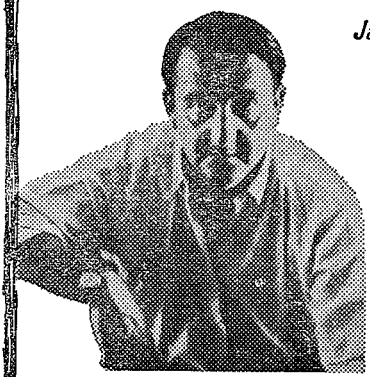

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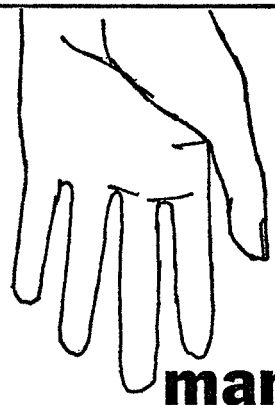

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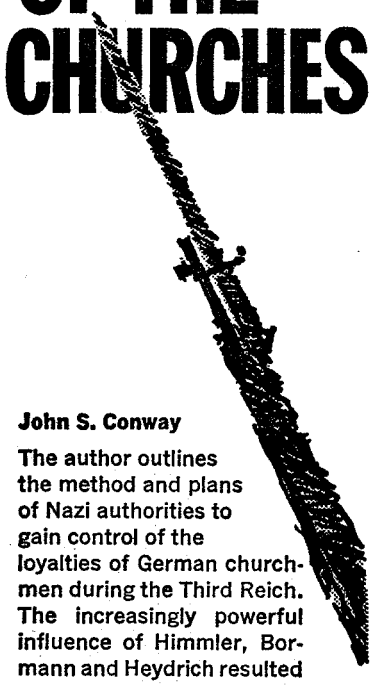

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