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CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 47

Winter, 1971

DOROTHY LIVESAY - POETRY OF POLITICS AND LOVE

Articles

BY DENNIS DUFFY, PETER STEVENS, SANDRA DJWA, STANLEY S. ATHERTON

Poem and Chronicle

BY DOROTHY LIVESAY

Review Articles

BY MARGARET ATWOOD, RALPH GUSTAFSON, A. W. PURDY, PETER STEVENS, GEORGE WOODCOCK, NEIL COMPTON, W. H. NEW

Reviews

BY FRASER SUTHERLAND, ROY DANIELLS, HERBERT ROSENGARTEN, DONALD CAMERON, KEATH FRASER

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

WYNDHAM LEWIS IN CANADA

EDITED BY GEORGE WOODCOCK

With an introduction by Julian Symons

An unsuccessful attempt to return to England from the United States during World War II resulted in Lewis living in Canada for the most part of the war. This was the third time in his life Wyndham Lewis had come in contact with Canada. He was born on his father's yacht off the coast of Amherst, Nova Scotia, and, based on this tenuous association, had been retained as a Canadian artist during World War I.

Wyndham Lewis has an international reputation as one of the finest writers and painters during the period between the two world wars. T. S. Eliot described him as "the greatest prose writer of my generation." As the founder of Vorticism, he was one of the leaders of British avant garde painting during the same period. Yet in Canada Lewis was almost totally ignored. "They have retained their censors office here," he wrote, "so I am debarred from telling you what I think of this place: but if you turn to the Book of Genesis you will see that towards the end of the week God became awful tired. It was in the last few minutes (He was not feeling at all good) that He produced a country beginning with C. It might have been Canaan; or perhaps it was a place over which a King reigns who is however only a commoner. A pretty tough one that!"

Wyndham Lewis in Canada traces his activities in Canada through reminiscences and observations of people who knew him during this period and discusses his writing and art. This book, the second in the Canadian Literature Series of reprints, is a collection of articles which have previously appeared in different issues of the journal *Canadian Literature*. Two new articles, including one by Lewis which has never before been published, and a bibliography of his works, have been added.

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contributors

DENNIS DUFFY teaches English at Trinity College, University of Toronto, and recently published in the Canadian Writers series the best short introduction to Marshall McLuhan, his thoughts and writings.

PETER STEVENS, a regular contributor to *Canadian Literature*, is the poetry editor of the *Canadian Forum*, and himself a widely published poet.

DOROTHY LIVESAY, represented here by a study of her love poems by PETER STEVENS, and by a long poem of her own written during the Thirties and hitherto unpublished, has been one of the central figures in Canadian poetry since the 1930's, and one of the most interesting features of the 1960's was her publication of several volumes of poetry which show an amazing movement into new territories of mood and technique. Her collected poems will be appearing soon, and she is also working on a volume of autobiography.

MARGARET ATWOOD, whose *Journals of Susanna Moodie* is reviewed in this issue, is now in England. Her novel, *The Edible Woman*, well received in Britain and the United States as well as in Canada, will shortly be turned into a feature film.

RALPH GUSTAFSON, whose most recent book of poems was *Ixion's Wheel*, is now poet-in-residence at Bishop's University. His *Penguin Book of Canadian Verse* is one of the classic anthologies.

A. W. PURDY's most recent book of poems is *Love in a Burning Building*, which MARGARET ATWOOD will review in the next issue of *Canadian Literature*; at present he is travelling in Mexico.

GEORGE WOODCOCK's most recent book is *Canada and the Canadians*. He is at present working on a major study of the English poet, critic, novelist and anarchist philosopher, Herbert Read.

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W. H. NEW's book on Malcolm Lowry is due for publication shortly. He is at present studying varieties of Commonwealth writing in the Caribbean and Britain.

editorial

NEW DIRECTIONS IN PUBLISHING (1)

THE DECISION OF ITS CHURCHLY OWNERS to sell Ryerson Press to an American publishing empire is as great a blow to letters in Canada as politically motivated commentators have claimed it is to Canada's dwindling area of economic independence. One can only admire the public gesture with which A. W. Purdy, one of Canada's leading poets and one of *Canadian Literature*'s most valued contributors, made the matter an issue for writers. It is, of course, for every writer to decide precisely what action he shall take when such things happen; the important thing, as Purdy's protest emphasises, is that he should not remain indifferent, that he should recognize he has action to consider.

For this is not merely an ordinary business deal, a routine merger of corporations. It represents something far more disturbing in its implications: the abandonment to foreign control, after a period of generations, of a native publishing enterprise that had become an institution in Canada's cultural life. Perhaps Ryerson Press had fallen behind in the quality of its publication programmes in comparison with the great days of Lorne Pierce; we have often felt it. Perhaps it was not a very profitable enterprise. Nevertheless, it did represent a tradition of independent publishing which had a symbolic as well as an operative value. It not merely provided Canadian writers with a place where they could publish; it provided them also with a place where they could be published by Canadians and hence feel — in the difficult literary times of the past — that they were part of a community in which the writing, production and reading of books were in some measure organically linked.

It is long since anybody worried about the sectarian ownership of Ryerson Press; what mattered a great deal more was that a Canadian institution, the United Church, should support such a press and allow it to exist and operate with — in recent years at least — a notable and laudable freedom from editorial interference. Perhaps the United Church did find that the activities of the Ryerson

Press had moved outside the sphere of its own religious functions (though one might consider anything cultural as having a direct relation to the spiritual life), but it had a responsibility to sustain the Canadian tradition, and we remain unconvinced that every possible effort was indeed made to find a Canadian purchaser or sponsor before the offer of a foreign-controlled corporation was accepted.

At the same time, though we must deplore what has happened to Ryerson Press, and demand that urgent measures be taken to ensure that no other Canadian publishing house is similarly absorbed, we insist that the position in Canadian publishing is not nearly so imperilled as some commentators have suggested. We have seen statements that only two truly Canadian publishers are now left: McClelland & Stewart and Clarke Irwin. With due respect to these two houses, whose services to Canadian writing over the years have been invaluable, to regard them as our only completely Canadian publishers is to fail to recognize the revolution that has taken place during the past few years in publishing in this country. Not only have vigorous regional houses, like M. G. Hurtig in Edmonton, begun to challenge the centralization of publishing in Toronto. We have also seen the emergence of a formidable publishing underground (pioneered by Raymond Souster with the Contact Press and by Louis Dudek and his associates at the still flourishing Delta Press) whose activities not only represent a change in the nature of book production and distribution in Canada but also coincide, as I suspect the next few years will finally demonstrate, with a change in the character of writing in Canada at least as important as that which took place between the Twenties and the Forties.

In editorials for the coming year I intend to devote attention in some detail to this movement, which tends to bring publishing and writing closer than ever before.

The most striking single phenomenon is of course the emergence of that extraordinary alliance, confederation, symbiosis — call it what you will — House of Anansi and New Press. I am not sure of the exact relation between these two houses, or whether any formal link even exists between them; perhaps indeed there is no link except the fact that the originating inspiration for both of them appears to have come from Dave Godfrey, himself the best of the younger fiction writers as well as a university teacher of English and the editor for McClelland & Stewart of the Canadian Writers series of monographs in the New Canadian Library. Recently the editorial direction of Anansi appears to have fallen mainly to Dennis Lee; at New Press, Godfrey works in collaboration with two other

young writers who have had experience in trade publishing, Roy McSkimming and Jim Bacque. The really important facts about Anansi and New Press are that the people who run them are young, that they are themselves dedicated writers, that they are experimental in their approach to writing and radical in their approach to social change, and that they have been able to use cheap printing methods to bring out lists of new titles each publishing season which compare remarkably well with those of the regular trade houses.

The territories chosen by Anansi and New Press appear only vaguely demarcated from each other. New Press devotes the greater part of its attention to various aspects of the New (but not necessarily New Left) Politics, and to related social questions, but it does occasionally publish verse and fiction; in fact its most recent publication as I write this editorial — and its most ambitious book to date in size and format — is Dave Godfrey's remarkable novel, *The New Ancestors.* Anansi has been inclined, particularly since the emergence of New Press, to concentrate on verse and especially on experimental fiction.

It is on this role of House of Anansi that I shall concentrate in the present editorial. In the next issue I hope to write at length on the role and activities of New Press. Essentially, under the sensitive editorship of Dennis Lee, the role of Anansi has been to publish the experimental fiction of the writers who at this moment seem most likely to produce the significant Canadian novels of the relatively near future. The good books of verse Anansi has also published would certainly have appeared without the House, since by the time it began operations the facilities for publishing poetry in one way or another had already greatly exceeded the production of good verse, as any conscientious reader of the new poetry knows to the depths of ennui. It was Anansi's resolve to publish experimental fiction, regardless of the potential market, that was important. In the event, the public interested in such fiction showed itself to exist, so that Anansi has been not merely courageous but also successful.

At this point, Anansi has reached its thirteenth volume of fiction, and the record is a good one. I do not suggest that every title has been a great success; indeed, two of the first three, Graeme Gibson's *Five Legs* and Ray Smith's *Cape Breton is the Thought-Control Centre of Canada,* were poor experiments because the authors had obviously failed to realize that the cardinal law of the literary quest is to know one's destination; it is the way there that experiment discovers.

On the other hand, the third of the initial group of Anansi fiction was one of the best volumes of stories to be published in Canada for many a year, Dave Godfrey's *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola,* sportsmen's sketches with an almost

Turgenevian sense of environment and a mercilessly cynical way with the human fauna.

It was after this initial trio that Anansi announced last year the project of Spiderline Novels, a series devoted to the first novels of young experimental writers. The series continues, for there have been at least two Spiderliners this year, and it appears still to be restricted to first novelists; but at the same time Anansi has published three works of fiction by writers who have already published before and elsewhere. This amounts, for 1969 and 1970, to a publication schedule of five or six novels a year, together with all the other books and booklets that come from Anansi, and it represents as much new fiction as any Canadian publisher except Jack McClelland brings out annually.

The authors of the first group of Spiderliners may be said to have a just grievance against *Canadian Literature*, though it would be due to one of those accidents every editor dreads and regrets once it has happened. An apparently conscientious reviewer accepted three of the books with enthusiasm, and never delivered the review. The consequence was that at the time of their publication only one of them, Peter Such's *Fallout*, received in this journal the attention it deserved. At least this omission gives a reason to say something by way of afterthought about the rest.

Having reviewed the whole group — Such's *Fallout*, Russell Marois's *The Telephone Pole*, Matt Cohen's *Korsoniloff*, John Sandman's *Eating Out* and Pierre Gravel's *A Perte de Temps*, in a Toronto paper when they originally appeared — I shall largely be repeating what I have already said, though Dennis Lee has persuaded me that *The Telephone Pole* is in fact a more interesting novel than I thought on first reading last year. However, I still cling to my view that *A Perte de Temps* was far and away the best book of the group, and that does tell us something important about the difference between young Francophone and Anglophone novelists.

A Perte de Temps, Anansi announced at the time, was the initial work in a plan to publish, in the original French, books by young Quebec writers who otherwise would probably not be read by Anglophone Canadians until at least five years after they first appeared, and then doubtless in bad translations. The experiment has not been repeated, and I suspect this is because Anansi has been unable to find another novel written in a French as limpid and as comprehensible even to the laziest bilingualist as that of Pierre Gravel, who writes in the lucid tradition of Gide and Camus.

A Perte de Temps, which was published simultaneously by the avant garde

publishing house in Quebec, Parti Pris, is, like all the fiction which Anansi has so far published, a *récit* or novella, rather than a full-sized novel, and in this way it follows one of the evident inclinations of young Canadian fiction writers in both languages — brevity accompanied by a drastic cutting away of the naturalistic detail and elaboration of dialogue that characterize the generation of novelists represented most prominently in Canada by Hugh MacLennan.

Read again in 1970, *A Perte de Temps* has even more immediacy than it had last year when it appeared, for it tells of a crucial day in the life of one of the Quebec terrorists of the early Sixties. Robert, the protagonist, receives a telephone call on a foggy night from one of his political comrades to say that an associate has been caught by the police; if the arrested man sings, they will all be picked up. Robert leaves his home to meet in a café the man who has called him. His friend does not arrive; Robert telephones and learns that the police have intercepted him. Knowing that sooner or later he will be picked up, he walks, sleeps in a park until the rain drenches and wakes him, dries off in a truck-drivers' eating house, and then, in the middle of the night, goes to his girl. In the morning he leaves her, and is arrested in the street.

The action is as simple as that, totally without melodrama, without even the violence one might expect in a novel of terrorists. What makes the story absorbing, apart from the supple and extremely evocative prose, is the way in which, recollecting incidents and conversations during his life as a terrorist, Robert's mental walk on that night reveals, quite unsensationally, the mental attitude — or rather the variety of mental attitudes — that lie behind the actions of the terrorists. There are those who think only of the end, and those who seek meaning entirely in action; those who merely drop out and those who, one suspects, betray. Most important, Robert is brought, on this night when a whole phase of his life seems to be ending, to consider how his past shaped his actions, how the feeling of a need to be decisive rose out of the consciousness that his father, a suicide, had totally failed in his life.

Gravel belongs to the same generation as the terrorists active in the early Sixties, but he writes with an assurance that makes his age as irrelevant as his Canadian origin. He has, of course, the local knowledge that gives the action authenticity, but otherwise it is in no way incongruous to think of him merely as a French writer in the larger sense. There is nothing in the least provincial about his handling of the language, and his whole attitude has a maturity lacking in most Anglophone writers of his age. His attitude to experimentation is especially healthy; he resorts to it only when it can further the purposes of his novel, and never for its

own sake. The consequence is that he has used a rather conventional linear form, but has broadened it by a very subtle use of memory and — on one occasion only — by a particularly effective use of dream as a revelatory device.

By contrast, all the Anglophone novels in the group — three by Canadians and one by an American — are immediately recognizable in terms of locality of origin (none, quite obviously, could emerge out of an English background) and also marked by a dogged experimentalism of form. There is a passionate rejection — even where it might be the best way of getting something into the reader's mind — of the conventional linear pattern. And often the manipulation of time shifts and of correspondences between apparently disparate threads of event and personality looks like apprentice work, by which I mean that it seemed to be done for practice, for effect, rather than because it is essential to the work in hand.

One has, of course, to take into account currently fashionable aesthetic stances. The idea of a finished work, even the ambition to compete in Stendhal's lottery of being read in a hundred years, have both lost a great deal of their appeal in a century when one wonders whether there are a hundred years to go for mankind. The unfinished texture that characterizes some of these books, which look as though a good working over would have vastly improved them, is obviously to some extent deliberate.

Questions of finish apart (if one can ever put them apart) there is a great deal that is interesting in Spiderline's first four novellas in English. Russell Marois explores perhaps most thoroughly the possibilities of the non-linear novel in his complex fantasy on the remotely interweaving lives of four marginilians in urban society; there are moments of brilliant hallucinatory fantasy, passages of great linguistic virtuosity, signs of a talent that may one day profoundly influence the character of Canadian fiction in general. Peter Such's *Fallout*, a novel in which the component and parallel elements are not nearly so well managed, as he tells of the collapse of a boomtown society, is perhaps most memorable for a very moving interpolated short story of an Indian and a white girl going to a lake island and making love. Matt Cohen's *Korsoniloff* is probably the most polished of all the novellas, and it shows an interesting shift away from the campus obsession which so recently gripped young Canadian and American writers; though Korsoniloff is a university teacher, it is his off-campus self that we observe, as he drifts through his curiously passionless relationships, and he is meant to interest us as a psychotic rather than a professor — unless his alienation is itself a comment on our sick educational system. In all these novels the middle-class life of which MacLennan wrote is avoided; new Canadian fiction has shifted its interest into

the lower depths and the fringes of society. The leading characters in *Fallout* are Indians and construction workers, in *The Telephone* they are denizens of a fantastic underworld; in *Eating Out* a burlesque game of cops and robbers in a New York hamburger joint is enacted through the eyes of a half-witted rubbydub. It is the kind of world that fascinates young writers at times of social breakdown, as it did in the French Nineties, in Russia before the Revolution, in England during the Thirties. In Quebec the literary rebellion has been more sharply related to the political rebellion, and for this reason it has felt less of an obligation to seek experimentation for its own sake; doubtful though the political success of separatism may have been, its literary success is an accomplished fact, and there are more good Frencophone than Anglophone fiction writers.

Not that it is impossible to produce in English Canada a novel as good as *Perte de Temps*. Indeed, Anansi has proved in its 1970 publications that it can be and is being done. Apart from a translation of Roch Carrier's remarkable novel, *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* (reviewed in its original version in *Canadian Literature* some issues ago) these include three novels, all of greater substance and complexity than the earlier Spiderliners, and all nearer to life, less conditioned by formal imperatives. They are Rachel Wyatt's *The String Box* and Michael Charters' *Victor Victim*, both first novels by writers out of their twenties who came from England, and Marian Engel's *The Honeyman Festival*, a second novel which more than fulfils the promise of her first book, *No Clouds of Glory*. Perhaps the great test was that, while one read the 1969 Anglophone Spiderliners with a constant awareness of effort not too well concealed, and therefore remained constantly the critical observer looking in, one enters *The String Box* and *Victor Victim* and *The Honeyman Festival*; they are microcosms that absorb one. They will all be reviewed in *Canadian Literature*, but must be mentioned here to emphasize the extent to which, in three years of courageous publishing and good editing, the House of Anansi has revealed new possibilities in the arts of fiction, of whose health the literary diagnosticians had so often despaired.

G.W.

GRACE

The Novels of Hugh Hood

Dennis Duffy

> *If I were a poet, I would write about how things are full of the Holy Spirit, without reference to the Spirit, just to the illuminations in the things. Now I think of it, that's what I try to do in fiction, give the sense of how things are* inflated *like footballs by the indwelling Spirit.*[1]

IN THE NEARLY TWELVE YEARS following his first publication,[2] Hugh Hood has produced a body of fiction including some fifty short stories and, as of Spring, 1970, three novels. The range, vigour and richness of his writing grows with every publication. His latest novel, *A Game of Touch*[3], confirms him as the steadiest viewer of ourselves, in Canada, now.

The ultimate concern of Hood's fiction is the presence of grace that the epigraph alludes to; it is as a chronicler of the Higher Things (to the exclusion, it is assumed, of the Here and Now) that he is generally viewed by the literary public. It is no accident that when his *White Figure, White Ground* came to be taught at my college, it appeared in a Religious Knowledge course taught by a psychologist rather than an English syllabus. There is some danger in interpreting the whole of a writer's work in terms of his deepest concern; it can lead to the obscuring of the means and the various strengths of those means by which a writer asserts his profoundest thoughts. To find in Wordsworth only the secularist mystic, and to overlook that delineation of the English landscape linking him with Constable and Turner is to miss out on some pleasurable readings. Hood's fiction is ulti-

mately "spiritual" and "religious" in its thrust; I wish neither to deny or undervalue that. In a decade that has seen such prose fiction as *Beautiful Losers*, *Place D'Armes*, *Cocksure* and *The Edible Woman*, Hood's fiction resembles MacLennan's in its sense of a larger backdrop against which everyday human activities, tragic and otherwise, are played. This larger vision accords to those activities a meaning and value beyond the quotidian. Perhaps I am just saying that Hood is not a post-modern in his sense of life — he sees it as grim, joyous, brutal, peaceful, but never as merely silly or absurd. His characters are haunted by the past, they are prone to fantasizing their way around reality, but they possess minds and bodies which struggle, at times successfully, to live really and presently. It is not that they or their creator are unaware of the Horror or the Void; it is that they do not often dwell there. Yet they are as real, their feelings and responses as true, their lives as representative of the tenor of their times as those of the deranged and fragmented who stalk the pages of the narratives mentioned.

It may be — the returns are not in yet — it may be that the entire post-modern element in our cultural experience is the truth about living in the present, and that life is surreal, delusional, macabre and absurd. Yet it is also possible that the post-modern fiction of the sort I have mentioned — the fiction born of Beckett and Burroughs rather than Joyce — has ignored too many of the facts of life to be in touch with most times in the lives of most people. To invoke Joyce as I have may appear perverse, but a little reflection upon the love lavished upon Poldy Bloom and the mythic resonance granted the Earwickers intimates that behind Joyce's formal experimentation lay that bedrock of humanist culture that has sustained the West since its beginnings. To be petty, perplexed and often frustrated is not to be contemptible, but human. The presence of a larger humanity enfolding with sympathy the figures who strut and struggle in the foreground is the mark of our century's greatest novelists, Joyce and Faulkner, however attractive it may be to mark in these writers only misery and despair.

If Hood's work belongs so obviously in the camp of the ancients, it is also the case that his fiction exhibits a grasp of the present, especially the Canadian present, matched by few other writers of his native land. My object in this article is to demonstrate that his sure purchase on the present, so evident in *A Game of Touch*, is wholly compatible with his ampler vision of a process of grace and redemption illuminating that present. Hood is an imaginative analyst of our society to no less a degree than the producers of satiric and nihilistic fiction, yet his rationality has not cut him off from sensing the limitations of the rational in

appreciating the world we live in. That linear narrative, straightforward description and concretely (rather than symbolically) conceived characters can still convey the tang of reality is the implicit message of the "traditional" form of his fiction.

As a means of establishing the particular virtues of *A Game of Touch*, let me make an arbitrary distinction between Hood's first two novels, *White Figure, White Ground* and *The Camera Always Lies*, which will be treated in reverse order. I am characterizing the latter as a novel of society, and the former as one of grace in order to make apparent the presence of both strains in his latest work.

THE CAMERA ALWAYS LIES is Hood's weakest and least understood work of fiction, yet any consideration of his knack of catching the world we live in must begin there. The novel's weakness lies in its characterization, which fails to support a theme more complex than the psychology of the characters. While the book is a detailed portrait of the post-Hollywood film industry, it functions also as a parable on the public cannibalism surrounding our gods, the celebrities. Alongside this are a series of reflections on the nature of contemporary art, a pre-occupation of Hood's fiction, and the subtle temptations to fakery that it offers to its successful practitioners. Clearly, this is not a Hollywood novel, whether in the realist mode of John O'Hara or the surrealist of Nathanael West, yet the book was generally reviewed in terms of its "predecessors" and as a result of such assumptions came out looking rather bungled. The narrow psyches of its characters are forced to channel too broad a stream of thought and feeling, but this is an error of the too purposeful writer rather than the unskilled. My own dissatisfactions with the novel will appear in detail a little later, but for the present let me convey its strengths. Its greatest is its sharply etched picture of a film industry which may not be a microcosm of our society, but which is assuredly one of the matrices of our collective mythologies, a mythical business whose realities are somehow ours.

The Camera Always Lies brings this society across to the reader by giving both a densely-detailed treatment of the nitty-gritty of its subject and an allusive probing of its inner drives which mesh with those of the larger society. The common reader will always find diversion in observing the way his neighbours earn their living. The occupational novels of Arthur Hailey attest that readers will endure any degree of stereotyped characterization and unreal psychologizing in

order to find out how airports and hotels function. Jobs are important to all of us, however frequently we are lectured on the obsolescence of the work ethic. They can offer the one period during the day when the reality principle is wholly and objectively present, when our own fantasies and gaps in feeling bump against an unyielding external reality. This is not the case, however, when the job involves the manufacture and marketing of the mythical, evocative yet ephemeral stuff that appeals to our appetites for power and security without really satisfying them.

The world of Hood's fiction is a job world, his writing an encyclopedia of trades and professions. Stockbrokers, psychologists, road repairmen, priests, painters, musicians, athletes, actors, academics, storekeepers, bankers, grocers, cameramen, campers, corsetières — this procession, this Whitman catalogue troops through his pages not in the guise of names with occupational titles attached, but as people seen and magnified through the technical details of their jobs. This Balzacian gift is one writers dismiss at their peril, since the world of their readers is largely determined by those occupational boundaries which the novel of sensibility — from Richardson to Cohen — largely ignores. *The Camera Always Lies* shows film people at work; the audience learns what it is to choreograph a musical number so as to underplay the star's dancing disabilities, how a costume designer compensates for short-waistedness in his subject, how an "indie" production is financed and promoted, and so on. These are not little technical excursions, but areas of living which fill in a character and advance a story line the same as interior monologues and symbolic happenings.

There is more to society than jobs, though, as two contrasting giants attest. *Middlemarch* gives us society with jobs — medical experimentation, the politics of the rural gentry, scholarly pursuits — and *Vanity Fair* does not. Thackeray's grim fathers, Sedley and Osborne, are both bankers, and the most we know of their trade is that Osborne's finances are solid enough to withstand the disturbance of Napoleon's return from Elba and his friend's are not. The vision of society in *Vanity Fair,* while not as real, is surely as true as that in *Middlemarch.* Thackeray shows how a society functions, how it handles the matter of who is in and who out, how it provides opportunities for the hungry to carve the sated. He achieves this not by depicting a world at work but through establishing a continuum in which the puppets may act out their representation.

The continuum consists of real elements — Waterloo, John Company's India, the Prince Regent — and those of the novelist's creation — *The Washerwoman of Finchley Common,* the Collector of Boggeley Wollah, the frontispiece of the Osborne family Bible. Thackeray's creations blend with God's to produce a sense

of society as men experience it, a small world, as we self-consciously mutter, where our paths intersect with those of others in ways initially improbable but in retrospect neatly determined.

So with the characters in *Camera*: their lives intersect in a credible fashion with those in other Hood stories. A character buys an Alex MacDonald (*White Figure, White Ground*) canvas, mention is made of the film editor Kitcheff ("The End of It," *Flying a Red Kite*), and Hood steps into the frame long enough for a character to praise *Around the Mountain*. Perhaps this is a sort of in-jokery, though it could as well be the first small step in the creation of a long sequence of interconnected works. But novels don't become portraits of society because they contain an allusion or two to figures appearing elsewhere; they succeed because they construct that continuum found in Thackeray. In *Camera*, the heroine Rose meets her rescuer Jean-Pierre because her producers are negotiating for his North American distribution rights, while her involvement with him follows an initial occupational encounter disguised as a social event. The ailing marriage of Rose and her husband Seth is shattered by the producers' normal/abnormal manner of promoting the film. Characters intersect through booking agencies, health spas and filming locations in the way people do through job connections in the real world.

There is more to a sense of society than this, as Thackeray saw. Somewhere, the scattered people with their scattered interests are pulled together by a social matrix that is more than a departures and arrivals lounge, but a context of mental habits and associations as well. Thus Thackeray's controlling image of the Fair and the common attribute shared by most every character — overpowering, raw appetite. Since, as I noted earlier, every job does not deal with the real, the figures in *Camera* share an involvement in the delusive and deceitful. The involvement isn't always intentional, yet the process by which Rose undertakes the suicide attempt that opens the book starts because her sense of reality has been dulled by a career devoted to burnishing her image. Repeatedly, the characters practise the grossest deceptions upon themselves and each other; let one acutely observed detail stand for the corruption of a society: "[The security guard] was supposed to keep the photographers in line, but did nothing except bum cigarettes off them."

As is fitting for a novel about films, the deepest symbolic probes into the inner drives of society are made through movies, one real, *King Kong*, the other planned by Jean-Pierre, *Feu James Dean*. In his hotel room, the late-movie addict ponders what he has just watched:

> Images swam in his brain, of rape, murder, betrayal, of King Kong at the top of the tallest building in the world, swatting biplanes out of the air like flies. You want to marry the girl and settle down, but you can't because you're a guilty beast. This coupling of monster and innocent woman was a staple in the slick American cartoons, a comic theme or a grotesque one, not tragic. . . . Treat horror comically . . . that is what they do. King Kong, Count Dracula, Frankenstein's creation, the Addams cartoons, the Teen-Age Wolf Man, the Munsters, the sting drawn progressively with each step toward the trivial — the monster was really lovable and just like us.

The author, through his character, the sort of cerebral French film-maker given to meditations upon *King Kong*, reveals the outlines of his novel's myth, the escape of the girl Rose from the innocent — through its total ignorance of moral habits or considerations — monster of big-time filming.

The other movie, *Feu James Dean*, is one the 1970 reader either swears he has seen or is shocked that no one has yet filmed it. It tells of a quiet young Frenchman fascinated by America-as-power, the owner of a Chevrolet with an interior decorated with "Pictures of motorcycles and folk singers, the Beatles, racing cars, movie stars, shots of crimes with people lying dead on the streets, pictures of guns and of cowboys." In a familiar enough pattern of behaviour, he first charms and then strangles an American girl he meets. The cluster of images gathered by the two films, real and imaginary, is not another indictment of America or the movies or American movies, but a representation of a culture in the grip of strong feelings it cannot express realistically. Either paranoia and aggression are fantasized into the stylized hysteria and violence of the mass media and its charismatic superstars (*Feu James Dean*) or else it conceals through stereotype (at times comic, at times grisly) the primitive horror of feelings it cannot acknowledge in any other manner (*King Kong*). The movies are images of the post-modern or the technological society or whatever term may be current; they ally themselves with a number of thoughts and associations demonstrating the congruence of the novel's film-making society with the larger grouping supporting it. From the glimpse of the negligent doorman to the articulation of a culture's deepest imaginings, *Camera* gives both the inside and outside of its society, showing it as something more than a collection of people or a melange of mythic associations, showing it as a combination of both.

Yet the novel does not succeed; though this is not my greatest concern here, let me briefly outline my dissatisfaction. The problem with *Camera* is Rose Leclair, a heroine whose personality is too simple and observed too superficially to bear the weight of the social themes she embodies. A Becky Sharp puppet would have

done better, for it is in the handling of what people do rather than how they think that the novel excels. The tour-de-force opening the novel, Rose's attempted suicide, is a masterly presentation of a psycho-somatic organism in revolt against death. The intermingling of mind and body is handled with great skill, but it is somewhat of a disappointment for Rose to be revealed, not as some tortured movie queen in the manner of Monroe, but as a wholesome, healthy girl saved at the last moment by her basically sound mind-body. It is not that simple people are uninteresting, but that Rose is. References to a fairly ordinary girlhood and a fairly ordinary climb to stardom do not deepen her character, and in her the ordinary becomes the banal. While she is probably made so insensitive to the skulduggery around her in the first section for the purpose of showing the dream world stardom forces her to live in, the reader does become impatient with her stupidity. Yet Rose has to carry the story; she is not portrayed as Aimée in Waugh's *The Loved One*, a distanced figure who is the object of pity rather than sympathy. And there is not enough to Rose to carry her own story.

Finally, the morality of the novel becomes confused. The work has dealt, both in the implicit manner I have described and in explicit fashion as well,[4] with the falsity of film and its world. Yet Rose is rescued by the French Director and flies off to Europe to marry and make beautiful films with him. One's first impulse is to see the book as the sort of Billy Wilder slick and cynical diversion analyzed with such acuity during the novel.[5] But that kind of reaction tears the book apart, for its tone throughout has been one of concern and involvement and not the detached contempt of, say, *Kiss Me, Stupid*, a Wilder flick discussed in the novel. Perhaps, one reasons, the novel is out to show that there is no escaping the hollow values of the world Rose makes her living in, and that the best she can hope for is a cleaner version of the game she must play. Well, if this is so, then how ultimately boring and frustrating a story we have before us. Raw cynicism would have done better.

As I have pointed out, *Camera* is most interesting in its realization of a society in being. It falters when it attempts to get at the insides of the people composing that society. Hood's problem then was to create either a portrait of society-as-organism that did not require portraying individuals in depth, or else to try harder to present the characters fully. *Around the Mountain*, the second collection of short fiction and a very well-planned and interconnected collection at that, displayed his sure grasp of a landscape — man-made, natural, urban, rural — and his gift for blending these various views into subtle expressions of states of human feeling. As he put it, "I don't think the Romantic Movement failed,"[6] and *Around*

the Mountain is as Romantic a view of Montreal as is Wordsworth's poem of Tintern Abbey. That is, the city defines and re-defines the author-observer, its majesty and vitality confirming and enlarging his own powers. With ease and assurance, Hood moves through quasi-journalistic vignettes of city life — "Le Grand Déménagement," "Starting Again in Sherbrooke Street" — to beautifully realized evocations of the reality beyond the landscape, as in "A Green Child" and "The River Behind Things."

If *Around the Mountain* showed how the trick was done without in-depth characters (beyond the faceless narrator), the work preceding *Camera — White Figure, White Ground* — displayed the sureness with which Hood could depict a character and show the changes life put him through. What he had done in *White Figure* he did not choose to do in *Camera*, but a look at his first novel reveals the resonance he is able to give his characters. It should also demonstrate that the success of *A Game of Touch* is no fluke, but the confident use of talents — for capturing society, for showing individuals — displayed earlier in isolation but now combined within a single work.

White Figure is a novel about painting and the boundaries of art, abounding in demonstrations of painterly technique and intense meditations on the possibilities of catching life within a canvas. It offers also something close to a Canadian poetics, an examination of the stresses peculiar to artistic life here. Such a preoccupation is perhaps to be expected from a novelist of English-and French-Canadian parentage, and the reader searching for the allegorization of the tension between the two strains in Canadian life could find it in this novel, though only after some violence had been done to the text.

For my story is first of all about a painter, an artist in the middle of the journey, enjoying a measure of comfort and reputation, who is on the verge of gaining fame in the great world. Alex MacDonald, a leading Montreal artist awaiting his first New York opening, travels with his wife to Nova Scotia both to paint in a light he has never experienced and to discover the past of his father, who left there as a young man. It is the virtue of *White Figure* to sustain the reader's interest not merely in Alex the painter, but to make his personal search credible also, so that a productive tension arises from the two poles of experience. Alex's two searches — for a mood in his painting he has never caught before and for the true reasons why his father left the family — are successful, but in a limited sense

only. He never discovers exactly why his father was rejected by his relatives, but he does come to some understanding of the hatreds and misunderstandings still festering in Barringford, Nova Scotia. This understanding reveals itself on a non-rational level in Alex's canvases. This breakthrough into understanding rather than analysis is conveyed in Chapter Four of the novel's second section, a novel in a nutshell where his struggle to accept his father and complete his canvas produces a single narrative thrust that gives us the whole man, painter and child.

This is Alex's first illumination in the novel, the first glimpse into the conflicts of the past and their resolution in the present. If this process is localized around the figure of his father, the other search, the search more directly concerned with his professional life, gets embodied in the two women in his life and the personal-painterly forces they represent. His wife Madeleine, of a distinguished French-Canadian family, represents the claims of society, the familiar, the assured, the possible, all of the bugaboos of the Romantic artist as our age has defined him. His cousin Ellen, a Barringford girl, represents solitude, the exotic, the unattainable. Hood displays a sharp sense of the ironies of social observation in locating the solid matron in a *soignée* Montreal female and the Lillith in a sheltered Nova Scotian virgin. From one point of view, the painter's final choice of wife and success in New York is a cop-out. It offers another instance of the Canadian penchant for taking the low road. Hood makes no attempt to soften or evade this possibility, but prefers to present the problem it offers directly to the reader.

One need not be devoted to the stereotype of the *poète maudit* to be disquieted by the choice of Madeleine. For all her chic and sensitivity, she is a scheming bitch who is extremely interested in making it both with and for her husband, and the two canvases he completes in the book are done either without her or in her despite.[7] He is aware of her anxieties about the possible unprofitable nature of his painting and of her schemes with his dealer to prevent him from reaching too far in his work, yet remains with her and does so contentedly. " 'I'm no mystic; I'm a flesh man'," he declares near the end of the novel, and this remark discloses his reasons for cleaving to his wife. The chapter on their love-making (Chapter 7 of the second section) is the most intensely written in the novel, not to work up a sizzling sex scene, though it is as "hot" as any piece of pornography, but to convey the power of the MacDonalds' sexual relationship. In a very direct fashion, the chapter conveys the satisfaction husband and wife give each other. It is more than a matter of four legs in a bed, though that is where it starts. It is a matter of being present. This presence is what marriage is about, and the existence of it compensates for Madeleine's fundamental lack of sympathy with the sort of new

work her husband is struggling to realize. He knows his wife and her drawbacks; he can live with that knowledge and handle the problems as they arise.

The alternative female is Ellen, a sea-girl associated with green, the "dark female shape" behind *Light Source* #1 and #2, the paintings occupying the time of the narrative. The first is the title-painting of the book, a white-on-white which attempts to reach beyond painting, beyond even perception, to the region where it all begins, wherever that may be. As Madeleine sensibly assures her husband, " 'You can't paint what's invisible. You can't paint what doesn't exist'," and yet the oils in the painting possess greater brilliance and variety than ever before. Alex puts the dilemma squarely: " 'How can it be so good if it isn't true?' " How can it, indeed? Ellen has been with him since the inception of the painting, when the idea of it came upon him in the holy dread he experienced during his initial exposure to the white light and solitude of the seashore. The sexual encounter between Alex and his cousin is unplanned, clumsy and incomplete, far different from the assured sensuality of the married couple. The thought of sex between Alex and his young cousin is faintly off-colour, faintly incestuous; like that painting, it would be an attempt to reach through the senses what the senses cannot reach. In choosing wife over cousin Alex really chooses between the marital and the mystical, opting for the centre rather than the more exciting, more frustrating margin. But the painting has been completed, a proof that that while the painter can reach there, he is not out to dwell on the margin. The business of rejecting what you could have in favour of the richness you already possess is too complex to be termed a cop-out. It is instead a matter of learning from an experiment that did not come about through methodical planning, but which came nonetheless and is there to be admired and used: *Light Source* #1.

If this painting, with the feelings it absorbed and evoked, represents one portion of the illumination Alex receives in the course of the novel, *Light Source* #2 conveys the other side of this vision of light. Chapter 3 of the first section rings the changes on black and white as the MacDonalds first reach the Atlantic. In the course of this Alex asserts that " 'you have to have the double vision' ", that is, you need white to know black, and vice-versa: " 'God, but a really white man would be a frightening thing to see.' " By the end of the novel, he has executed a horror-filled, turbulent canvas which he presents — unviewed by the public — to Ellen. It is his way of showing her his black and white colours. He has painted into the magnificent abstraction of *Light Source* #2 the green associated with Ellen, completing a painting as good as he'll ever get but which is "the most aggressive violent turbulence of paint imaginable . . . discordant, jangled, riotous;

after a while it got on your nerves." The audience of Alex's aged aunts fails to spot "the comical hints of green" (always the double vision), but the total effect of the work is to get on to canvas the violent, brutal Alex who battered his father in his youth and in maturity came to see and absorb what he had done. It is no coincidence, as Madeleine points out, that he made love to her after crating the painting and shipping it to Ellen. He has had his exposure to the double vision in its extremest form — a schizoid split — and realized that there is no way to have both women and all they represent simultaneously in his life. All such attempts develop in him a split between artist and husband, painter and man which he will not endure, even if it for a moment widens the reach of his art. The choice he makes is to go on to the New York triumph and abandon the work which would restrict his drives to the lonely and unsatisfactory.

In considering *White Figure*, I have tried to display the dexterity with which Hood has intertwined the personality of a man with his artistic production, making the one as real as the other. Therefore, the grace, the understanding that falls upon Alex MacDonald is not a blinding revelation of the sort recalling a hypothetical Beethoven crying to a thrush, "Run through that again; it sounds like what ought to be the opening bars of my Sixth!" The grace is instead the illumination that occurs during a job, the grace commanding the artist to cross out *that* word, put in *that* note, go heavy on *that* brush stroke. And through this aesthetic grace Alex's personality is revealed, so intimate is the novel's sense of the identity between artist and man. For the human soul also learns through re-examining *that* incident, recalling *that* person, placing a new construction on *that* mood. This surefootedness amid the traps of the ambiguities of the human personality gives Hood's fiction the strength to show in a credible fashion how human beings experience crisis. The assumption behind the fiction is that the ordinary is fairly miraculous and the trick of the artist is to catch that miracle at its most visible — say, at the mid-point of a painter's career.

No one within camera range is unaware that countries have their crises as well as do individuals, though the camera that informs us also dulls our perceptions. The camera watches confrontations and riots, parades and manifestoes, ignoring the very down-to-earth fashion in which our society's state of permanent crisis is blended into the fabric of our daily lives. The novel, an art form which more than any other celebrates the quotidian, is one device by which

society can see itself as it digests major issues in humdrum fashion. No more useful truth was taught writers of fiction than when Sir Walter Scott used the melodramatic plot of *The Heart of Midlothian* to show how in troubled times sons first lose, and then they slay their fathers. This may appear too heavy a metaphysical burden for the incident of the killing of Staunton-Robertson by his unknown outlaw son, but then Scott has been under-rated for better than a century. Miss Doris Lessing's *The Four-Gated City*, so wretchedly reviewed, offers an instance of the way in which a novel can still capture the meat-and-potatoes fashion in which our planet is being destroyed by a bored and violent civilization.

The title of *A Game of Touch* means what it says — touch football is a game played by all the male characters. But sex and politics are also games of touch, and the commonplaces of boys and girls together in their little sports throws into relief the conflicts threatening to destroy a society. Sports, as Hood knows, are excellent activities in which to locate men at work. The opening piece in *Around the Mountain*, "The Sportive Center of St. Vincent de Paul", give as much insight as one is likely to gain from years of reading anthropology into the importance of the male bond and the tenacity of the informal conventions by which men govern their affairs. *A Game of Touch* shows the way in which a series of unspoken assumptions shape the Higher Things, especially politics, and the way in which the laws of the tribe pass *sotto voce* from generation to generation. It also shows how an age of relentless publicity is dissolving those conditions and leaving very little to replace them beyond the vagaries of charisma.

To repeat, the sport is touch football, and the novel gets under way when Jake Price, newly-arrived in Montreal from Stoverville, Ontario (Hood's country of the mind near the Quebec border), casually joins a touch football game in a park. From this comes his acquaintance with Roger Talbot, a wealthy Quebec intellectual of English and French parentage; Marie-Ange Robinson, who first made her appearance in "Bicultural Angela" (*Around the Mountain*), and Duncan McCallum, Establishment-educated and now a house psychologist for a large corporation. Jake, the hard yet innocent outsider bewildered by the gentlemanly conventions of the crowd he has fallen in with, is an excellent observer of the folkways of the Montrealers. For the present, what happens to Jake is not as interesting as what happens to Roger, a Trudeau who neither can nor will succeed in the great world.

The first thing the reviewers will say of *A Game of Touch* is that nothing much happens, which is to say that the novel rearranges the insides of the characters without anything too dramatic happening to their outsides. Roger works out a

complex federal-provincial health services scheme, negotiates skilfully with his fellow Quebecers on behalf of Ottawa, is denounced as a *vendu*, and leaves Ottawa to return to the academy. Clearly no tale of derring-do, but a chronicle which accurately conveys the tone of Canadian politics.

What could be duller than a novel about taxation and the responsibility for it? Well, in a materialist society such as ours taxation forms the chief link between subject and government; it becomes the badge of citizenship. " 'Funds, not sex, are at the root of human motivation,' " Roger wryly observes, and this is the first ironic hint of the importance to the novel of economic questions. Debates over where the money is to go reveal the passions behind politics, as well as the strengths of various groups and alliances. It is the passion that matters, and not the pennies, and this the cerebral Roger comes to see, though too late in his career for his cold image to thaw. During a day of wearying negotiation, the "blinding insight" comes to him that:

> these bloody money matters were symbols of great unconscious tides in the life of millions of people, who might never consciously consider tax percentages from one year's end to the next. Millions who were suffering from a bottomless, humiliating wound in the unspoken darkest reaches of their lives. People who had early learned to say things like, "*nous autres, on n'e' pas instruit-là,*" or perhaps *on n'e' fait que pour des petits pains chez nous.*"...
>
> He realized that the words he thought in, "economic community," "taxing source," "administrative means," were a bloodless, denatured, foolish and heartless screen over his feelings. He saw suddenly that what people said about him, TRAHISON DE ROGER TALBOT, was partly true and deeply felt. I have no people, he realized, and I never will; instead I have the international economic community.

This moment of grace comes too late to shelter him from the drumfire of criticism coming from his native province, and his minister, relieved at finding a scapegoat, allows him to resign. Roger is a figure who has been with us since Ford's Tietjens tetralogy, the man born into a ruling elite whose integrity disqualifies him from exercising power in the devious fashion in which it must be wielded. Fortunately, Hood doesn't impose on his character the quasi-saintliness Ford lavished upon his hero, but in a very effective scene near the novel's conclusion brings home Roger's dignity, solidity and loneliness. As the novel has proceeded, Marie-Ange, the astute practitioner of bedroom biculturalism, switches her allegiance from Roger to Duncan, whom the narrative reveals to be locked in his Anglo world of jobs, connections and speedy promotions in the motherly embrace of the multi-national corporation. The final gathering of the triangle is

in Grandma's Antimacassar, a "swinging" place featuring campy decor, rotten music and a swingless clientele. Roger is appalled by the pseudo-sophistication and hard-sell rottenness of the place, Marie-Ange (who we can sense will go back to being Angela, the exec's wife from Stoverville who tried the French thing a few years back) and Duncan too intent on being young and with-it and like now baby to examine the scene they are a part of. Roger, in his forties, is dismissed with a few nasty remarks about youth and age and leaves, still his own man, but only his own man.

With a few adaptations, the story could have come from one of Peter Newman's political chronicles. The novel contains a genuine feel for Canadian politics, for the way the public business gets done and the vocabulary our rulers bring to the execution of their tasks. It is a fine thing to write a novel so true to the milieu from which it springs as this, but it is a finer thing to write a novel plain and simple. What gives *A Game of Touch* the requisite literary virtues is the manner in which the doings of Jake Price, the artist as a young layabout, reinforce the political theme and unify the public and the personal.

Very simply, Jake wants to live rent-free, as Roger notes. In fact, he does exactly this, staying in a studio flat atop a building Roger's family owns in a warehouse-light-industrial district empty at night. When the building goes up in flames as the result of a fire in the electroplating shop on the lower floors, and he barely escapes death, Jake realizes that "there was a catch to living . . . rent-free . . . nobody around to help you when you got into trouble." In other words, no one can safely opt out of the social contract, whether the contract be signified by taxes or rent. Jake's romantic vision of *la vie bohème* cannot be sustained, and he takes a job with Duncan's firm as a personnel evaluator. He brings no professional qualifications to the position beyond a great deal of common sense and an absence of illusions about himself. He becomes engaged to a sturdy French-Canadienne, not abandoning his art but realizing that earning a living comes before it.

Perhaps the saddest of the principal characters is Marie-Ange, so close to achieving maturity during his liaison with Roger but now thrown back into dreary games with Duncan. The novel is, after all, about the two most interesting subjects life offers, sex and money, and the choices facing Marie-Ange are best illustrated by the novel's treatment of her sexuality. With Roger, everything becomes sexually charged, with the activities of an entire day bathed in an eroticism consummated in bed at the end, but which differs in form rather than in tone from what has gone before (Ch. 13). Contrast with this the body-painting

of Chapter 16, in which her body is garishly decorated by Duncan and his drunken pals in a manner ultimately expressing a great deal of contempt for the flesh and for the female in particular. The act is sexual, but of such a nature as to deny any power and beauty to sex and turn it instead into a nasty little game. In the fashion of our time, the rhetoric of permissiveness and liberation conceals despair and hostility. It is Duncan that Marie-Ange marries, and all their determined swinging cannot hide the weaknesses they bring to their union.

A Game of Touch: Jake leaves his self-centred existence and joins a world populated largely by others. The game of Touch: a pastime played " 'for sport and for exercise, with the violence taken out of it'." Canada as a game of Touch: "a religious idea . . . man acting out the instinct to justice, without war." Keeping in touch: Roger's failure to do so diminishes his political effectiveness. Sex, the oldest game of touch: the contrast between Marie-Ange, once Roger's woman and the Marie-Ange now the creature to be painted by Duncan in a parody of sex. Can you follow how the strands interweave, and how the personal and communal levels of the book fuse into a representation of a culture that is deadening and which must recover its tactility? Can you see how the theme of touching widens into a vision of a world touched by an opportunity for greatness, a people on the verge of breakthrough if only they would speak with honesty to each other and acknowledge their mutual needs?

In *Strength Down Centre*, his portrait of Jean Beliveau, Hood finds in his subject a communal hero who is more than an athlete. Beliveau receives gifts, advice and Miss-Lonelyhearts-type pleas for insight and comfort from his fans. " 'It isn't simply that I'm a hockey player; people need to touch somebody.' " We live at a time when more and more people cannot do this in their personal lives, when religion no longer offers a sense of touch, and when inevitably the larger-than-life figures of sports, politics and entertainment come to fill this function. *Camera* was about the way we devour these figures, from Rose Leclair to Marilyn Monroe to the Kennedys. *A Game of Touch* is also about this society of ours, about it in the down-to-earth way we all experience it. Satire, surrealism and symbolism are all effective ways of dramatizing our world, but to most of us they offer the escape hatch of "Well, that's a little too exaggerated. Now if he had only looked at the other side . . ." That escape is not available to Hood's readers. He has shown us where we are in terms no one can fail to recognize.

Taken collectively, are not Hood's novels an achievement one searches widely to match in English Canada? Has he not given us an ordinary, recognizable world in which extraordinary things nonetheless happen? On the levels of nature and of

grace, of expertise and illumination, has he not demonstrated a skill and a sense of feeling illuminating our present and our future? The graces of his short fiction have been apparent since the publication of *Flying a Red Kite*; is there not something to the novels as well? They offer a panorama of our society and the fate of the individual within it. Balancing between a sense of the real and a glimpse of the visionary, they bring to us a picture of this world and the grace that is there for anyone who would reach out for it.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Hugh Hood in a letter to the author, undated.

[2] "The Isolation Booth," *Tamarack Review*, #9 (Autumn, 1958), 5-12.

[3] *A Game of Touch*, Longman, $5.95.

[4] See the Director Max Mars's philosophical reflections on the camera's lies, pp. 73-4.

[5] *The Camera Always Lies*, 195-6.

[6] Letter to the author, 23/XII/66.

[7] This equivocal female crops up again in Hood's fiction, most obviously in "The Tolstoy Pitch," *Fiddlehead*, #79 (March-April 1969), 44-59. There, however, the wife-who-only-wants-what-is-best is drawn with less subtlety, the story being an attempt to convey the sort of sellout that does not in fact take place in *White Figure*, however much the novelist may toy with the possibility.

[8] For example, see the oft-reprinted "After the Sirens," *Flying a Red Kite* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1962), 125-35.

DOROTHY LIVESAY

The Love Poetry

Peter Stevens

IN HER SOCIAL POETRY of the 1930's Dorothy Livesay is concerned principally with human fellowship and the poems call for freedom from capitalist tyranny. There is no mention of the problem of freedom for each individual: the question of the roles played in society by man and woman is not raised. I suppose that she had tackled the problem indirectly in the long poem in *Signpost*, "City Wife" but that poem seems more concerned with the personal relationship of husband and wife, not with an examination of woman's role in contemporary life and not in any large sense with aspects of the relative freedoms and responsibilities of man and woman in modern society.

Her later poems, however, show a greater interest in woman's individuality, her need for freedom, her right to exist in her own way. Woman as herself is very much a part of her love poems as we shall see later. The love poems in *The Unquiet Bed* are preceded by a section of personal poems in which the poet concentrates on various aspects of herself as woman. In "Woman Waylaid" she sets up a contrast between the opposing sensitive and practical sides of her nature. In this poem the sensitive side wins out. She prefers to pick flowers, not to collect wood for the cool evenings. So she returns

> empty-
> handed
> to face
> pot-bellied stove
> its greed.

She makes her choice as individual woman and she is free to make the choice. Although it may mean that she will be uncomfortable in "the cool evenings/by

the lake," at least she has herself made the decision. Too much must not be made of this poem but in the context of the whole book (and the arrangement of the poems and sections of *The Unquiet Bed* is an important aspect of the book) this poem, and most of the others in the second section, are directly concerned in an unpretentious way with the problem of woman's position in modern society. Dorothy Livesay still insists that woman is involved in the natural cycle of growth. In "Sunfast" she sees herself as part of the whole life force symbolized by the sun. She takes in the sun like food; the sun refreshes and re-orders the world just as human beings try to establish patterns. But the poet seems released to some higher mode of life than suburban pattern and order

> I am one
> with rolling animal life
> legs in air
> green blades scissoring
> the sun.

In a general way the image of a 'sunfast' is close to images used by Gwendolyn MacEwen, particularly in *Breakfast for Barbarians*. And it is perhaps significant in this context to remember that Dorothy Livesay has written a poem "For Gwendolyn" in which she expresses her feeling that the younger poet could have been her child.

The feeding on nature, the immersion in it as well as the recognition of one's place in it, is expressed in several poems in the second section of *The Unquiet Bed*, for instance, "Process". "Pear Tree" has the same notion at its centre. The tree in this poem becomes almost a symbolic mother, for it hears "children chugging on the chains/of sound/practising language." But the reference in the poem takes on a wider significance, for the tree connects daylight with darkness, and so perhaps foreshadows the idea of union and communication achieved through the man-woman relationship in the love poems:

> Lucky this pear tree seeped in sun
> shivering the air
> in her white
> doldrums
> taps with her roots
> the worms' kingdom.

The question of individuality in relation to the male-female principle Dorothy Livesay herself finds so prevalent in her poetry crops up humorously in the poem

"Flower Music", particularly in the section titled "Peony." The male neighbour grows peonies easily — the language suggests something rather brutal and violent about the male's bringing forth these flowers, an attack perhaps on the nature of the peony itself, its virgin purity. The poet herself peevishly resents his success. She has tried to make them flower by using the brute power perhaps associated with the male principle. She has been a tyrant to the flowers but they do not blossom. The poem ends ironically, for she suggests that the man's masculinity, his power brings forth beauty "so light/so silken." This sense of opposition and contradiction between male and female, expressed somewhat obliquely in the poem, is very much a part of Dorothy Livesay's view of human love, and it turns up in the next section of *The Unquiet Bed* which is devoted exclusively to love poems.

BUT THESE LOVE POEMS were not the first that Dorothy Livesay wrote. There are quite a number of love poems in *Signpost*, and it is interesting to look at them now to see how her views on the role of woman have changed. The love poems in *Signpost* are attempts to express the changing moods and emotions of a love affair. They are personal poems but they are also objectified to make more universal statements about love, as Robert Weaver in the Fall, 1948 issue of *Contemporary Verse* suggested. He said that the poems were poems

> about love; about the paradoxical, even tragic desire to lose oneself wholly in passion and love, at the same time retain something essential of oneself. The person, invaded, often resisted successfully, or fled. But already, in this microcosmic human relationship, Miss Livesay was being strongly drawn towards identification with something outside of the self.

Obviously, these remarks in some sense could apply to her later love poems, although I think that Dorothy Livesay is much surer of herself as a woman in the later poems so that she can afford to be more open, direct and honest, make the poems in fact much more personal. The early poems still have some romanticism clinging to them, although some of the poems are admirable statements of the wayward passions, misgivings, deceits and contradictions of love. And certainly they are the first attempts in Canadian poetry to express a modern approach to love, even though they are not always successful.

In "Song And Dance," Dorothy Livesay suggests some of the literary and philosophic (if that is not too pedantic a word in this context) motivations behind these early love poems:

> Through my twenties an experimentation with sex . . . was simply [a] search for the perfect dancing partner. I had read Havelock Ellis's *The Dance of Life* and I believed of [sic] the consummation of two bodies into one, the merging of the self in other self. Also, it goes without saying, I had read *Lady Chatterley's Lover.*

The partners in love try to keep each his own individuality, in order to prevent being overwhelmed and overpowered by the other partner. The poet attempts to protect herself by keeping herself close to natural things. This she uses as "armour" ("Weapons") because in love she feels vulnerable but if the other merges with her own essential faith in nature, then she is defenceless. Thus, love can become a kind of struggle for power; it may be impossible to wall oneself in, for love demands openness between partners. This idea is reminiscent of that expressed in other early poems, in which the poet, in talking of the immense external reality in terms of an outer darkness, often used the image of enclosed space within which she kept the darkness at bay. But even in erecting a shell around one, one senses that it is futile. In the same way, love seems to be an enormous force in the love poems in *Signpost* and defences against it are fragile, particularly as love demands frankness and searches out the private sanctities of personality. Even if one of the partners takes refuge in nature, as the poet suggests in "Sun," recognizing the naturalness of love, then the other partner can uncover the whole, can see everything open to his eye as he looks at nature. The poet expresses her love as a purely natural phenomenon:

> I am as earth upturned, alive with seed
> For summer's silence and for autumn's fire.

Caught in the creative urges implicit in nature, she feels unified with nature but does not wish her partner to recognize her surrender to these primal promptings: "I am all things I would not let you know." But this natural development beyond words is still apparent, so even as she thinks she escapes with a retention of her own self, she is caught by a lover through his acceptance of her implicit union with nature:

> I may escape — you hold my body still
> In stretching out your hand to feel the wind.

Love is all-encompassing in these poems, so the poet, surrendering to it completely with candour and honesty, lays herself open to attack. The full knowledge of another individual as a necessary part of a complete love leads each partner to be at the mercy of the other. Thus, love is not all sweetness and a bringing forth through union; it can be ruthless. In "Ask Of The Winds" the poet uses details from spring to suggest the awakening of love within her, but she senses the power of her lover, a power which so shakes her that in spite of the emergence of new life, she realizes the ruthlessness and coldness in his love. Indeed, so overwhelming is his strength that often she feels left outside his experience:

> What was it, after all,
> The night, or the night-scented phlox?
> Your mind, or the garden where
> Always the wind stalks?
>
> What was it, what brief cloak
> Of magic fell about
> Lending you such a radiance, —
> Leaving me out?
>
> What was it, why was I
> Shivering like a tree,
> Blind in a golden garden
> Where only you could see? ("Alienation")

The notion, then, of distance, a notion that crops up time and again in Dorothy Livesay's poetry, a distance between people, in this case between lovers, is part of the poet's concept of love. She seems to be suggesting that union through love is only momentary and that it includes struggle for dominance. The release from individuality through complete union seems to be too open a position, may bring about such a thorough nakedness of soul as to threaten the very basis of the personality. In "Blindness" Dorothy Livesay uses the image of dancing as a symbol of this ecstatic release but within the poem she expresses the idea that that release is too dangerous if seen by the other partner. It might lead to a destruction of individuality:

> You did not see me dancing,
> Even then!
> Your blindness saves my soul's integrity.

Perhaps the poet is even suggesting that the blindness is an effect of love and so paradoxically the power of love capable of dominating is denied that power

because of the ecstasy of love itself. But the paradox within love becomes more complex in the context of such a poem as "The Unbeliever", for here the poet takes up the problem of individuality again. The poem poses the question of commitment. It suggests that there must be total involvement, no holding back, the state that might menace individual integrity. Yet at the same time anything less than complete commitment leads to failure and lack of communication. As if to stress this aspect, "The Unbeliever" develops by a series of questions. The poet asks why she put no trust in the words of her love; seemingly, she believes that she could retain her own self this way. But it has led to a breakdown. The voice she did not believe is now silent so she is "Quiet now in these lonely places."

In fact, three or four of the poems in *Signpost* are concerned with the loss of love, the moving apart of the lovers. In "Consideration", for instance, the opening stanza suggests how words become weapons, destructive with "biting analysis/Of one another." "A Song For Ophelia" is a simple lyric about loneliness, the sense of desolation after love has broken down. Yet love persists, if only in the memory; sometimes, in spite of the deliberate attempt to forget it, love returns, somewhat shadowy, after its "cobweb image" ("Dust") has been brushed from the heart. The ghost of love returns, seen in objects associated with it — and at such times the anguish of the loss of love returns as well:

> Whenever I passed the house
> At far, rare intervals
> Memory stabbed,
> The tree at the gate griefed.
>
> But now, passing it daily,
> I scarcely remember —
> Pain has a too familiar look
> To need the averted head. ("Neighbourhood")

The same kind of feeling is expressed in a poem "Time" which does not appear in *Signpost* but from its position in *Selected Poems* was probably written at the same time:

> I opened wide a furnace door
> And hot flame seared my face:
> I was surprised, that after breach of time
> I could not love you less.

Perhaps this discussion of the early love poems has suggested an overly schematic approach on the part of the poet. This is not so. The poems are

attempts to express the varying moods occuring during the course of a love affair with images pointing to psychological states and conflicts. Not all the poems dealing with love in this volume are successful. Some retain a kind of adolescent vagueness of romantic feeling, some strive for ambivalence of meaning which results only in obscurity or, conversely, over-simplification. But on the whole, Robert Weaver's summary of these poems quoted earlier is accurate. They convince as personal statements; they are believable as notations on personal experience. At the same time, however, they reach a certain objectivity because of the tone of directness amounting in most cases to a starkness. The images are not often over-developed; the poems themselves are generally short and to the point, as if the poet — and this is somewhat surprising considering both the age of the poet when she wrote these poems and the general poetic atmosphere in Canada when these poems were published — as if, then, the poet is determined to get to the root of her emotions in order to express them as openly and frankly as possible without making them too private in their connotation. Indeed, the closing poem in the volume, "Protest," is in its series of questions a kind of manifesto about honesty, a pledge of openness and candour:

> Can I help it, if the wind
> Catches crows and holds them pinned
>
> Across the skyway in a row,
> Scaring off the rain and snow?
>
> Can I help it then, if I
> Seize forgotten exstacy —
>
> Give away closed thoughts of mine,
> Hang my secrets on the line?

In view of the association of crows and flight in her poetry with re-birth and release, she may even be suggesting in this poem that a poetry of real honesty is a defence itself against the loss of love, that by expressing it accurately, the poet can retain a good deal of the meaning and joy of the experience of love.

HONESTY AND CANDOUR are essential components of the poems she wrote about her later experience of love in *The Unquiet Bed*, and *Plainsongs*. These poems, stemming as they do from her maturity as both poet and woman, taking into consideration her wholehearted concern about the posi-

tion of woman in society and therefore the integrity of woman in a love relationship, are obviously for the most part more compelling statements than those in *Signpost.*

The poet prepares us for the section devoted to the love poems in *The Unquiet Bed* by closing the previous section, which as we saw earlier concentrated on the individual liberty of woman in personal life, with two poems about the reawakening of love within woman. And again she expresses this in an intensely personal manner. The first of these poems is "Eve". The poet notices an old apple tree, "the last survivor of a pioneer/orchard" which is "miraculously still/ bearing". She stoops to pick up one of the fallen apples, to possess it, to taste it "earth-sweet". And the tree she now recognizes as a symbol of herself:

> In fifty seconds, fifty summers sweep
> and shake me —
> I am alive! can stand
> up still
> hoarding this apple
> in my hand.

She feels this earth sweetness developing within her as an "unwithering" in the second of these poems, "Second Coming". She thinks of blossoms in autumn, colours of growth and purity. Through love she grows to another vital existence, "coming be/coming". This poem prefigures perhaps the insistence on physicality in the love poems which follow. But the titles of both these poems with their general religious implications also suggest that physical manifestations of love, however momentary, may include some spiritual meaning and revelation, and in some of the love poems the spirituality does arise from the physical presences of the lovers themselves, so that the ideas of separation, darkness, silence and distance in these poems take on weightier values because of the context in which they have been placed.

An insistent demand runs through the love poems, a demand that comes from her essential individuality but also a demand that comes from the masculine opposite partner. "Be woman", is the opening line of "The Taming" and in this poem being a woman means being submissive in sexual union but paradoxically that basic femininity has its own strength which will take away some of the mastery of the male. In a way "The Taming" is a poem that emphasizes the give-and-take of love in the strictest sense. The sexual experience puts her at the mercy of the partner:

Be woman. I did not know
the measure of the words
until that night
when you denied me darkness
even the right
to turn in my own light.

The language here suggests that love must be fully acknowledged in the open; woman must give herself in order to release her own womanhood. Although this sounds like the passive feminine element as described in "Bartok And The Geranium", the closing lines of "The Taming" indicate that this release through sexual union in fact gives the woman at least an equality of mastery in the experience:

Do as I say, I heard you faintly
over me fainting:
Be woman.

Thus, the sexual experience makes her face her essential self, her womanhood with both its submissive qualities and its strength. Through the physical experience comes a release from physicality. Woman is not to be considered merely as a physical piece of property. Love must give her freedom to remain herself even within the gestures of submission. "I'm not just bones/and crockery," she says in "The Unquiet Bed". She wants the freedom to be part of a unity, a loss of one kind of freedom in order to release a true individuality. She has held to the idea that

love
might set men free
yet hold them fast
in loyalty.

So love must always "make room for me", the "I", the individual human being, even in the act of union.

In spite of the ecstasies and freedom of love, in spite of the joy she experiences in rediscovering love at this point in her life — see particularly "A Letter" which repeats the image of the tree used in "Eve" and "Second Coming" — the poet acknowledges the terrors, failures, and paradoxes of love. She sees its creative joys but also its abysses, gaps, and silences. "And Give Us Our Trespasses" can be seen as a poem about the dark kingdom of human love.

It is a poem coming out of darkness, involving the darkness and the silence in itself. Love is the swaying form; the first section shows the room of love shaking and quaking. This movement dispels the darkness "at midnight":

a socket
was plunged in the wall

and my eyes sprang open.

Love is beyond words, perhaps a parallel with poetry which tries to catch the more complex beat beneath ordinary language. Speech in love is "out of turn". One must listen. "I heard only your heartbeat." The poet recognizes her inadequacies, a sort of recognition of the impotence of language even in the act of using words. The movement and the image of light breaking returns in the poem's fifth section:

quivering water
under the smite
of sunlight

But after this epiphany there is the return to words, to make sense of the silence and darkness. "The telephone" is "always available/for transmitting messages" but to make the effort to speak is like trying "to push the weight/ of a mountain" so the poem closes with an acceptance of that large area of silence "between the impulse to speak/ and the speaking" for in that area "storms crackle". So we are finally apart in love because of our inadequacies just as we finally have to rely on the silence beneath words because our use of words is always inadequate. There is distance between lovers; there is distance between silence and speech:

Forgive us our

distances.

Images of dream and sleep figure a great deal in the love poems in *The Unquiet Bed*. The poet sees the experience of love as something other-worldly and dream-like ("A Book of Charms"), something beyond words as in a dream ("The Dream"), but at times sleep and dream represent loneliness and distance, as in "The Vigil".

Some poems in *The Unquiet Bed* and *Plainsongs* attempt to describe the momentary blisses and fearful transient qualities of human love. "Old Song", in *The Unquiet Bed*, expresses in controlled and resigned tone the passing of love, the impermanence of a human relationship even though it may achieve harmony

and union. "You cannot hold/what vanishes." Humans must accept transience in love, "Your bones may melt/in me/or in another woman" but that acceptance of momentary things is of the essence of love, for "the essence is/to catch the bird in season." In a later poem in *Plainsongs*, "Con Sequences", Dorothy Livesay uses images drawn from nature to suggest the distances between lovers and also the growth and violent surge of love. When there is no desire in the lovers, then a face "is stone/carved bone" but this hardness can crack and disintegrate through love:

> I wait for lightning
> an avalanche
> to tear the hillside

Underneath the placid surface, love rests, waiting for growth:

> Kick the leaves
> aside
> yellow roots
> cry for greening.

So love is a kind of undersurface that rises through the union of sex. Love, paradoxically, is there, both in lack of desire and in passionate response:

> The sun shines
> on the bald hill
> or the lush valley
> equally fiercely.

"Four Songs" (*The Unquiet Bed*) expresses Dorothy Livesay's personal explanations about her need and desire for love as a mature woman. She assesses frankly her indulgence in sexual love, trying to counter superficial arguments:

> People will say
> I did it for delight
> you — for compassion

but she establishes in the first song that it was indeed a matter of give-and-take:

> *Give me the will*, you said
> *and in return*
> *take from my fill*
> *of passion.*

In those terms, then, people's opinions about this affair were wrong, for

> You did it from design
> I — from compulsion.

She recognizes the dangers of mere indulgence in passion but she cannot reject the passion, even though it may be quenched for both herself and her lover. The fire of her desire "envelops" her lover; "attracts the moth/and the murderer too". She realizes the double-sidedness of insistence on passion:

> Dido knew
> this fire
> and chose
> that funeral.

She finds her passion urgent and insistent, a "hunger." Her body is "blunt" and needs "the forked light/ning of tongues." Her passion is assuaged but "thirst remains" for the gentleness and calm of love. In this third lyric there is an indirect return to the idea of words in "tongues" and the fourth lyric gathers together the images of fire, thirst and words. The inexpressible experience of human love is cooled to the level of words, giving a taste of the sensual pleasure just as a poem in a way gives a sense of the ineffable experience which may give rise to the poem:

> I drink now
> no fiery stuff
> burning the mouth
> I drink the liquid flow
> of words and taste
> song in the mouth.

"The Touching" is another series of lyrics which describes the sexual experience more explicitly. The image of coldness and warmth is repeated as love is seen as a protection against coldness. Love as a kind of violence, a union of entrance and submission, ("pierce me again/gently") leads to completion, to a merging in new life. The joining of man and woman in the sexual experience enlarges the individuality of woman, for the "steady pulse" of the penis she feels as "my second heart/beating".

The second lyric plays with concepts of light and dark, revelation and darkness, submergence in warmth "under the cover" so that love lightens that darkness.

The third lyric repeats the notion of growth, for the poet acknowledges a kind

of re-birth beyond words through love. It releases her into new elements; she becomes "part of some mystery". She is swallowed within her lover but although she loses her own individuality, she feels herself within a larger, more basic and elemental self:

I drown
in your identity
I am not I
but root
shell
fire

so that at the moment of climax, that moment of completion and union, she is somehow alone, deep in some underworld of darkness from which she struggles to be born anew. At this epiphany she becomes both mother and child at the moment of birth:

I tear through the womb's room
give birth
and yet alone
deep in the dark
earth
I am the one wrestling
the element re-born.

Here again is the image of isolation in a dark world, the image of violent struggle leading to a break-through to creation. This same image is repeated in "The Woman" (*Plainsongs*), in which she cries for relief, for "the fearful knot of pain" to be untied. She wants release through the climax to the urgency of love:

When you make me come
it is the breaking of a shell
a shattering birth

how many thousand children
we have conceived!

Through love she lives on the tips of her senses. Through submission to her lover her whole sensual life is opened, even though she recognizes that she is in some way held and lost to herself:

never thought me bound
until one night all night I lay
under your will and mind

and heard you play my secrets
over and over in your hand ("The Cave," *Plainsongs*)

so that

over all
my body's fingertips
day breaks
a thousand crystals ("At Dawn," *Plainsongs*)

The idea of loss of self, of complete submission in order to reach to the elemental life in which a new self is released opens "The Notations Of Love" (*The Unquiet Bed*). The poem moves into the area of silence in the sense that at one point the poet is accused of being unable to speak of love. There is only cruelty but she sees love as being hard in its strength and asks her lover to take love "the hard way". Then in "facing the rock" he will feel "the fountain's force". This force of love goes beyond age and time. Of the senses it is touch, the joining of flesh that offers its secrets. A finger may trace crows' feet round the eyes but

the lips stay fresh
only the tongue
unsheathes its secret skin
and bolts
the lightning in.

Thus, lovers come to union through experience beyond words; they are joined across silence and darkness, and even when separated by distance, the substructure of their love can seem to join them at almost a physical level:

especially around
these absences
our minds are twins
they circle and unite
my left arm is your right arm
bound even in flight

The physical union of lovers continues even after the act of love and "The Notations of Love" closes with the idea of continuance beyond sexual love. Out of "the dead/of night" comes light; she has lost one kind of individuality but has gained a new understanding of her essential elemental self:

day or night, I
am undressed

dance
differently.

Paradoxically, the poem following "The Notations Of Love" which closes on the idea of new release and a kind of continuance is a poem that hints at the break-down of love. "Moving Out" uses the dismantling of a house as a symbol of the paring away of love. The physical features of the house make the house, just as the physical love of the lover makes the love so that now she can only

find an upright bed
between your bones —
without the body of your house
I'd have no home.

The poem, then, contains an allusion to the possibility of parting, to the disintegration of love and indeed in *Plainsongs* there are poems which offer a bleak statement of the gradual collapse of love. In "Auguries" the poet drops into the darkness, perhaps that darkness that love can lift her from. Here, however, she waits in the dark and has ominous dreams, waiting perhaps to be broken by love like "a shell in your hand". She finds herself alone in a dark garden, the trees shrouded and black around her. After the presentation of these dismal dreams, there is a stark statement of the denial of love: "you have said no." The poem ends with a series of questions, listing her hopes for a return to love. In the future she wants the dark garden of her dream to become "a green place", where she will be held again in a landscape where "your hands were the sky itself/cupping my body". She waits hopefully to be lifted "on girders of sunlight" out of the gloom of her present state.

Two other poems in *Plainsongs* give indications of the loss of love. In "The Sign" there is a reference to separation, though there is "yet touching". The progress of a log rushing along with the flow of a river, whirled and battered against the banks, sucked under the surface, then swept out of sight represents the vicissitudes of their love, so that, even though the poem ends in a joining of hands, the emphasis in the poem has been on separation, distance and disappearance. "The Uninvited" also suggests that the shadow of a third lies between the lovers, and the poet is conscious at the end of the poem of "another voice/singing under ice."

The closing pages of *Plainsongs* seem to concentrate on the separation of the lovers and the attempt by the poet to assess her situation, to come to terms now with the absence of love. In "Another Journey" she sees herself as escaping from

the captivity of love. She recognizes signs around her in nature that might make her cling to the past: a switchback trail that almost turns back on itself, but she moves steadily upwards, her eyes fixed resolutely in front of her. She may be moving in a darkness, but the poem closes with a glint of light, a return to life:

Night
spills stars
into the valley
I am aware
of cedars breathing
turning the trees
move with me
UP the mountain.

THROUGHOUT THE LOVE POETRY in *The Unquiet Bed* and *Plainsongs* Dorothy Livesay emphasizes the physical aspects of human love, so it is not surprising that the poem "The Operation" (*Plainsongs*), connects her experience of love and her recovery from it, together with a general reassessment of her situation of her life as she found it at that time.

"The Operation" opens with a sense of crisis. The poet has reached a crucial point in her life, this crisis made all the more emphatic in her mind because it happened after her tremendous experience of love:

And I too
after the blaze of being
alive
faced the wall
over which breath must be thrown.

Her view of the doctor corresponds to her view of her lover. He is one who uses violence, a knife, to save her. She is a "victim/grateful to be saved," so she gives herself completely to him.

After the operation the doctor watches over her with "silent white precision" and with solicitude until there grows between them an "intimate flashing bond". So far in the poem the hospital experience is a kind of parallel with her experience of love, so that her emergence from the hospital is in a sense a re-birth. She must learn to live again; she must learn to face the world of external reality: "I have to breathe deep here/to be alive again".

The second section is devoted to a meditation about her response to love. She

tries to evaluate it. Just as she has to rely on herself to effect a complete physical cure after the operation, so she must assess her chances in the aftermath of love, which she now sees as "a sickness" which the lovers attempted to cure in many ways: by separation or even by physical indulgence. The disease racked them and at times their sexual union was an effort to effect a cure. Eventually, their separation has led to some kind of cure, at least for her lover, as she now watches him "a well man", though she herself is still trapped in gloom: "rain/ smirches the pain." This image suggests that she cannot face her new situation in a clear-sighted fashion and the poem adds further details of poor vision:

> I face
> wet pavement distorted
> mirrors

A picture of her lover suddenly breaks into the poem but she dismisses it by the choice of an act of violence:

> I decide to complete the operation
> tear myself into four quarters
> scatter the pieces.

This will lead to re-creation, a new life, in "uncoiling/animal sun —/another kingdom."

The last section of the poem returns to a key image in Dorothy Livesay's poetry — a doorway — used generally as an entrance to new experience, as a release, a revelation or emergence into some new world. Here, as she stands in a doorway, she takes stock of herself in specific physical terms. She realizes that by an acceptance of what she is now she can rebuild a life. She can now see her lover in an objective light, enabling her to concentrate on her own life:

> for now the *he* the *you* are one
> and gone
> and I must measure me.

Thus, she imperatively exhorts herself to grow again, to stretch for the life force of the sun, "reach a dazzled strangeness/sun-pierced sky."

The process of recovery and the stoic insistence on individual growth are expressed again in two poems as yet uncollected in book form. Both appear in a magazine *First Encounter*, which appeared in 1970. It is significant that both poems repeat images that have been part of the love poetry. "Rowan Red Rowan" takes up the tree image previously used in "Eve", "Second Coming" and "A Letter". She sees herself here somehow like a tree

winter enclosed crystal
pale mouth stiff
and the smile frozen

But there are bright berries on the tree. Still, the numbness she feels is perhaps a kindly numbness because spring, like a time of new growth, may release her frozen tears:

I cannot cry till the far green time
when the hills loosen
and the tears in streams rove through my veins
into frenzied blossom.

The long hard look she has been forced to take at herself is the subject of the other poem, "Fancy!". Her self-regarding has revealed some undesirable features to her. It has made more aware of her "burdened body/the shrivelling eyes/the withered chin". Yet the poem closes with an image of life:

Yet still I live! move with the dancer
stamping within.

So she has emerged from crucial experiences not unscathed but with knowledge and with a stoic evaluation of her own life. The sequence of the love poems in *The Unquiet Bed* and *Plainsongs* are the most candid revelations of the experience of love as seen by a woman in Canadian poetry. Some poems fall short of their aims because the poet seems more concerned with poetic theories about form and lining. Sometimes the structure of lining seem arbitrary, although in most cases the use of broken short lining together with rhyme, half-rhyme and assonance mirrors the changing and breathless quality of the experiences themselves, as well as rendering some sense of the spirituality of the experience, for the best poems in the sequence seem enclosed in suspension, caught in an ecstatic calm. At other times the poet mars a poem by making the reader too conscious of an image, so that it becomes for him a conceit, a rhetorical device that militates against the tone of honesty and directness in most of the poems. There is occasional over-emphasis and repetition, even (though rarely) an indulgence in romanticism and sentimentality. But these are only minor blemishes on an otherwise distinguished set of poems.. They are examples of the very best in Dorothy Livesay's later work in which she is not afraid to be intensely personal and frank because she is able to express her feelings immediately and yet objectively so that she herself is subjected to the appraising and critical apparatus she uses in her own poetry.

CATALONIA

Dorothy Livesay

THE FLAG of darkness lowers at half-mast
blotting the blood-stained hieroglyphs from eyes
strained from the smoke, the flares, the rat-tat-tat
of guns' incessant bark. A sudden lull
fans wind on brow, recalls from far off hills
the ones who rest . . . oh unbelievably
a girl who rests tired head on easy arm
and sleeps encircled by her own heart-beat.

But we, grey snakes who twist and squirm our way
from hump to sodden hump, roll in a hole
of slime, scarring our knees to keep awake
(earth's fermentation working overtime).
Horizons reel, groping for an axis,
stars burn in whirling rockets overhead —
we wrench ourselves over the last trench, down
down, down in scurrying scramble tossed
towards lost lines, lost outposts, lost defence . . .

THE CAPTAIN of the third brigade
sprang from a hillock where he peered
into the flare-lit dark. He crouched
and doubled up, ran to a gunner's nest.
"They've quit" he hissed. "They've left the ridge
and swarmed to cover, in the wood . . .

Thirty years ago the last great battle of the resistance by the Loyalist Government of Spain and the International Brigades against the invasion of General Franco took place in Catalonia. Short news reels of the battle, newspaper reports, letters from Mackenzie-Papineau Brigade volunteers from Canada provided the background for this poem, written in spring, 1939. It was never published, probably because in Canada there were no magazines or quarterlies interested.

Background information on the political events which stirred those times has been admirably documented in "Unamuno's Last Lecture", by Louis Portillo, published in Cyril Connolly's Horizon.

D. L.

The tanks? they've left the bloody tanks
defenceless . . . wounded men will be inside."
Then Sorensen came up. He'd seen
the tired retreat from our right flank.
Tall, lean — as a stripped tree —
he hung above the captain, panting words.
"What's that?" The captain thrust a fist
in the man's face. "You mean it, Sorensen?"
"I'll go" the lean one said . . . and down
he slithered on his knees, towards the tanks.

INSIDE a tank the smoky darkness lurched
and stupidly the air, acrid with oil,
clutched at a face. It shoved his nostrils in,
clung to his palate with a gritty clamp,
branded his lungs. He choked and coughed
tried to restrict his chest from heaving rasps —

crouched on the floor, head thrust against steel wall.
And now again pain stung his shoulder-blade
his arm, still bleeding, hung beside him limp —
a stranger's arm. He looked at it, and saw
himself the same, inertly cut away
from human contact, blood of brotherhood.
The sweat broke on his brow, the blood closed down
against all sound of guns. He swayed, and fell.

The boy he fell upon stirred from his dream,
moved, and felt out the knife-wound in his side.
The soggy bandages were now a wad
of blood, clotted and warm; the quivering flesh
throbbed like a heart-beat pounding through the room . . .
his room at home so clear now in his mind
shuttered with slanting shafts of light, the chinks
of day on rosy plastered wall, his chairs
hunch-backed, the cool tile floors with candle-grease
scattered in silver coins beside the bed . . .
But O, that voice . . . what voice sang out to him
screaming in siren tones, Arise, awake,
stand up and strike, strike back and shoot,
shoot till the last strip fumbles in your hand — ?
till silence huddles in the muffled tank.

The tank! He rose up, leaning on one arm
then crawled away from his companion's side.
The fumes, the oily fumes, spluttered within his brain
but dragging himself up, he reached the slit
and peered outside. The earth still seemed to heave
with showers of fire still bursting from its bowels.

Then something moved, a shadow writhing low
upon the ground; and Sorensen burst in
upon the tank, gasping and hurried, thrusting bandages
towards him, helping him stand up and breathe.
"The other soldier's dead." They took his gun

and letters spilling from his pockets, these
the two remembered. Then ploughed on to find
the next tank, and the next, where other men
lay trapped and helpless, ammunition gone.

NOW WE RETREAT in better order, confident
of gun on shoulder, captain in command.
The wounded swing in swift-made hammocks, safe
from guttering death or prisoner's assault.
And as they move others are marching down,
people are shuffling down the roads of Spain
bundled with babies, chattels, cooking-pots
a donkey-load of warmth; a basket, light
with bits of bread, dried beans, remains
of other hasty meals, swallowed between
the zoom of air-raids over village streets.
People are marching with all song
gone out, all sunlight flattened grey
upon their faces; now in steady haste
pushing ahead to valleys where the mountain shade
leans kindly down, where snow
looks good to sleep upon. No winds can blow
more fiercely than a bomb, and winter's frost
will pierce steel needles lighter far to bear
than thrust of shrapnel splitting under skin.

People are marching, marching, and they meet
the tattered tunics of the soldiers, some of whom
walk bare-backed in the cold. A woman stops
and gives a shawl, a skirt for covering
for soldiers on ahead, who march to make
a further stand.
Though darkness fall once more,
a tattered flag, the men will stand upright
spirit sustained, the floor of Spain
a ground not tilled in vain with blood

with bones of young men scattered far;
not fertilized in vain, O grey-green gloss
of olives, wind-bent on a hill, of earth
supported by the vineyards' yield, and wheat
crisp in the sun. No more sterility
or drouth or barrenness is yours
O rolling plains; who make a covering now
for breath and bone; for growing hands
whose fingers work beneath the roots, to burst
out of the earth again, another spring!

1939

NO OTHER WAY

Sinclair Ross's Stories and Novels

Sandra Djwa

This is a fundamentalist town. To the letter it believes the Old Testament stories that we, wisely or presumptuously, choose to accept only as tales and allegories.

AS A NEWFOUNDLANDER, I have always felt a great fondness for the writings of Sinclair Ross. I do not quite understand the nature of the attraction, whether it is his concept of a prairie nature — hard, with overtones of fatalism — which corresponds to my own view of Newfoundland, or whether it is simply his wry observations of the circumlocutions of the Puritan way — a sensibility which also strikes a familiar note. In any event, whenever the term "Canadian novel" comes to mind, I find myself gravitating towards Ross and particularly towards his sometimes puzzling first novel, *As For Me and My House*.

Reading through *Queen's Quarterly* of the late 30's and early 40's, it is not too difficult to recognize branches of the novel. Here are the familiar characters and concerns of Ross's world: the Steves, the Philips, the Pauls, the young boy with the horse ("A Day with Pegasus," 1938); the chance intrusion of the artist into the prairie town ("Cornet at Night," 1939); the paralyzing lack of communication between husband and wife ("The Lamp at Noon," 1938, "The Painted Door," 1939); or, for that matter, between friends ("Jug and Bottle," 1939) which leads inevitably to further betrayal; the "unappetizing righteousness" and pansy-embroidered motto, "As For Me and My House We Will Serve the Lord" of "Cornet at Night."[1] Here, too, in the short story, as in "No Other Way," first published in *Nash's* magazine (London, 1938), is the unmistakable silhouette of Mrs. Bentley. Older, more haggard than the protagonist of *As For Me and My House*, Hatty Glenn is equally dependent on the love of her still-elusive husband of over twenty years.

Reviewing the short stories and novels, I seem to find that character recedes into the emotional landscape; the primary impression is of those short paragraphs

which establish the natural landscape and its relation to a perceiving consciousness. Throughout Ross's work, there is a sense of a bleak, hard nature — the loneliness and isolation of the prairie winter, the indifferent sun which scorches the summer wheat. Against this nature, man is insignificant:

> In the clear bitter light the long white miles of prairie landscape seemed a region strangely alien to life. Even the distant farmsteads she could see served only to intensify a sense of isolation. Scattered across the face of so vast and bleak a wilderness it was difficult to conceive them as a testimony of human hardihood and endurance. Rather they seemed futile, lost, to cower before the implacibility of snowswept earth and clear pale sun-chilled sky. (*Lamp at Noon.*)

Mrs. Bentley, looking across the open prairies and towards the Alberta foothills, recognizes both man's insignificance and his need to project human meaning into the natural landscape:

> We've all lived in a little town too long. The wilderness here makes us uneasy. I felt it the first night I walked alone on the river bank — a queer sense of something cold and fearful, something inanimate, yet aware of us. A Main Street is such a self-sufficient little pocket of existence, so smug, compact, that here we feel abashed somehow before the hills, their passiveness, the unheeding way they sleep. We climb them, but they withstand us, remain as serene and unrevealed as ever. The river slips past us, unperturbed by our coming and going, stealthily confident. We shrink from our insignificance. The stillness and solitude — we think a force or presence into it — even a hostile presence, deliberate, aligned against us — for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness, where we may have no meaning at all. (*As For Me and My House*)

This is a nature against which man must struggle — not just to become a man — but simply to exist and perhaps, if he is particularly fortunate and determined, to exist in some meaningful way. Most of these stories are a legacy of the drought years of the thirties on the prairies — the depression moving imperceptibly into the war years. Even in Ross's second novel, *The Well*, where the protagonist, Chris Howe, is given an urban childhood, the primary emphasis is still placed on the essentials of survival: "to outwit, score, defeat, survive — Boyle Street had permitted nothing else." However, as is later suggested in this novel and throughout the first novel, existence of some meaningful way becomes the ultimate goal. For Philip Bentley this search for meaning involves the attempt to find dignity and purpose in nature and in himself through his art:

> Tonight Philip made a sketch of Joe Lawson.... He's sitting at a table, half-hunched over it, his hands lying heavy and inert in front of him like stones. The

> hands are mostly what you notice. Such big, disillusioned, steadfast hands, so faithful to the earth and seasons that betray them. I didn't know before what drought was really like, watching a crop dry up, going on again. I didn't know that Philip knew either.

In many of the short stories and also in some of the entries in Mrs. Bentley's journal, human action is presented as the reaction to natural events. The young farm boy of "One's a Heifer" is sent out into the open prairie because a blizzard has caused the cattle to stray; Ellen, the young wife of "The Lamp at Noon," is driven to madness by the incessant wind and dust beating against the walls of the house and stable, "as if the fingers of a giant hand were tightening to collapse them." This reaction to the natural event can precipitate a quarrel, most often between husband and wife, sometimes with a young boy as the interested bystander, and the development of the plot quite often lies in the working out of the emotional tension that has been generated by the conflict.

Because this conflict is intimately connected with the struggle for survival, the tragedy of these stories is that there is often no possible reconciliation of any kind. When an author's horizon is composed of "the bare essentials of a landscape, sky and earth," there are no compromises open: if land and weather fail man, the struggle for survival can only end tragically, the extent of the tragedy being largely determined by the strength of the person concerned. Will, the young farmer of "Not by Rain Alone", has a moment of bleak recognition when he suddenly sees the future which must surely lie ahead of himself and his sweetheart, Eleanor:

> He was thinking of other dry spells — other wheat that had promised thirty bushels and yielded ten. It was such niggard land. At the best they would grub along painfully, grow tired and bitter, indifferent to each other. It was the way of the land. For a farmer like him there could be no other way. (*Lamp at Noon*)

As in the poetry of Pratt, this struggle against nature becomes a test of endurance in which only the very strong such as Paul of "The Lamp at Noon" survive, but with such heart-breaking self awareness as to make it almost unendurable, while those who are weaker, such as his wife Ellen, are destroyed. As Laurence notes, Ross's men seem to know by instinct and by habit that strength, if not actual, at least apparent, is demanded, and each of them refuses to communicate to his wife those admissions of failure and of helplessness which would undermine the appearance of strength until the final, irreversible betrayal. John, the good but stolid farmer of "The Painted Door," is simply unable to communicate; his wife's tragedy is that she can see but not accept the fact until it is too late. Paul

of "The Lamp at Noon" cannot accept his wife's anguish; even after the final devastating betrayal when he realizes that compromise with the land is no longer possible, when his crops are completely destroyed and he is stripped of "vision and purpose, faith in the land, in the future, in himself," he is still attempting to find a way to withstand his wife and to go on: "For so deep were his instincts of loyalty to the land that still, even with the images of his betrayal stark upon his mind, his concern was how to withstand her, how to go on again and justify himself." For a farmer such as Paul or Will or the John of "A Field of Wheat," there is "no other way" than to go on, and this continued struggle against tremendous odds becomes a revelation of the real self, as is suggested in Ross's description of the stripping down of Paul's character to "a harsh and clenched virility . . . at the cost of more engaging qualities . . . a fulfillment of his inmost and essential nature."

For other characters of Ross's fictional world, the stripping down which leads to self discovery is equally important. Often made in terms of a sudden discovery of one's essential nature, it delimits the path that this nature must follow. For the country boy of "Cornet at Night," a chance meeting with a musician, Philip, makes him aware of his vocation as an artist: "This way of the brief lost gleam against the night was my way too. And alone I cowered a moment, understanding that there could be no escape, no other way." (*Queen's Quarterly*, Winter 1939-40). For the Bentleys, the gradual stripping away of the "false fronts" of dishonest life leads to the realization that they must get away from the kind of world that the small town of Horizon imposes, to a community where essential self can be safely revealed: "I asked him didn't he want to get out of the Church, didn't he admit that saving a thousand dollars was the only way".

Ross's earliest references to the "way" which character and environment impose are found in his first published story, "No Other Way." Hatty Glenn, the female protagonist of this story, is a simpler character than Mrs. Bentley, as she is most strongly motivated by the habit of parsimony. After a lifetime of "grubbing" while her husband "schemed," she is weather-beaten while he is still comparatively attractive; to make matters worse, he now ignores her. In a moment of insight, she recognizes that nothing in the world can better her relationship with her husband, and that for her there is "no other way" than to continue along in the same tragi-comic fashion:

> She glanced over her shoulder and saw the half-chewed turnips being slobbered into the dirt. December — January — a pail a day.

And then in a flash she was clutching a broom and swooping into the garden. 'Get out, you greedy old devils! After them, Tubbie!'

Butter twenty five cents a pound. There was no other way. (*Nash's*, Oct. 1934)

In Ross's more sober stories, character and environment can combine like a vise to grip a character and set up a course of direction that even repeated failure does not change. His characters appear to be driven, like those of Grove in *Settlers of the Marsh*, to act as they do until one or another of a partnership is destroyed. When Paul is finally willing to make some compromises with the land, he finds his wife mad and his child dead. Having betrayed her husband, Ann of "The Painted Door" has a revelation of his intrinsic strength and determines to make it up to him. He, however, has already walked out into the blizzard where he freezes to death. Coulter, the inept recruit who has been repeatedly befriended by the soldier narrator of "Jug and Bottle," is accidentally let down by his friend. Crushed by an overwhelming burden of guilt and despair, and with no one to turn to, Coulter kills himself: " . . . caught helpless in some primitive mechanism of conscience like a sheaf in the gear of a thresher, borne on inexorably by the chain of guilt to the blade of punishment." (*Queen's Quarterly*, Winter 1949-50). Many such scenes of human despair and futility suggest that the President of the Immortals also has his sport with the people of Ross's prairie. Mrs. Bentley comments on this when observing the work-torn country congregation which is still waiting and praying after five years without a crop: "And tonight again the sun went down through a clear, brassy sky. Surely it must be a very great faith that such indifference on the part of its deity cannot weaken — a very great faith, or a very foolish one."

ON THE WHOLE, despite the suggestion of naturalism, particularly in the metaphor used to describe Coulter, Ross is not a naturalist in the sense of Norris's *The Octopus* or even in the modified sense of Stead's *Grain*. There is a strong streak of determinism running through Ross's work, but it is most often kept firmly within a Christian context through a respectful address to "Providence," albeit with some irony as suggested by the title, "Not by Rain Alone," of one short story where the crops fail. Philip of *As For Me and My House* " . . . keeps on believing that there's a will stronger than his own deliberately pitted against him . . . a supreme being interested in him, opposed to him, arranging with tireless concern the details of his life. . . ." The good man of "The Run-

away" finds himself troubled by God's justice, especially when the scales are eventually weighed in his favour: "What kind of reckoning was it that exacted life and innocence for an old man's petty greed? Why, if it was retribution, had it struck so clumsily?" (*Lamp at Noon*).

The whole question of the ways of the Old Testament God to man is an important one for the characters of Ross's fictional world and particularly in relation to the first novel, *As For Me and My House*. Here this question carries with it that latter-day Puritanism of the psychological search for self, often expressed in terms of the "way" that must be taken. As in Rudy Wiebe's novel of the prairies, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Harold Horwood's description of Newfoundland, *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday*, or Margaret Laurence's *A Jest of God*, the novel presents a world in which the outward representations of Christianity are without real meaning — simply empty forms without spirit — and in which characters must learn to reject the false gods without before it is possible to find the true God within and, as a sign of this, an authentic sense of direction.

Ostensibly, the "way" of *As For Me and My House* is the Christian way indicated by the title. But this structure is steadily undercut through the central metaphor of the "false-front" and through explicit statement until we come to see the Bentleys metaphorically as pagan priest and priestess ministering to an Old Testament World. It is not until the novel has moved full cycle through sin, sacrifice, and repentence, that there is a pulling down of the old false gods and a revelation of the true self. In this sense the novel is, as is suggested by Roy Daniells in his fine introduction to the New Canadian Library edition, the struggle of the Puritan soul to find the way. At the beginning of the novel, Mr. and Mrs. Bentley, the new clergyman and his wife, are hanging out their shingle, "As For Me and My House . . ."; at the end of the book they are taking it in. In between, the process of the novel has involved a shedding of their defenses, a breaking down of the hypocritical "false fronts" behind which they have hidden both from each other and from the townspeople.

The metaphor of the "false front" is probed in basically psychological terms. Philip Bentley, aware that his new role as minister is hypocritical, is tortured by his own dishonesty. Unable to draw or paint constructively, he is reduced to turning out drawing after drawing of self-analysis: Main Streets with their false-fronted stores, all "stricken with a look of self-awareness and futility." In the journal entries which make up the novel, his wife admits that there is something in Philip's art which "hurts," but as she finds it easier to live in Horizon she refuses to sympathize: "False fronts ought to be laughed at, never understood or

pitied. They're such outlandish things, the front of a store built up to look like a second storey." Yet when she erects her own false front against Main Street, she discovers that she is just as vulnerable as Philip:

> Three little false-fronted towns before this one have taught me to erect a false front of my own, live my own life, keep myself intact; yet tonight again, for all my indifference to what the people here may choose to think of me, it was an ordeal to walk out of the vestry and take my place at the organ.

The Bentleys also erect facades to hide from each other. He has attempted to mould himself into the ordered life which she considers practical and in so doing, is alienated from her, while she takes up the role of the hard-working woman of the manse, inwardly chafing but outwardly content with her husband's meagre tokens of affection. Without any hope for the future other than a parade of Horizons, each like the one before, Philip turns on his wife as the major instrument of his imprisonment, punishing her through the withdrawal of his love. The novel is orchestrated by Philip's emotional withdrawals, "white, tight-lipped," and the closing of his study door which shuts out his wife while she, in turn, escapes into the night, the granaries, and the railroad tracks.

There is a strong emphasis on the build-up of emotional tension throughout the novel. In comparison with the suffocating atmosphere of the house with its ever-present aura of sexual tension, even the bleakness of the prairie landscape offers a kind of freedom. We are told again and again that one or the other attempts to escape the claims of intimacy by pretending to be asleep when the other finally comes to bed. This situation continues until finally they make up and the process begins again. It is this heightening and release of emotional tension which would seem to characterize the novel's form: the first half develops through a cycle of wind and drought chronicling Steve's coming and going, and the eventual rains where the Bentleys are reunited; the second part of the novel works through the darkness and despair of winter, ending with the death of Judith and the birth of her child in April.

In the first chapter, we are introduced to the Bentleys' ostensible Puritan ethos: the shingle, the statement of Philip's creed, and the bargain by which the Bentleys co-exist with the townspeople: "In return for their thousand dollars a year they expect a genteel kind of piety, a well-bred Christianity that will serve as an example to the little sons and daughters of the town." But we soon discover that this "well-bred Christianity" is form without spirit, the false front of a behaviour without belief; it is a modern form of paganism in which the forms or conventions of a faith are perverted into a substitution for faith itself. This is explicit in the

extended metaphor at the conclusion of the first chapter where the clergyman and his wife are ironically identified as the "priest and priestess" through whom the people make offerings to the small town gods of Propriety and Parity:

> . . . the formal dinner of a Main Street hostess is invariably good. Good to an almost sacrificial degree. A kind of rite, at which we preside as priest and priestess — an offering, not for us, but through us, to the exacting small-town gods Propriety and Parity.

In this metaphor, they are revealed as handmaidens to the Puritan false gods of behaviourism — the mechanical acts of behaviour which remain after the true religious spirit has gone out of action. "Propriety," the well-bred Christianity which Mrs. Bentley cites, is the outer form of circumspect behaviour which replaces spontaneous action grounded in love; "Parity", social prestige, is that form of behaviour which results in the establishment of a village elect (notably the trinity of Mrs. Finley, Mrs. Bird, and Mrs. Bentley) and the exclusion of the damned (such as Judith and Steve) on grounds of social elitism rather than in terms of the true Christian love which results in brotherhood and justice. In this schemata, everything is turned upside-down; consequently, when justifying the adoption of the Roman Catholic orphan, Steve, to the Protestant church elders, Mrs. Bentley can see herself as the devil's advocate:

> So I parried them, cool and patient, piety to my finger tips. It was the devil quoting scripture, maybe, but it worked. They couldn't answer. . . . He [Philip] looked on, flinching for me, but I didn't mind. I'm not so thin-skinned as he is anyway. I resigned myself to sanctimony years ago. Today I was only putting our false front up again, enlarged this time for three.
>
> Philip, Steve, and I. It's such a trim, efficient little sign; it's such a tough, deep-rooted tangle that it hides.
>
> And none of them knows. They spy and carp and preen themselves, but none of them knows. They can only read our shingle, all its letters freshened up this afternoon, *As For Me and My House — The House of Bentley — We Will Serve the Lord.*

In this context, the supposedly Christian structure of the novel is ironically reversed. In Joshua, the source of the original quotation, a choice has been made by the Israelites. They have rejected the pagan gods of the Ammonites and chosen the true God, Jehovah. In the first chapters of Ross's novel, it would appear that the Bentleys have chosen the pagan gods, but the development of the novel leads to some new possibility characterized by a new honesty, a child, and "a stillness, a freshness, a vacancy of beginning", suggesting a movement from the Old Testament to the New. In the larger metaphoric framework of the book, this develop-

ment is characterized by the storm that sweeps through the town of Horizon, demolishing most of the false-fronted little stores on Main Street.

Philip's first sermon in a new town is always "As For Me and My House We Will Serve the Lord." Mrs. Bentley explains that it contains Philip's "creed": "The Word of God as revealed in Holy Writ — Christ Crucified — salvation through His Grace — those are the things Philip stands for." However, soon it becomes clear that Philip does not believe the Christianity he preaches. As a young man, he was sure that "he was meant to paint", and had used the Church as a steppingstone to an education. Had he succeeded, he might have lived with his conscience, but a wife, the depression, and a rapidly-mounting sense of guilt and despair anchor him firmly to the false fronts of Main Street: "having failed he's not a strong or great man, just a guilty one":

> He made a compromise once, with himself, his conscience, his ideals; and now he believes that by some retributive justice he is paying for it. A kind of Nemesis. He pays in Main Streets — this one, the last one, the Main Streets still to come.

As this reference to retributive justice would indicate, Philip's strongest instincts are towards a kind of pagan Nemesis or fatalism. Mrs. Bentley, observing the country people of Philip's charge, senses this same primitive response in the "sober work-roughened congregation":

> There was strength in their voices when they sang, like the strength and darkness of the soil. The last hymn was staidly orthodox, but through it there seemed to mount something primitive, something that was less a response to Philip's sermon and scripture reading than to the grim futility of their own lives. Five years in succession now they've been blown out, dried out, hailed out; and it was as if in the face of so blind and uncaring a universe they were trying to assert themselves, to insist upon their own meaning and importance.
>
> 'Which is the source of all religion,' Paul discussed it with me afterwards. 'Man can't bear to admit his insignificance. If you've ever seen a hailstorm, or watched a crop dry up —— his helplessness, the way he's ignored — well, it was just such helplessness in the beginning that set him discovering gods who could control the storms and seasons. Powerful, friendly gods — on his side. . . . So he felt better — gratefully became a reverent and religious creature. That was what you heard this morning — pagans singing Christian hymns . . . *pagan*, you know, originally that's exactly what it meant, *country dweller*.

The primary Old Testament distinction between Israelites and pagans is the monotheism of the chosen people. God's covenant given to Moses states that the Ammonites and other pagans will be driven from the Promised Land, but that the Israelites must guard themselves carefully from the "images" of the pagans: "for

thou shalt have no other gods before me." This association of image or idol-worship with paganism is also suggested in Ross's novel. There are early references to Mrs. Finley, the "small-town Philistine" who would like to mould the town "in her own image." If Philip had a child, Mrs. Bentley tells us, he would mould it "in his own image." Philip is also the product of his own twisted image of his dead father. From a photograph, a trunkful of old books, and the discovery that his father wanted to paint, he has developed himself by emulation: "They say let a man look long and devotedly enough at a statue and in time he will resemble it." Similarly, Philip's concept of the Church is an unhappy child's picture modeled on the image of the Main Street Church: "Right or wrong he made it the measure for all churches." And, as he has moulded his own character on that of his father, so he attempts to mould Steve: "For there's a strange arrogance in his devotion to Steve, an unconscious determination to mould him in his own image . . ." When Steve is removed from the household, Mrs. Bentley's primary regret is that Philip has never seen through to the real boy, "fond of bed, his stomach, and his own way":

> An idol turned clay can make even an earthly woman desirable . . . he's one idol tarnish-proof. Philip will forget the real Steve before long, and behind his cold locked lips mourn another of his own creating. I know him. I know as a creator what he's capable of.

THIS WHOLE COMPLEX of Old Testament idol, image, and paganism, suggests a framework of ironic illusion supported by the names of the characters.[2] In each case there is ironic reversal, Eliot-fashion, in which the novel character can be seen to be acting in a manner similar to, yet opposite from, that of his Biblical counterpart. Philip, deacon and evangelist, did preach "salvation through His Grace" and did convert from idolatry; the apostle Philip is rebuked by Christ because of his request for material proof of the existence of God: "Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us." In Ross's novel, Philip the preacher substitutes the image of an earthly father (the photograph) for a heavenly one and, as he has modeled himself upon that image, succumbs to the new paganism, the idolatry of Self.

There are also suggestions throughout the text that Mrs. Bentley has been raising up her own images, in particular that of Philip, the sensitive and impressionable artist who must be mothered along in the direction which she best sees

fit. She does not come to see how wrong she has been in her wilful attempt to structure her husband's life until after her encounter with the prairie wilderness and Philip's raging attempts to catch the strength of the land on canvas: "Water gets dammed sometimes . . . it seeps away in dry, barren earth. Just as he's seeping away among the false fronts of these little towns." She also realizes that she has attempted to mould her husband's life largely because she has a false image of his real nature: "I've taken a youth and put him on a pedestal and kept him there." With the recognition that the Philip she has known for twelve years is little more than the false front of their single and joint romantic projections, comes the more difficult and sometimes whistling-in-the-dark formulation that Philip's periodic thrashings-out against the hypocrisy of his own life are not as contemptible as she has previously, and somewhat smugly, assumed:

> And if it's finer and stronger to struggle with life than just timidly to submit to it, so, too, when you really come to see and understand them, must the consequences of that struggle be worthier of a man than smug little virtues that have never known trial or soiling. That is right. I know. I must remember.

Mrs. Bentley must remember because her whole life is posited on her husband; although he is her creation, he is also her god and ground of being: "I haven't any roots of my own anymore. I'm a fungus or parasite whose life depends on his." Like Hatty Glenn, for her there is no other way than to keep going on: "Somehow I must believe in them, both of them. Because I need him still. This isn't the end. I have to go on, try to win him again . . . It's like a finger pointing." But unlike the earlier struggle which borders on the trivial, Mrs. Bentley's struggle is often admirable because there is a strong sense of discipline and the larger good in her sense of direction. There is no doubt that her motives are often self-interested, but it is a self-interest which acknowledges its own presence and which makes some attempt to modify itself.

In the first cycle of the novel, she is threatened by Philip's affection for Steve and in the second by his affection for Judith. As a result, she begins to admit the self-destructive nature of their marriage and to probe her own motives: "For these last twelve years I've kept him in the Church — no one else. The least I can do now is help get him out again." In this conclusion there is some positive choice and her feeling that "there's still no way but going on, pretending not to know" modulates into the discovery that there is one way out of Horizon: "saving a thousand dollars was the only way." Mrs. Bentley's "only way," the bookstore in the city, in contrast to the "no other way" of many of Ross's characters, suggests an intelligence capable of choice. Realizing that the foundations of her own

morality have also been modelled on the untried virtue of a smug Main Street, Mrs. Bentley gropes, with lapses, toward some other way.

As in the short stories, nature has a relation to human action; Mrs. Bentley is often impelled towards the way she must follow by the force of the wind. At the beginning of the novel, the wind establishes the emotional landscape of Horizon:

> It's an immense night out there, wheeling and windy. The lights on the street and in the houses are helpless against the black wetness, little unilluminating glints that might be painted on it. The town seems huddled together, cowering on a high, tiny perch, afraid to move lest it topple into the wind. Close to the parsonage is the church, black even against the darkness, towering ominously up through the night and merging with it. There's a soft steady swish of rain on the roof, and a gurgle of eave troughs running over. Above, in the high cold night, the wind goes swinging past, indifferent, liplessly mournful. It frightens me, makes me feel lost, dropped on this little perch of town and abandoned. I wish Philip would waken.

The wind makes Mrs. Bentley aware that she has been lost and abandoned, dropped, as it were, on this point of Horizon, the place where land and sky meet. In a real sense, Horizon is as much a psychological state as it is a town; it is the place where one is lodged when it is impossible to go either forward or backward, the stationary perspective. The Bentleys are caught in this self-destructive stasis, and it is in the first few chapters of the novel that Mrs. Bentley is forced to recognize her alienation from Philip: "I wish I could reach him, but it's like the wilderness outside of night and sky and prairie, with this one little spot of Horizon hung up lost in its immensity. He's as lost, and alone." But she too is lost on the same horizon: "There's a high, rocking wind . . . and I have a queer, helpless sense of being lost miles out in the middle of it, flattened against a little peak of rock." Philip, listening to the wind, slips away from his wife and closes the study door between them: "Not that things between us tonight are much different from any other night . . . [but] tonight, because of the wind, we both seem to know." In Philip's next painting of the false-fronted Main Street the wind sets itself against the town and Mrs. Bentley reads there her husband's state of mind: "The false fronts . . . are buckled down in desperation for their lives . . . And yet you feel no sympathy . . . you wait in impatience for the wind to work its will."

The power of the wind in the painting suggests the destructive force rising in Philip. In the first half of the novel, the Bentleys sat together in a little ravine and watched the railway go by, each knowing it was the way out which repeated Horizons had denied Philip; the second part of the novel would appear to begin

at this same ravine where Philip takes stock of himself and determines to shape his own way, to "take things as they come — get what you can out of them." His decision, "if a man's a victim of circumstances he deserves to be," inevitably leads to Judith West. Now aware of Philip's infidelity, Mrs. Bentley despairs in a closed horizon:

> I stopped and looked up Main Street once, the little false fronts pale and blank and ghostly in the corner light, the night encircling it so dense and wet that the hard gray wheelpacked earth, beginning now to glisten with the rain, was like a single ply of solid matter laid across a chasm.

This suggestion of a closed world in which there is only one bridge of solid matter, the road which is also the way of Horizon itself and which ends in darkness, is repeated in Mrs. Bentley's next visit to the ravine. There, cloud and earth join together to form an impenetrable horizon, mirroring her emotional state.

But the novel has already moved to an anticipatory upswing, Mrs. Bentley watching the night train go out is for the first time, like Philip and Judith, and old Lawson of *The Well*, at one with the quickening train wheels: "It was like a setting forth, and with a queer kind of clutch at my throat, as if I were about to enter it, I felt the wilderness ahead of night and rain." At Christmas, she continues this journey to venture over the high prairie snow. From this real horizon, the small town of Horizon is seen in perspective. It is no longer her whole mental horizon, but simply "a rocky, treacherous island" in the snow. When she next visits the ravine with Paul, her perspective is completed. Near the end of the novel, when the wind nails her against the grain elevator, she is still feeling lost and abandoned but there can be no question that she will go on with Philip. Similarly, Philip visits Judith West to tell her that the Bentleys will adopt the coming child and then move to a bookstore in the city. Both decisions pave the way for the final confrontation between husband and wife when the great wind storm blows down most of the false fronts on Main Street.

This novel raises several disturbing critical issues including the death of Judith West, the character of Mrs. Bentley, and the validity of Philip's claim to be an artist.[3] I am inclined to believe that Mrs. Bentley is no more or less culpable than she might be expected to be under her circumstances. Through her own stubbornness and pride of possession, she contributes to her own betrayal, but there is sufficient evidence to indicate that she also suffers toward her own redemption. Judith West's death does seem painfully unnecessary, particularly when juxtaposed to Mrs. Bentley's cruel remarks:

> For me it's easier this way. It's what I've secretly been hoping for all along. I'm glad she's gone — glad — for her sake as well as mine. What was there ahead of her now anyway? If I lost Philip what would there be ahead for me?

Yet, on further consideration, it would appear that there was, in fact, no other way for Judith, either in terms of the deterministic nature of Ross's art or of the novel's mythic structure. Her sacrifice, like that of Steve and El Greco, can be seen as the last sacrifice required by the pagan gods of Main Street. And, as in the short stories involving a betrayal, her death is accomplished through the forces of nature — the soft, spring mud which exhausts her, precipitating the birth of her child.

There is a somewhat similar deterministic situation involved in the melodramatic death of the old farmer Lawson in *The Well*. Betrayed and shot by his young wife, he is stuffed down a well almost despite the efforts of the rather unattractive narrator, Chris Rowe, who appears to be swept along by the currents of destiny. What is most interesting about *As For Me and My House* in comparison with Ross's other work is that a more sophisticated third person is added to the central tragic situation — a Mrs. Bentley whose evolving consciousness is capable of compromise so that the total catastrophe of the stories and the near catastrophe of *The Well* is averted. Chris Rowe is also groping towards a sense of direction, but he is much cruder a character than either of the Bentleys. In fact, the novel itself has the kind of jagged relief which causes the reader to wonder — hopefully — if perhaps *The Well* is not the earlier of the two novels.[4]

Philip, the "non artist" as Warren Tallman calls him, "unable to discover a subject which will release him from his oppressive incapacity to create," does seem to find a subject from the moment he attempts to catch the elusive whiteness of Judith West's face. From this point onward his sketches move from the stasis of despairing Main Streets to the real horizon of galloping stallions, the country schoolhouse, the "strength and fatalism" of the prairie hills. But it is my impression that the real issue here is not whether or not Philip is a successful artist, but rather that he is motivated by some inner sense of direction which is other than the way of Main Street. Like Judith West, and to a lesser extent like Mrs. Bentley, Philip has a dream of an expanding horizon. And, as in the short stories, it is on the process of realizing this dream or of finding the way that Ross is focusing, rather than on the character Philip or on the artist Philip. In this sense, Philip is the abstracted principle and Mrs. Bentley the active process of the Puritan way; the two, as Roy Daniells notes, are part of a larger whole.

THE SIGNIFICANCE of Ross's achievement, and I fully agree with those critics who suggest that *As For Me and My House* is in the mainstream of the English Canadian novel, is that in nature, ethos and hero, Ross has captured all of these qualities which we attempt to invoke when we want to talk about Canadian writing. It is Ross's hard nature given tongue by Mrs. Bentley when she observes that the wilderness frightens us:

> We've all lived in a little town too long.... We shrink from our insignificance. The stillness and solitude — we think a force or presence into it... for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness, where we may have no meaning at all...

which also recurs in Bruce Hutchison's book, *The Unknown Country*[5] and which is given the status of a literary myth in Northrop Frye's rationale for the "garrison mentality" of Canadian writing.[6]

Yet, in significant difference from the nature which leads to the formulation of Frye's "garrison mentality" or, for that matter, from the mental "pallisade" of William Carlos Williams's *In The American Grain*,[7] Ross does not seem to be suggesting that there is no god in nature if for no other reason than that his people would not allow it. It may very well be the Old Testament vengeful God, the Nemesis of Philip's guilty conscience, or simply the psychological projection of the will to believe. Nonetheless, the people of Ross's prairie appear to keep on waiting and believing that beyond the individual tragedies of such as "Not by Rain Alone," such endurance does have value. And, certainly, in the larger structure of the first novel, there is a kind of grace bestowed: Mrs. Bentley is supported in her struggle to find the way by the Old Testament metaphor of the pointing finger: "It was like a finger pointing again, clear and peremptory, to keep on pretending ignorance just as before." Ross gives an explicit psychological basis for this metaphor; yet, as it springs from the inner recesses of self and is associated with her desire to find the "way," it is not without implications of a transcendent function. Then, too, Philip undergoes a kind of salvation through grace. He does find other-directed subjects for his art and he is given a child which he so desperately wants. Most importantly, it is a child with all of the New Testament implications of "a little child shall lead them."[8]

It would appear that the religious frame of reference, even if only in terms of residual response, is still a very important part of the Canadian novel. It was with considerable surprise that I realized recently that a surprisingly large number of our twentieth century novels refer to specifically moral, often explicitly religious

concerns, as is suggested in the following titles: Grove's *Our Daily Bread, Fruits of the Earth*; much of Callaghan, including *Such is my Beloved, They Shall Inherit the Earth, More Joy in Heaven,* and *The Loved and the Lost*; Mitchell's *Who has Seen the Wind?*; Klein's *The Second Scroll*; MacLennan's *Each Man's Son* and *The Watch that Ends the Night*; Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*; Wiseman's *The Sacrifice*; Watson's *The Double Hook*; Laurence's *A Jest of God*; Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many*; Horwood's *Tomorrow Will be Sunday* and Kreisel's *The Betrayal.*

Why might this be so? There does not appear to be a comparable movement in the American novel of the last twenty years, although a successful argument might be made for the preceding three decades.[9] There is the obvious fact of the unpopulated land itself: Canada, particularly the prairie, is still largely open space. In the midst of land and sky, as is explicitly suggested at the start of Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind?*, it is difficult not to feel the cosmic setting. Then, too, the country is still basically regional; in the smaller communities religion still remains a strong force. Furthermore, our great wave of immigration was at the turn of the twentieth century rather than in the late eighteenth or nineteenth, as it was in the United States. This turn-of-the century immigration, particularly of Scotch Presbyterians and European Jews, has greatly strengthened the Old Testament concerns of our literature.

Another possibility may be inferred from the fact that naturalism did not take hold in Canada as it did in the United States. R. E. Watters, in an address to the Third Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association (Utrecht, 1961), gives a convincing rationale for this fact.[10] He further notes that as Canada experienced no wars of emancipation and liberation, Canadian fictional characters do not usually see existing social conditions in Zolaesque terms, nor are they particularly concerned with leaving established communities for a place where they might be more free, as is suggested in the American myth of the journey west. Rather, as the historical fact of the United Empire Loyalists would suggest, and as Frye and Watters both note, the Canadian hero is concerned basically with maintaining his own integrity within a chosen community. I would add to this that the works of Ross would suggest that naturalism cannot flourish where there is even a remnant of divine providence. Religion, even if largely residual or seemingly converted to demonism as it is in *As For Me and My House*, invokes another set of values which even if psychologically internalized, still supports the individual in his struggle:

> A trim, white, neat-gabled little schoolhouse, just like Partridge Hill. There's a stable at the back, and some buggies in the yard. It stands up lonely and defiant on a landscape like a desert. . . . The distorted, barren landscape makes you feel the meaning of its persistence there. As Paul put it last Sunday when we drove up, it's *Humanity in Microcosm.* Faith, ideals, reason — all the things that really are humanity — like Paul you feel them there, their stand against the implacable blunderings of Nature . . .
>
> And it was just a few rough pencil strokes, and he [Philip] had it buried among some notes he'd been making for next Sunday's sermon.

Unlike Huckleberry Finn, the characteristic American hero who determines "to light out for the territory" when civilization becomes too pressing,[11] the characteristic Canadian hero is the one who stays and endures — the farmers of Ross's prairie. If and when there is to be some way as there is for the Bentleys of Horizon, it must be an honourable way and one which is sanctioned by community.[12]

FOOTNOTES

1 Margaret Laurence has also noted this motto in her introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of Ross's short stories, *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories.*

2 Stephen, a devout Christian, was the first martyr; Paul (formerly Saul) witnessed the stoning of Stephen by the mob and was converted to Christianity; Judith, in the *Apocrypha*, gave her body to save her townspeople and was honoured by them. Mrs. Bentley, unnamed in the novel, would appear to have many of the characteristics of the Rachel of Genesis. She has no children, receives a son through a maidservant and finally does have a son of her own. This Rachel is also associated with the successful theft of her father's household "images" (gods) which she brings to her husband. Added to these references is the suggestion of the "bent twig" implicit in the name "Bentley."

3 See Roy Daniells's "Introduction" to *As For Me and My House*; Cf. William H. New, "Sinclair Ross's Ambivalent World," *Canadian Literature,* No. 40 (Spring, 1969), p. 26-27; Cf. Donald Stephens, "Wind, Sun and Dust," *Canadian Literature,* No. 23 (Winter, 1965), p. 20-23; Cf. Warren Tallman, "Wolf in the Snow," *Canadian Literature,* No. 5 (Summer, 1960), p. 15.

4 In author's remarks appended to "No Other Way" in *Nash's* magazine, Ross is quoted as saying that he has written two novels: "failures, which publishers write me are interesting and compelling, but of small commercial possibilities. I am now starting to work on short stories, hoping gradually to build up a better technique . . ."

5 Bruce Hutchison, *The Unknown Country*, p. 3: "Who can know our loneliness, on the immensity of prairie, in the dark forest and on the windy sea rock? . . . We flee to little towns for a moment of fellowship and light and speech, we flee into cities or log cabins, out of the darkness and loneliness and the creeping silence."

[6] Northrop Frye, "Conclusions," *Literary History of Canada*, p. 830. "I have long been impressed in Canadian poetry by a tone of deep terror in regard to nature. . . . The human mind has nothing but human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even its sanity, yet the vast unconsciousness of nature in front of it seems an unanswerable denial of those values."

[7] Cf. Warren Tallman, *Canadian Literature*, No. 6, p. 43. "The continent itself — the grey wolf whose shadow is underneath the snow — has resisted the culture, the cultivation, the civilization which is indigenous to Europe but alien to North America even though it is dominant in North America." Tallman's thesis in this article would appear to rest on the premises of William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain.*

[8] Ross, *As For Me and My House.* "In our lives it isn't the church itself that matters but what he feels about it, the shame and sense of guilt he suffers while remaining a part of it. That's why we're adopting Judith's baby. He'll dare not let his son see him as he sees himself: and he's no dissembler."

[9] Cf. Faulkner, Steinbeck, Warren.

[10] R. E. Watters, "A Quest for National Identity: Canadian Literature vis a vis the Literatures of Great Britain and the United States," *Proceedings of the Third Congress of International Comparative Literature Association.*

[11] *Ibid*, p. 237.

[12] "Last Friday they had a farewell supper for us in the basement of the church, made speeches, sang *God Be With You Till We Meet Again,* presented us with a handsome silver flower basket. It's the way of a little Main Street town — sometimes a rather nice way."

THE KLONDIKE MUSE

Stanley S. Atherton

THE KLONDIKE TRAIL OF 1898, symbol of the last great gold rush in history, captured the imagination of a continent. By the time Robert Service reached the Yukon in 1904 as a teller for the Canadian Bank of Commerce, public interest in the area was widespread. Well before Service himself began to record his impressions, a "Klondike literature" was already rapidly accumulating from the numerous eye-witness reports, the travellers' accounts, and the books of advice to prospective gold-seekers. For the most part, however, these works emphasized factual events and situations, and only those that were specifically connected with the Gold Rush. While there was plenty of action recorded, little of a meditative or reflective nature could be found in such accounts. The way was open for a writer with talent enough to take advantage of the happy coincidence of event and location to mythologize the north.

Service, stimulated by the recent and contemporary events in his new surroundings, began to produce both poetry and fiction in an imaginative reconstruction of this world. What fame he has achieved continues to rest chiefly on the few volumes his eight years of residence in the Yukon yielded. These include *Songs of a Sourdough* (also published as *The Spell of the Yukon*) (1907), *Ballads of a Cheechako* (1909), *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* (1912), and the novel, *The Trail of Ninety-Eight* (1910). This body of work, rarely examined critically, deserves attention as one of the earliest attempts in Canadian literary history to mythologize the environment.

In his early poetry Service used the subject matter of the Gold Rush as a point of departure for his comments on man's relationship to the land. In "The Spell of the Yukon", for example, the Gold Rush is dispensed with in the first stanza. From here the poet moves to a description of the physical environment, using the Klondike as a representative northern landscape. The third stanza, and the remaining six, catalogue the varying responses and attitudes the narrator takes towards the North.

A number of these reactions had been articulated a few years earlier by Hamlin Garland. In a *McClure's* article in 1897 he had termed the Yukon "a cruel and relentless land," and a "grim and terrible country." Service made these and similar reactions the subject matter for a number of his best-known poems. The untitled prefatory poem to *Song of a Sourdough* is characteristic.

The lonely sunsets flare forlorn
Down valleys dreadly desolate:
The lordly mountains soar in scorn,
As still as death, as stern as fate.

The lonely sunsets flame and die;
The giant valleys gulp the night;
The monster mountains scrape the sky,
Where eager stars are diamond-bright.

So gaunt against the gibbous moon,
Piercing the silence velvet-piled,
A lone wolf howls his ancient rune,
The fell arch-spirit of the Wild.

O outcast land! O leper land!
Let the lone wolf-cry all express —
The hate insensate of thy hand,
Thy heart's abysmal loneliness.

Here one finds a number of key concepts which recur with varying degrees of emphasis in the majority of the Klondike poems: a sense of loneliness, hints of the supernatural, hostile nature, an intense and meaningful silence, and a reminder of man's mortality.

Service is rarely content simply to describe the North. A number of his poems provide effective illustrations of the constant perils to human life in such a desolate area, perils which evoke a continual fear in man of the hostility implicit in the environment. He achieves his effects in various ways, often by utilizing the supernatural element found in indigenous Indian folklore. In "The Ballad of the Black Fox Skin", for instance, he recounts an Indian belief that a particular fox was invested with supernatural powers, and that any who attempted to do it harm would surely suffer. The sceptic who laughs at the superstition and kills the fox is later murdered, and the poem traces a trail of death marked out by all those who possess the cursed skin. By the corpse of the last possessor hoofprints are found, and the skin has mysteriously disappeared.

References such as this to specific supernatural occurrences are set against

a wider background of mystery and other-worldliness which often characterizes the North for Service. The narrator of "The Ballad of the Northern Lights" views the aurora "as one bewitched" and describes its mystic beauty as "wild and weird and wan". In "The Ballad of Pious Pete" the presence of witches and frost-tyrants is recorded, adding a further dimension to the supernatural world, and relating it through the image of "cadaverous snows" to human mortality. The language of death abounds in the work, often coupled with Service's characteristic sardonic humour. This pre-occupation with morbidity may account partly for his poetry's continuing appeal. In an age when the threat of violent death is more than ever man's constant companion, the macabre humour of Service takes on a contemporary relevance. Intriguing examples of this "northern gothic" can be found in many of his better-known ballads. Besides those mentioned, they include "The Cremation of Sam McGee", "The Ballad of Blasphemous Bill", and "Clancy of the Mounted Police". In these ballads Service creates a nether world of terror in which men are driven mad or to their deaths. In "Clancy of the Mounted Police" the land terrifies and threatens: "Corpselike and stark was the land, with a quiet that crushed and awed,/ And the stars of the weird Sub-arctic glimmered over its shroud." And in "The Ballad of the Black Fox Skin" the threat is personified in a frightening and archetypal fairy-tale situation: "The Valley's girth was dumb with mirth, the laughter of the wild;/ The still sardonic laughter of an ogre o'er a child."

IF SERVICE HAD continued to react imaginatively to the North in this fashion, he might have created a valuable mythic vision. As it was, he became a magpie, randomly picking up physical or climatic characteristics of the North and using them as they suited his fancy at the time. The result is confusion, with one poem contradicting another; and it is this inconsistency that marks his failure to create a coherent Northern myth.

The point is easily illustrated by comparing "The Ballad of the Northern Lights" with the well-known "Call of the Wild". The silent North, a "land that listens", was described by Sir Gilbert Parker as a land where the silence led man to meditate on the divine power that created the universe, and which guided man in his worldly struggles. Service treats this theme in "The Ballad of the Northern Lights", where in a terrifying world "purged of sound" three half-demented men hope to gain brief respite from the elemental forces harrying them by meditating on the things they "ought to think". In the world of the poem,

however, the North refuses to allow such meditation; two of the men die, and the third is driven mad.

The ambivalence of Service's responses is seen clearly when the reader moves to "The Call of the Wild", for in this poem the silent north is revealed as the repository of truth: "Have you known the Great White Silence, not a snow-gemmed twig a-quiver?/ (Eternal truths that shame our soothing lies.)/ . . . Have you seen God in His splendours, heard the text that nature renders?/ (You'll never hear it in the family pew.)" Here Service says that only through intimate contact with the natural order can man come to a decision on the values he should use as a guide in life. The contrast with "The Ballad of the Northern Lights" is striking: in that poem the North is judge and executioner, resolutely condemning man to death for his weakness; here the north is teacher, benevolently aiding man to a more meaningful existence.

The conflicting attitudes toward the Canadian North which Service presents in his poetry are echoed in his novel of the Gold Rush, *The Trail of Ninety-Eight*. The novel is first of all a chronicle of a particular time and place, for, as the title indicates, it was the product of a specific historical event. Service, like Ballantyne and other writers on the North, found the subject matter for septentrional fiction in an event which had already stimulated widespread interest in the area. In one sense he was simply exploiting interest which the Gold Rush had created by producing a work of fiction to order, and one for which he could expect to find a favourable reception.[1]

The Trail of Ninety-Eight dramatically retells the story of the struggles of men to reach the Klondike gold fields and their trials after arrival in Dawson. The hero, a romantic Scottish fortune hunter named Athol Meldrum, is introduced to the other characters on the steamer which carries him north to Skagway. Meldrum meets Berna Wilovich, the girl he eventually marries, and he comes into contact with the domineering and greedy Winklesteins, her guardians, and with Jack Locasto, the coarse brute who later intrigues with the Winklesteins to make Berna his mistress.

The terrible crossing of the mountains and the often tragic hardships of the trail from Skagway to Dawson are recounted in a series of illuminating instances which bring the trail to life in a manner reminiscent of Zola.[2]

> It was an endless procession, in which every man was for himself. I can see them now, bent under their burdens, straining at their hand-sleighs, flogging their horses and oxen, their faces crimped and puckered with fatigue, the air acrid with their curses and heavy with their moans. Now a horse stumbles and slips into one of the

> sump-holes by the trail side. No one can pass, the army is arrested. Frenzied fingers unhitch the poor brute and drag it from the water. Men, frantic with rage, beat savagely at their beasts of burden to make up the precious lost time.

Service's peculiar sensibility required a complete fidelity to fact, yet at the same time he was striving to realize his world imaginatively. But the conventions of popular fiction demanded a dramatic contrast (and conflict) between a sterling hero and an unregenerate villain. So although Meldrum becomes thoroughly infected with the gold-fever on his arrival in Dawson, he is untouched by the easy virtue of a town where the "good old moralities don't apply". Aware of the mass appeal of exposure, Service made much of the immorality of those in positions of power. When Meldrum is cheated out of a claim he staked, for example, he makes a vehement denunciation of the official corruption which was widespread at the time. While such passages help to make *The Trail of Ninety-Eight* valuable as a social record of the Canadian North seventy years ago, the plot is all too often unduly contrived to admit them.

The intrigues of the evil Locasto with the guardians of the virtuous Berna are melodramatically portrayed in a sequence of incidents which take place while the hero is out mining. Meldrum's return to find that Berna has been forced to become Locasto's mistress, and has since been leading the life of a dance-hall girl, results in his own fall into the world of sin and debauchery about him. At length he is rescued from his self-destroying debauch, and he and Berna live together in a love-sanctified union. The unexpected arrival of Garry, Meldrum's brother, complicates the idyllic existence of the couple. Shocked and disgusted by the common-law union, Garry attempts to seduce Berna to show his brother her true character. The attempt fails, and in a final climactic scene Meldrum and Berna (since quietly married) are caught together in a burning Dawson hotel with Garry and Locasto. Only the lovers escape the blaze.

Although it is obviously a contrived pot-boiler, *The Trail of Ninety-Eight* is nevertheless a significant contribution to literature about the Canadian North. It is one of the earliest attempts to make a myth of the north, to capture the spirit of the land and make it comprehensible. To do this, Service comes back again and again to the idea of the North as battlefield where man tests himself by contesting with the natural environment. While the idea of man and nature in conflict is conventional enough to be a cliché, Service might have used it freshly and effectively in the Northern setting. He failed to make it work, however, because he was unable to decide whether such a conflict brings out man's nobler or baser qualities. In a number of passages, of which the following

evocation of the spirit of the Gold Trail is typical, the North clearly brings out the worst in man.

> The spirit of the Gold Trail, how shall I describe it? It was based on that primal instinct of self-preservation that underlies our thin veneer of humanity. It was rebellion, anarchy; it was ruthless, aggressive, primitive; it was the man of the stone age in modern garb waging his fierce, incessant warfare with the forces of nature. Spurred on by the fever of the gold-lust, goaded by the fear of losing in the race; maddened by the difficulties and obstacles of the way, men became demons of cruelty and aggression, ruthlessly thrusting down the weaker ones who thwarted their program.

Yet elsewhere, when the North is described as a new frontier, conflict with the environment calls forth nobler instincts. The challenge of untamed nature is met, the battle is joined until "overall . . . triumphed the dauntless spirit of the Pathfinder — the mighty Pioneer."

Similar contradictory reactions to the Northern landscape were noted in the poetry, and these are also evident in the novel. On the one hand, the North is repellent to man, its inhospitable nature an unwelcome reminder of his mortality.

> On all sides of the frozen lake over which they were travelling were hills covered with harsh pine, that pricked funereally up to the boulder-broken snows. Above that was a stormy and fantastic sea of mountains baring many a fierce peak-fang to the hollow heavens. The sky was a waxen grey, cold as a corpse-light. The snow was an immaculate shroud, unmarked by track of bird or beast. Death-sealed the land lay in its silent vastitude, in its despairful desolation.

On the other hand it is alluring, a compelling presence which casts its spell on the human imagination: "Who has lived in the North will ever forget the charm, the witchery of those midnight skies. . . . Surely, long after all else is forgotten, will linger the memory of those mystic nights with all their haunting spell of weird, disconsolate solitude." But here, as in the poetry, Service seems incapable of bringing the conflicting views together to create a consistent and meaningful vision of man in the north. The reader leaves his work aware of contradiction rather than ambiguity.

In the Gold Rush and the Northern setting two elements for myth-making were ready to hand. The event and the land in which it happened combined to provide the first significant opportunity for mythologizing the north. Unfortunately for Canadian literature the talents of Service were inadequate to cope with the challenge, and the opportunity was lost.

chronicle

POETS IN CONCLAVE

Dorothy Livesay

WHEN THE CANADIAN AUTHORS' ASSOCIATION was first proposed in 1921 with Sir Charles Roberts at its head, the aim was to make it a body of professional writers who would battle to represent their case with the government, especially on matters of copyright. To a large extent they were successful, but in time — all too soon — the organization became one of lion-hunting amateurs and regional self-admiration societies. Thus, the C.A.A. activities became the object of ridicule to poets in the Thirties who drew their inspiration from the metaphysical tradition and from contemporary movements abroad — poets like A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott, Leo Kennedy and Robert Finch.

In a parallel way, the League of Canadian Poets, which has just concluded its second biennial conference in Ottawa, was first promulgated in 1966 as a professional lobby. One of the founders, Louis Dudek, has told me that he saw the organization as a body which might make itself felt in the area of setting standards for Canada Council grants, literary awards, publishing aids and standardization of fees paid by public institutions such as the CBC. Indeed, Dudek went so far as to speak of "an academy of poets". When Dudek resigned last year, the League of Canadian Poets appeared to some to have become, if not a group of lion-hunters, at least a narrow group of poets, in-grown Ontario style. Within their range, during this past year, they seem to have been successful in setting up local poetry-reading circuits and in publishing an anthology of current poetry, *Made in Canada : new poems of the seventies.* The latter, edited by Raymond Souster and Douglas Lochead, is national in scope and is a contribution to the encouragement of Canadian poetry and poets. But because of the energy required to set up local Metro-Toronto and Ontario poetry-reading circuits, the national scene was neglected. The League ignored the fact that, quite outside itself, Canadian poets were getting travel grants from the Canada Council in order to give readings on university campuses across the country. Only a few

well-known poets were on this roster, and their fees as paid by universities have varied, it is said, from $50.00 to $200.00. It could be said also, that although the CBC has encouraged poetry broadcasts and especially the work of young poets, its range is also limited.

I only mention these practices to illustrate the need for clarification and consistency. It was precisely to remedy some of these disparities that Raymond Souster and his small executive called the poets' conference on October 9-12. The Canada Council generously furnished the wherewithal and Carleton University acted as host for some 40 poets from Vancouver to Fredericton. Would this we wondered, be merely a social event, interwoven with poetry readings and (high) spirits, and never really getting down to the question of re-organizing the League on a national basis? The agenda left much to be surmised: Poetry Reading Circuits; Poetry Publishing in Canada; The Canadian Poet as Translator. These turned out to be workshops where great good sense prevailed. Out of them came resolutions on the establishment of a Booking Agency for poetry-reading circuits (possibly to include prose and drama); the encouragement of regional circuits co-ordinated with high schools and universities; the setting of fees, royalties from anthologies; the need for a Canada Development Corporation to promulgate Canadian books; ways and means of getting libraries and bookstores to distribute books on a regularized basis; the paperback drugstore menace; — in short, professional concerns!

It is true that there were some very hot issues: those centring around Canadian sovereignty and its literary repercussions; and those centring on the status of translators and books of translation. Here there was a great divide between the West Coast, eagerly careening into the international translation field with demands for recognition and aid from the Canada Council, and the eastern and Quebec delegates who saw the primary crisis as one of lack of understanding between French and English Canada. All priorities, all aid, they felt, should go to French-English and English-French translation of prose, poetry and criticism.

But are we too late? Already, as we sat deliberating and wrangling, the Quebec explosion was beginning. If Quebec must go, then the deliberations of the English-speaking poets who are now actively seeking ways and means of reaching their French counterparts have come far too late. We should have heeded, long before this, the warning of Hugh McLennan. His voice has been the only one amongst Canadian writers which has pleaded, all through the sixties, for urgent action on the cultural front. Without French-Canadian literature we shall be much the poorer.

review articles

THE MESSIANIC STANCE

Margaret Atwood

West Coast Seen, edited by Jim Brown and David Phillips. Talon Books. $3.50 paperback, $5.95 hardback.

THE MESSIANIC STANCE has long been indigenous to the West Coast, and *West Coast Seen* does not fail to adopt it. The anthology opens with a sermonistic piece by Jim Brown in which dogmatically-formulated snatches of anti-dogma are interspersed with hymns of praise (to Vancouver as a "source of energy," to *Tish magazine*) and with mystic quotations from *Words* and elsewhere. After being told that we are "moving through the mystery," though, it's a slight letdown to turn the page and find the editors going on about money, publishing and Canada Council grants just as though they were Torontonians.

Despite the naiveté of this juxtaposition, the introduction does make some valid points. Vancouver is, as Brown claims, an open city, which may account for the collection's extreme diversity. Phillips is quite right in stating that the book's relevance is "immediate": he seems to fear that these poems won't stay representative of what's going on in Vancouver for very long, and indeed several of the poets are already elsewhere. All anthologies are necessarily retrospective, but this one is a little more so than, for instance, *T.O. NOW* or *CANADA FIRST*: the poems date roughly from 1965 to 1969. They're no doubt a reasonably fair cross-section of what was being done in those years among new (though not always young) poets, if one chooses to skip the customary quibbles (if X, why not Y, if Hulcoop and Jungic, why not Yates, where are Jamie Reid, Daphne Marlatt, etc.?). On this point Brown defends himself in advance:

> Our conception that the scene here has not been easily defined since the early days of Tish is even more true today. There are so many people writing here now that it would be impossible to say that this is a complete or absolute statement of the WC thing/scene in Canada.

This comment underlines one of *West Coast Seen*'s problems: its attempt to contain a sort of poetic urban sprawl. Vancouver is a city that poets go to rather than come from; the result is a book that can either be praised for its range and inclusiveness or reprimanded for its lack of focus. Stylistically, *WCS* has something for everyone: for an editor whose "whole conception of publishing is centred around the personal aspect," Brown's taste is surprisingly eclectic. But he seems aware of this too, and the shifts in typeface are perhaps intended as a comment rather than simply as a decorative device.

West Coast Seen's variety makes it unsatisfactory for trend-spotting purposes,

but a reviewer is honour-bound to make the attempt. The cover provides a clue of sorts: on the back is an alphabet with some of the letters replaced by images (a clock, people walking); on the front is something that looks like a geological strata diagram (reflecting perhaps the editor's intention of presenting simply what has happened, with critical judgment kept to a minimum) until it is turned sideways, when it becomes a series of thin pictures: trees, houses, telephone poles. Here then are two concerns important to West Coast poets (though not altogether unknown elsewhere): the concern with image as physical object stripped of rhetoric, and the concern with language as visual and aural medium, stripped of what Brown calls "intellectual meaning".

The first direction was taken some years ago by, for instance, George Bowering, Lionel Kearns, and some of the other early *Tish* poets, and (less programatically but sometimes more profoundly) by John Newlove. It is followed here most notably by Ken Belford, Pat Lane and Barry McKinnon. Belford is a delight: he has his language well under control, and such poems as "Carrier Indians", "Stove" and "Omega" read with the kind of inevitability of image and rhythm that makes other poets grit their teeth with envy once they have recovered from the poem. Pat Lane is finally discovering his own voice; some of the selections here lack the austerity and condensation of the best work in his recent collection, *Separations*, but one outstanding poem, "Last Night in Darkness", appear in both. Barry McKinnon's most impressive poem here is the roughly-finished but powerful "Letter 11: for my wife".

The second direction is rapidly gaining adherents, but the local source of energy is undoubtedly still Bill Bissett. At their best, his poems transcend the technical peculiarities and conventions of much "sound" poetry — phonetic spelling, distortion or abolition of syntax, serial repetition, and a childlike preoccupation with sounds for their own sakes and with the fact that two words of different meanings can be pronounced alike (producing what would be known in other circles as "puns"). Such poems as "the tempul firing" are invocations, conjuring (as opposed to descriptions) of the ecstatic vision, and Bissett does them better than anyone. Siebun, Tan Trey, Mayne (sometimes) and Phillips (in a much cooler way) are somewhere in the vicinity of the same wave-length. "Image" poems usually concentrate on the outer world, describing things (and the poet's reaction to them) as they are; "sound" poetry leans toward the magical, the inner, toward the evocation of a world transfigured. The difference is illustrated by the work of Brown himself, which moves from earlier "image" poems such as "Poem to my father" to later "sound" ones such as "th breath".

But these two kinds of poem-making are not the only ones going on in *West Coast Seen*. Some poets, such as Stephen Scobie, are exploring the visual type of concrete poetry, though this area is not adequately represented. Others, such as Pat Lowther, are happily unclassifiable: they are simply writing good poems. Others are either very versatile or still searching for a personal style. Another group, if group they be, are trending towards neo-surrealism; among these are Andreas Schroeder, the interesting Zoran Jungic, and Pierre Coupey — a more

ambitious poet than many in this collection.

Is Vancouver special? Is it really, as the introductory letter of David Phillips implies, that much different from Montreal or Toronto as a place to write poems, that much better? Does *West Coast Seen* have a distinctive flavour not found in, for instance, *T.O. Now*? There is certainly a difference in editorial attitude: anthologizers further east at least pretend that they are cool, semi-professional and semi-objective; they are more willing to comment, less willing to preach. The isolation of Vancouver and its consequent cultishness result in a gleeful do-it-yourself attitude towards publishing — a kind of "I'm doing this for me, my friends and the rest of the converted, but you can watch if you like" posture. It's as much of a pretense as the other one, but it does produce a different kind of grab-bag. If cultivated maturity results in quality control and a certain uniformity and dullness (like a convention of Iowa Writing School old boys), cultivated youthful enthusiasm obviously results in sloppiness. *West Coast Seen* is too long and too undiscriminating: it includes a number of pretentious, silly and trivial poems as well as a number of good ones. But children, though sometimes tedious and aggravating (to others: never to themselves) are also refreshing and delightful, and the Vancouver poets often seem more willing to take the more obvious risks, to branch out, to experiment and fail, than their more cautious eastern counterparts. On the other hand, wit seems to flourish better in the East: the WCS poets, though they play word-games, do not as a rule turn phrases. However, making final judgments about poets, cities or regions on the basis of an anthology is always dangerous: anthologies are mirages created, finally, by their editors.

ITS OWN TYPE OF FLEA

Ralph Gustafson

Contemporary Poetry of British Columbia, Volume 1, edited by J. Michael Yates. The Sono Nis Press. 252 pp. $7.50.

THIS ANTHOLOGY of contemporary poetry out of British Columbia is a very large, a very handsomely printed book, generous enough to give a page to a poem of even three lines. The cover design by Tony Hunt, carver for the Provincial Museum in Victoria, is strikingly attractive. The design is of a raven in flight.

I was glad not to see Pegasus in flight. Here, I thought, is a hope of poets with its own transcendent symbol. The bird was B.C. in geography and, so the title informed me, A.D. in climate. A clutch of 54 poets springing from the roots of a region known to itself up into the universal air. That figure of 54 was a bit dizzying. Is it possible, I asked, that instead of twelve or thirteen in good baker fashion there can be over half a hundred poets in only one-tenth of Canada? Surely then, we are renowned, Canada is a burgeoning cornucopia of immortal wounds and saving graces.

Well, it still isn't. This book is witness to other, lesser quotients. Excellent it is; but not transcendent. Competent and vastly encouraging in its craft and preparations it in summary is; intolerant of anything but poetry it is not. There is much that is tentative; there is much that is engagingly pretentious; and there is a great deal of verbal overkill. But the 52 stand together with hardly an egocentric twiddler among them. The conglomeration is personable and significant.

I am as convinced as nails and buckets that poetry is of its place and time: regional and personal. Just as surely, poetry transcends its locality and is universally human. But first of all it is Warwickshire or Squeedunk. Lack of local stride is what is wrong with the spate of stuff all over Canada seeking Canada Council crutches. Such stuff as was tossed up in the collection *Canada First*. This present anthology is way ahead of button-button-who's-found-the-button folk-gatherings. And, thank god, this anthology at last not only supersedes but puts in its place any more such field prospecting as was the advocacy of *Tish* or however you make up the anagram. This anthology is an anthology of integrity and there is hardly a group therapeutic bellyache in it. But you won't find British Columbia.

Michael Yates, the editor, openly states in his short introduction that he doesn't want us to find literary boundaries. "British Columbia poetry," he writes, "is not unlike the poetry of other regions in Canada, nor unique in the rest of the world. What is truly significant in these pages would be significant in any other place, translated into any other language." Poetry is kin to the whole world. Of course. But Mr. Yates' stance is erroneous. It is not true that poetry unlike in region is less significant — which is what the statement implies (let alone that terrific misstatement that a language does not confer absolute uniqueness on its poetry). Poetry *should* be regional while it is universal. Mr. MacLulich in a most informative poem, "Reflections on *The Naked Ape*", assures us that the ape when naked "has its own type of flea." I am sure that the native British Columbian has. What is more, once in a circus I saw a trained flea carry the globe on its back. That wasn't in Vancouver however.

If I am going to praise this anthology (and I do) should it not then have some timber and rocky mountains in it? At some of its best moments it does. At other best moments where it "is not unlike the poetry of other regions in Canada" it has subsumed its special environment (when the native is writing. The anthology's non-indigenous contributors and its translations from other tongues add to its feel of eclecticism). This identity business is notoriously difficult to handle when the landscape turns to inscape. Some say, "Good Lord, give it up. What does it matter?" You *can't* give it up. The whole world is protesting that you can't.

The present contributors have all had something to do with Canada. Let us stretch a point here and there and regard the book as Canadian. At this point in time and within the limits of this anthology what does "Canadian" mean? (I trust we are agreed with Sir Philip Sidney that of all liars, poets are the least liars.)

According to these present 54 seers and diagnosticians, first of all: we cannot deal with ourselves except atavistically. We must watch out for Pratt's prize cat.

As George Amabile warns us, darkness "flows and pulses in the room,"

> Outside,
> Thunder crumbles, a faint catastrophe
> In the far sky. Somewhere a cave-man
> Is crouching among giant ferns.

T.D. MacLulich also warns us not to be too hopeful about man:

> the hair on his head (of which he is vain)
> the hair at his armpits and genitals
> (of which he is ashamed)
> remind him he can never alter history

Canadians read history. Our reversion to primitivism is bad enough. But they are despondent on almost all scores (take the dust-jacket off this anthology and see for yourself). The discouraging thing about this Canadian despondency, in both young and old, is that it proceeds from ourselves; not from Vietnam and Biafra and Kent State University. Newlove is memorable in the mood: "every muddy word I write / cries," he points out to us. "Life continued before it occurred." Frederick Candelaria tells us that

> The clock has no hands:
> it is always checkout time
> before you can leave —
> too late —
> charged for the extra day
> you never had.

And poet after poet nods in crepe-hanging approval, even that vast wit, Stanley Cooperman:

> Birds
> are freezing
> in mid-flight.

Now really, Stanley. The Canadian winter is after all only nine months of the year. The young too: David Summers is preparing the manuscript for a first book of poems, yet already he informs us without an active verb:

> Inscribed
> on my pyjamas lapel,
> a miserable hallelujah.

In Ken Belford's room the furniture doesn't fit either:

> An ice octopus drapes one more arm downward.

The melancholy thing about this chill is that it is never relative to elsewhere's suffering. It's solipsistic. Except for Dorothy Livesay you won't find out that there is a war on. Not that we are without one or two resolutions to general misery. We have Lionel (Charlie Chaplin) Kearns:

> the answer will turn up
> in spite of the difficulties
> and confusions of dead cats
> rotting roses and discarded
> automobile parts
> perhaps one day slipping
> unobtrusively into the room.

(Kearns also happily gives us another of his miserable parables, this time about a man caught in a telephone booth.) If you search hard through the 252 pages of this anthology, here and there you will be able to eliminate the universal "perhaps". Bogdan Czaykowski has accomplished it:

> I reverse the hourglass
> and time grows eloquent once more.

But then Mr. Czaycowski is Polish. Poland has a different set of circumstances to Canada.

We have a sort of cerebral, class-room metaphysical wit, but a sense of comedy (and I don't mean funny entertainment) is, alas, largely lacking. That is partly because Earle Birney in this book is largely lacking (for goodness sake where is he, the father of so much and founding father of the U.B.C. Creative Workshop?). We have Cooperman and the younger Pat Lowther with her

Prometheus with ants
up his pantlegs.

But hardly a glimmer of a sense of humour in the younger:

I am an onion,

says David Summers.

According to this book what we are without is transcendence, religious or inspirational (except Dorothy Livesay; it always seems to be "except Dorothy Livesay"). Furthermore, we are practically without sex.

Fortunately, the day is saved. Take down the crepes. We have love. In the book you will find lyrical love lyrics by Skelton, Livesay, McWhirter, Hulcoop. How easy it is to celebrate misery. How rare the celebrations of joy! But these poets (can't the young go joyfully to bed?) do it. Robin Skelton's "Night Poem" is the finest poem in the book.

And so, is all that Canadian? One-tenth Canada? And I must remember, Volume 2, I deduce, is a-coming.

So much for content. Form too is meaning. And here this anthology is varied and skilful. The undergraduates and the graduates from the U.B.C. and Victoria workshops tend to write in the same mode (lantern celebrations and sagging prolixities) but group feel-ins are absent, few creaks are heard, the rhythm is mostly under control (that hiccough "breathing" marking the Tish school is beautifully absent; perhaps they got frightened), and the syntax is not only there but flexibly (and necessarily) used. The known names continue to command their craft — and welcome to P.K. Page who again observes

a high
point on a twirling spindle which
spun and hurled great gilded lariats.

ATWOOD'S MOODIE

A. W. Purdy

MARGARET ATWOOD. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie.* Oxford, $1.95.

SUSANNA MOODIE was an English emigrant to Canada in 1832. She settled with her husband in Douro Township, near Peterborough, and her book, *Roughing It in the Bush*, is one of the basic pioneer documents of Canada.

Margaret Atwood says in the Afterword to her own book that "These poems were generated by a dream. I dreamt that I was watching an opera I had written about Susanna Moodie. I was alone in the theatre: on the empty white stage, a single figure was singing." And later, about her poems: "I suppose many of these were suggested by Mrs. Moodie's books, though it was not her conscious voice, but the other voice running like a counterpoint through her work that made the most impression on me."

Well, that "other voice" is also the one that makes the poems impressive. Perhaps it is Atwood's own voice, or perhaps it is Susanna Moodie herself singing Atwood's opera. The duality is there. But I think Margaret Atwood has always had this duality in herself, a quality that she suggests is Canadian, a kind of "paranoid schizophrenia" which enables her to be a

ghostly observer peering over the ghostly shoulder of Susanna Moodie. In spite of hard physical details (fire and plague, dead children, trees, emigrants, etc.), these poems make a strange slightly-off-from-reality impression on the reader: and browsing through *Roughing It in the Bush*, I don't think Moodie's 19th century prose has this ingredient. The poems' impact is in this strangeness: as if Atwood were from Mars and Moodie an Englishwoman of "gentle" birth. And Atwood is not talking to a possible reader; she is an entirely subjective Martian.

The Journals of Susanna Moodie has many of the qualities of fictional biography: the reader knows very well (the Canadian reader, anyhow) that Moodie was a real person, and reading the poems both the Moodie and Atwood personae are inescapable. John Berryman did something similar in *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*, assuming the persona of a long-dead American woman of pioneer days. A similar authoritative and undeniably once-actual personage takes over in both books: Moodie and Bradstreet, with Atwood and Berryman as shadow manipulators coming to life in the publishers' blurbs. The puppets steal the show (but not the royalties): and this to me, is fiction.

Another advantage of using a once-living protagonist is the cohesive and intensive quality that a single viewpoint — or time or geographic area — gives a book of poems. (Bowering's *Rocky Mountain* is another example of the latter.) But there is a sub-basic quality in the poet's self that cannot be conveyed by speaking in another person's voice. Because, in its finest expression, the poet's voice is for everyman, not just a single person. And I think it's a very debatable point whether a poet can occupy another body and mind and still retain the sub-basic qualities of himself or herself. That is, Atwood as Atwood strikes me as authentic, but Atwood as Moodie is a very fine tour de force. But the latter is entirely legitimate, valuable and, in this case, rather marvellous fiction.

Peggy Atwood said to me about three weeks ago that a reviewer (that's me) should seek to fathom the author's (that's her) intent, implying that marks should be given, according to how close the author came to achieving that intent. This I disagree with in Atwood's absence, almost completely — unless the reviewer, knowing the intent, feels it was achieved and is, in addition, impressive as hell.

Re intent, I prefer Earle Birney's opinion (also verbal, though maybe he's written it somewhere too): that whatever meaning or levels of meaning the reader "extracts" from the work, this meaning is legitimate and valid. Because (my own comment as well as Birney's) there is something in a writer's head which causes him or her to incorporate meanings and possible interpretations he (or she) doesn't even know are there. Writers are generally a bit stupid — and I cite my own case particularly — feeling that too much knowledge and accumulation of literary debris in their heads can be a handicap: this apart from straight intelligence. Of course that's an alibi on my part, as I'm aware.

What I'm getting at: I'm not really interested in what Atwood is trying to do in her opinion: I'm interested in what she succeeds in doing — in my opinion. The two may be identical. I think they probably are in this book, but I'm far too cautious to say what I think she's trying to do, even though she more or less

says what that is in the book's Afterword. And I guess that sounds pretty convoluted and involved.

Well, I've held certain opinions about writing poems for a long time, but these opinions have changed recently. For instance: consistency of tone and metre. I've thought previously that inconsistency was the best way to write poems, in fact the only way for myself. Part of the reason for that opinion has been that critics seemed to demand consistency. Well — well, I still hold to the view that consistency of tone and metre would be a bad thing for me, for *me* — but not necessarily for others. Particularly in a book like the Moodie poems where a related and integrated outlook on the author-persona's part appears to make the poems more believable. In fact, I think Atwood's book has caused me to change my mind on this point. And I do think the Moodie poems are that impressive.

But looking at Atwood's books, I believe they all have this consistent and distinctive tone. And that's okay for her: what's sauce for the goose is not for the gander, and the difference in gender is not unintentional. For I believe that my personal outlook on life is markedly inconsistent: I may be temperamentally up one hour and down the next; I may be happy, I may be sad; I may be in love with life and all women, I may not. I want to convey these human inconsistencies in poems, and I try. But of course, I say all this after I look at my own poems and know (think) that they do reflect these attitudes.

In Atwood's poems I see no humour other than satire, very little love for anything (except possibly the Atwood-Moodie dead children in *Death of a Young Son by Drowning*); I do see subjective navel-watching and analysis, a hard cold look at the human condition. In the past I've said these shortcomings were a bad thing in any writer. But now I cannot transplant my own hangups into Atwood. If she lacks these things (and I think she does), it does not in any way lessen her poems. I would say they were just short of magnificent — except, that's another quality I don't think she has. One can cite a mixed bag of poets — say Yeats, Eliot, Layton and Birney: Yeats has magnificence, satire and no humour: Eliot, satire, magnificence and no humour: Layton the same: only Birney has genuine selfconscious humour as well. But I should add joy to this catalogue, for Layton does have that.

In John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, here's what Ford Madox Ford said about joy: "All modern effusions of joy are definitely unbalanced. Very well. Now, if poetry expresses the reality of existence — as I believe, along with Willie (jesus!) Yeats, it does, and as I hope you will too, my young friend — it follows that the experience of joy is in the nature of a fever, of hysteria, and not a well-founded natural human experience or condition. Therefore we can say: joy itself is hysteria, a drunkenness, an unnatural state."

It doesn't follow at all: joy isn't an unnatural state, even in the human-animal. And add that drunkenness (of the spirit, not artificially induced) is natural. Joy is part of the *condition humaine*, which isn't all terror and foreboding, can't be that or we'd all collapse damn quick under the psychic weight. Three of the people mentioned above whom I know (Layton, Birney and Atwood) all have joy personally, but

Atwood has not communicated the feeling in poems and probably has not wanted to. Again, I must not read my own preoccupations re how to write poems into Atwood. For I think she is a marvellous poet, perhaps the only one right now in Canada whose poems I look forward to reading with tremendous anticipation each time a book of hers appears. And she is what she is, without what I say to be shortcomings or weaknesses being shortcomings or weaknesses. Therefore, I say I have been wrong in my opinions that certain human life-qualities are necessary poem-qualities. (They were pretty naive opinions anyway.) At least, not for her, as not for Yeats and Eliot.

Having said what Atwood does not have, it devolves on me to say what she does. And, sticking to the Moodie book, I *believe* in Atwood-Moodie. I think the Moodie conveyed by Atwood is scared to death of life, but is nevertheless a real person. Moodie is also afraid of the rough and tough pioneer forest of early Canada, but what nice sweet well-bred and bedded English gentlewoman wouldn't be?

In *The Wereman*:

> My husband walks in the frosted field
> an X, a concept
> defined against a blank;
> he swerves, enters the forest
> and is blotted out.

Why, that Moodie bitch! I say. There isn't a scintilla, not a jot or milligram of affection for anyone but herself (Moodie) in the poem (in *Roughing It in the Bush* she calls her husband "Moodie"!). This I say, knowing Atwood meant to convey something quite different. I think she meant to say that humans are undefined as such, that they waver into hate and love like ghosts and things of mist in other people's minds. She meant (perhaps) to convey human inconsistency, as I have said her writing did not. Whereas I, becoming a vicarious female while reading the poem, growl soprano-bass that Moodie should have rushed after her husband into the dark forest, at least she should have if she gave a single damn. But she didn't, and that's one reason why Moodie is not quite human, was only worried about herself in the poem, was absolutely solipsistic. (Which is one of Atwood's strengths.)

On the other hand, I guess most Victorian women felt themselves to be only sexual objects (or so books tell me, and also certain Victorian female survivals), individuals only privately and partly, in their fears and hates but not their loves.

However, the Atwood-Moodie persona crosses me up in *Death of a Young Son*, about whom she/they say:

> I planted him in this country
> like a flag.

The line has multiple meanings, none of which I intend to mention. Unless to say that sons were loved but husbands were not, which interpretation should come from the whole book, not this one poem.

Here's an example of Atwood's verbal virtuosity:

> After we had crossed the long illness
> that was the ocean . . .

No ordinary pioneer woman would say that, and neither would Victorian-literary Moodie: but Atwood-Moodie might and did. Here I believe both. And briefly I see hundreds of mile of ocean vomit. I see sickness of the spirit and endurance. I believe. (Hallelujah!)

For the first few years in Canada the historical Susanna Moodie hated the new country (Canada), hated it like hell and

the devil: but in later years came up with phony-sounding eulogies for the country that don't ring true. Along those lines, Atwood makes Moodie come to love the country as well. But I don't think Moodie every really did. But Atwood does, and that's probably the most love lifting out of these pages of print. For the Moodie-Atwood persona becomes some kind of primitive corn-mother-spirit that sits in a modern bus along St. Clair Ave. in Toronto, embodying the ghostly citified barbarism of this country. I don't believe that double-love, only Atwood's.

Well, I could go on and on with these poems, tearing them apart, figuring them out, the radar echoes between them and me bouncing back and forth, back and forth, hypnotically boring. But if I'm talking to anyone here, I hope they carry this review farther than I am energetic enough to take it.

I disagree with most of Atwood's viewpoints wholeheartedly, and the circumstances will never arrive when I can say the rest of this review to her personally (besides, she's a woman, even though very intelligent), because she wouldn't listen to such confused and partly intuitive arguments. I've said here that she lacks many things in her poems which I think desirable (and I retract nothing), such as magnificence which she has not got in single poems. Taking the whole book though, she mysteriously does have that quality. Also clarity of intellect (if the reader will read hard), and give the poems at least the attention of a personal monetary transaction). The country itself is the Atwood-Moodie children (hail, corn-mother!) who never had a chance to grow to adulthood and be what the actual country too may never become.

What I'm saying is that this book will stand in any company, despite what I call shortcomings that are not shortcomings in Atwood. I can think of no comparisons for the book. Which seems to me a high compliment. Atwood may even deserve it.

CRITICAL ODYSSEY

Peter Stevens

GEORGE WOODCOCK, *Odysseus Ever Returning*. McClelland and Stewart, $1.95; *Hugh MacLennan*, Copp Clark, $1.95; *Mordecai Richler*, McClelland and Stewart, $.95.

THE BEST CRITICISM includes "the analytical approach and the philosophically creative insight", according to George Woodcock. Analysis should avoid the pedantic aridity of the academy, and insight should steer clear of the circuitous semantics of professional philosophers. Critics who travel this tricky path are few and far between — one thinks of Orwell; and the best, perhaps the only Canadian example we have, is Orwell's biographer, George Woodcock.

William New, in his introduction to *Odysseus Ever Returning*, Woodcock's collection of essays on Canadian literature, stresses that Woodcock's critical spectacles are "fairly freed from any rose tint and . . . it is upon the idea of 'reality' in literature that George Woodcock focusses." He is concerned, in fact, with

literature as a social force and as a reflection of social forces in the widest sense, so that perhaps he is best described as a moral critic, a critic who works in the same area as Orwell. In fact, in his book on MacLennan, Woodcock compares the Canadian novelist with Orwell in his respect for the value of decency, his search for some meaningful scale of verities which has disappeared from the depressing jumble and standardization of modern life. It is apparent, then, why Woodcock would feel drawn to MacLennan — "one of Canada's most considerable novelists of any kind", he calls him — and why he would devote, as he does, almost half the book on the novelist to an analysis of MacLennan's ideas as he expresses them in his essays. Not that his comments on the novels are secondary in his study of MacLennan. He makes very sound sense of most of the novels but he has summarized his ideas about MacLennan's novels so well in the essay "A Nation's Odyssey" that the book's statements merely expand the ideas in the essay. His greatest insight into MacLennan's novels — one I wish he would develop further — is his belief that the novelist relies "on the movements of the unconscious mind"; the novels reveal a mind "so greatly moved by intuition, so sensitive to collective impulses, so much more inclined to pessimism". He prefers *Each Man's Son* above all MacLennan's novels because in that novel "the novelist's own fatalism accords with his subject"; Woodcock's comments on this novel in his essay on MacLennan are brilliant but somehow he does not develop them to any further depth in the book — and this is a great disappointment.

Woodcock, in fact, may be best at the perceptive summary, something he brings off time and time again in his essays; the survey of Canadian literature in the opening essay of *Odysseus Ever Returning* is probably the best example, but there are good summaries of Canadian criticism and of Callaghan's work. But his book on Richler (a survey that contains only about 20,000 words) is too limited in space. It contains some valid insights and summarizing — he makes a very good case for *The Acrobats* and there is a very revealing comment on Canadian minorities in the context of Canadianism in the chapter on *Son of a Smaller Hero* — but this Canadian Writers series from McClelland and Stewart is far too cramping to allow the critic room to do little more than give plot outlines and a general discussion of principal themes.

Like Orwell, Woodcock has no patience with sloppiness, deceit and evasion. His attack on Callaghan really derives from his belief firstly that Callaghan's early bare prose is rather characterless and anonymous, and secondly that Callaghan's later novels are over-written, pretentious and empty at the centre. This opinion that Callaghan has written some of the best but also some of the worst prose in Canadian literature leads him to castigate Edmund Wilson for failing to distinguish between the good and the bad in Callaghan. Wilson's views he calls idiosyncratic, because Wilson is an outsider and remains a stranger to Canadian identity and feelings. Woodcock himself in his criticism often reverts to Canadian problems and Canadianism. In the course of various essays he throws off statements about Canada and Canadianism that elucidate certain trends in the writers but also carry weight outside

the immediate subject under discussion; for instance, he talks of Canada's "ingrained distrust of the exceptional," he maintains that "nationalist movements, indeed, can often frustrate and paralyse cultural traditions" and a remark from MacLennan he agrees with makes a splendid appendix to the Gospel according to St. Mathews — that movements like communism, fascism, and nationalism "are, in their appeal to the masses and even to intellectuals, aberrations of the religious impulse".

It should be obvious from these remarks sprinkled through his criticism that George Woodcock is not narrowly chauvinistic in his approach to Canadian literature. Literature is his concern wherever it is written. He is prepared to set our literature in the widest possible context, as can be seen by the many and different authors from other countries he brings into his arguments, although he does not seem to agree wholeheartedly with A. J. M. Smith's concept of cosmopolitanism. Unless he is convinced of an author's worth he will not agree with the critics outside Canada who praise a Canadian author. His critical reservations about Callaghan are a case in point. His other most severe attack is levelled at Leonard Cohen. He finds Cohen's poetry "languid, distant, stylized", *Beautiful Losers* "a tedious book" and his later poems "glib, shallow and self-imitative statements of loneliness". Clearly he condemns Cohen for vague expression in poetry divorced from reality; Cohen's world is too bound to a non-committed attitude to life, and for Woodcock this might mean a sloppy amoral attitude.

The attack on Cohen is significant in his criticism in other ways. Woodcock seems to want to make a clear distinction between the closed concept of art and life itself. He very obviously does not condone an ivory tower attitude, for he insists on the quality of life around the production of literature. "Books, like men, are better understood when we know the mental environment from which they have arisen." But we must not confuse art with life, he seems to suggest, so he is perhaps unsympathetic to the kinds of modern literature which present themselves as part of a very self-conscious process. This accounts for his somewhat grudging admiration for Malcolm Lowry. He feels *Under the Volcano* is an "imaginative transfiguration of real life", whereas *Dark as The Grave* has a "depressingly linear structure". The novel has no reverberations, no real artistic life for "art made out of art is always sterile". Yet even in this respect Woodcock shows a surprising openness of mind, for he praises Layton's poetry highly, even though in general he detests "the romantic cult of the artist". And he accepts Birney's continuous process of creation as represented by his *Selected Poems*, although perhaps his acceptance comes from what he calls Birney's use of experience "seen in its moral dimensions".

Woodcock's distrust of the self-conscious process in literature explains perhaps why the essays in *Odysseus Ever Returning* deal with figures who are generally well-established. There is a curious lack of critical discussion of the more recent developments and figures emerging in the latter part of the 1960's in Canada. I for one would like to see his incisive critical intelligence focussed on Al Purdy, Gwen MacEwen, John Newlove, Margaret Avison and the West Coast Movement of the 1960's.

In an article in a recent *Wascana Review* Woodcock predicts that there will soon be a return to more regular and traditional forms in literature. Perhaps beneath the critical statements made in these three books may be a kind of nostalgia for a firmer basis for literature than that current at the moment, the kind of nostalgia that again links Woodcock with Orwell. He is constantly searching for it in the Canadian literature he reads and criticises, just as he seems to be searching for a firm basis for life in his travels through other countries and other cultures. He describes himself as "an incurable moralizing traveller". These books are a report on his journey through the literary plains of Canadian literature in search of the worthwhile destination. He quotes with approval D. S. Savage's definition of the critical task: "to interpret, elucidate and evaluate our literature . . . to define, defend and expound the tradition." In the course of his remarks on Smith, he says, "We are in the middle of what tradition we have." If criticism is essential to the formation of a literary culture, then Woodcock is in the centre of our critical tradition, not veering to the fringes of mythic generalization or mystic outpourings but expressing a genuine unflinching view of our real achievements illuminated by a density of reference from his own wide-ranging interests. In a recent essay Eli Mandel called George Orwell "astonishing". It is obvious that Woodcock is close to Orwell and we can expect him to continue to astonish and delight us through his editorial acumen, his travels, his full-length studies and his criticism, of which these three books give a representative sampling.

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A SWAN AMONG GEESE

George Woodcock

ADRIENNE CLARKSON, *Hunger Trace*. McClelland & Stewart. $5.95.
JOHN CORNISH, *A World Turned Turtle*. Clarke Irwin. $4.50.
PERCY JANES, *House of Hate*. McClelland & Stewart. $7.95.
RUTH NICHOLS, *Ceremony of Innocence*. Queenswood House. $6.00.

WHILE EXPERIMENTAL, NON-sequential fiction comes more and more frequently from Anansi and other Canadian independent presses, the old fiction that sustains a chronological continuity and keeps to at least a pretense of naturalism still flourishes in a considerable variety of forms, and probably, book for book, maintains as high a level of interest as — and often a higher level of craftsmanship than — the new open-field novels in which, as in *vers libre*, success is difficult precisely because it seems so easy to the neophyte, who too often imagines that he has merely to open his typewriter for the unconscious to direct his fingers into greatness.

In any period, of course, the art which breaks barriers is that of the experimenters — a tiny minority of them — and it is these few master innovators who seem in later ages to represent their ages most splendidly. In fact, of course, they represent the future, the age that appreciates them. Joyce, for example, belongs far more to the world culture of the 1970s than he did to the Dublin of 1910, and Picasso far more to the cosmopolitan art scene of the decades since World War II than to the Paris thirty years before from which he and his associates launched the guerilla war of cubism. The artists who really represent their age most intimately are men whose reputation inevitably wanes as the time to which they belong dies away; Arnold Bennett and Augustus John are examples from the past, and I suspect that, when our successors look back a generation or so ahead, writers like Hugh MacLennan and Morley Callaghan will have the same appearance of receding into the age that bred them and will be read mainly as period figures.

The secret probably is that those who are really more deeply concerned with forms and philosophies of art — and so rise above their actualities as James and Proust and Joyce did — are more likely to be of significance after they are dead than those who have been unable to detach themselves from the fascinating grip of their environment. Tolstoy may seem the law-proving exception, but in his case a great historic vision — as with Dostoevsky a passionate moral vision — enabled him to transcend the mere pattern of living he portrayed so radiantly, and this vision became the equivalent of the Jamesian aesthetic and of Proust's dream of the marriage of time and art.

The four novels I am reviewing all appear to fit into what one may call the fiction of actuality; they deal with the world of here and now in terms of the preoccupations that concern unexperi-

mental and Gutenberg-addicted people of the late 60s and early 70s. For reasons I shall later give, I suspect that with one of these books appearances are deceptive and that in its author we may be meeting one of those destined to be an originator.

But let me deal first with the three that seem to me to be written mainly for this day and at most for this decade. Each has its own kind of competence, yet all are the kind of novels that usually find their way into the basket most reviewers keep for books they can safely take round to the bookseller to earn an extra perquisite because they are not likely ever to look at them again. Which is not to say they are not worth reading once.

Consider *Hunger Trace* by Adrienne Clarkson. It is topical indeed, in the sense that its theme is the position of woman in an acquisitive world. Its author is too intelligent to follow the orthodox Women's Liberation line, but the idea of the constricting nature of woman's lot in our society is clearly developed, and rather naively symbolized in the hawk with its marred claws who in an ambiguous way represents both the heroine (Regina) and her lover (Tiercel who bears a hawk's name), and yet perhaps projects the force that holds them together rather than imaging either of them individually. It is a fluent book, with a brightness of tone, but the images it arouses in one's mind — those of a Peter Newmanish political society — are cinematographic in a rather passé Hollywood style. Yet it is just a shade too clever and too sensitive to be standard pablum for the housewife. I found *Hunger Trace* pleasant to read, in the way a Noel Coward play was pleasant to watch, but at the same time an experience of little moment.

There was a more solid feeling to the experience of reading John Cornish's *A World Turned Turtle*. Cornish, who in one of his novels amusingly travestied the Doukhobors and in another gave a rather Balzacian peep into Montreal middle class life, now turns back to World War II for a setting and to the romance of pursuit for a form. The combination is one of dangerous possibilities. Such a novel — set mostly in the London of the blackout and of the first days of peace in May, 1945 — might easily have taken on a Graham Greenish tone or, if it veered too strongly to the comic, have looked like another *Turvey*. Mr. Cornish has quite successfully avoided both pitfalls in this tale of an Esthonian, naturalized into a Canadian and turned into a military policeman, who during the course of his duties encounters — as a fugitive from the Continent — his old schoolmaster from Tallinn. Tief — the schoolmaster — is interned on the Isle of Man, but Koort — the MP — becomes obsessed with the idea of rescuing him. Later, when Koort is ordered to act as an armed guard on a train taking Esthonian D.P's from Liverpool to Tilbury, where they will be embarked on a Soviet steamer for a journey to an unknown fate, it is obvious that the situation has become urgent. With Tief, he jumps the train and — as his world turns turtle — becomes the policeman's opposite, the fugitive, and his counterpart, the criminal, for to survive and disguise himself properly he must steal and threaten violence. The two fugitives live for a while on a deserted bombsite, but Tief is caught, and handed over to the Russians. Koort, his reason for rebellion gone, behaves

with increasing foolhardiness until, one evening, he is trapped by his fellow provosts on the baroque facade of a London mansion and falls to his death. It is a tale told with fine restraint, never veering into melodrama, never allowing its comedy to run out of hand, and admirably condensing the atmosphere of a period that, for half the world's people, is already history — a time before they were born.

Percy Janes' book, *House of Hate*, also straddles the frontier between present and past; its action is mostly set in a pre-Confederation Newfoundland that has largely vanished, but at the same time — like *A World Turned Turtle* — it cannot be called a real historical novel, for it is not reconstructing something outside the writer's experience. Janes lived through the world and times of which he writes, just as Cornish lived as a soldier in wartime London; indeed, in the case of Janes there is a peculiar intimacy to the link between the man and the book, for he admits with unusual frankness that this is a novel based on his own life. We are told that the family split by mutual detestation which figures in *House of Hate* is a projection of the author's own family; yet the work is not in the strict sense an autobiography, since Janes has changed and shifted and invented to give it the character of what he calls "a work of art". Art is a broad word, but my definition of it would not include *House of Hate*. It is a moving book at the points where the author is obviously still feeling with intensity passions that were his own and that shadowed his life, but there is too much unresolved raw material for it to carry conviction as a novel, though the obviously autobiographical elements do convince — as autobiography, and the book, hybrid and clumsy as it is, has some value as a portrayal of a society that has rarely yet found its way into literature of any kind.

Now I come to the book which seems to me the swan among this flock of worthy literary geese. It is *Ceremony of Innocence* by Ruth Nichols. Ruth Nichols is a young Vancouver writer whose *A Walk out of the World*, written when she was eighteen, was reviewed by Audrey Thomas in *Canadian Literature* 43. According to the dust-jacket, *Ceremony of Innocence*, though published later, is her first *novel*. Whether this means that it was written even before *A Walk out of the World*, or whether the latter was classed as a *romance* and in fact written previously, is not made clear, but it is obvious from the publisher's statements that both are the works of a very young writer. Yet, like its predecessor in publication, *Ceremony of Innocence* is far more than a work of promise. It is achievement — a work of remarkable intelligence, sensibility and formal power.

Barely described, *Ceremony of Innocence* is the story of a fantastically precocious twelve-year-old girl, Marjorie Baldwin, child of a cold, vain and widowed father, who sets off to spend the summer with him on an archaeological dig he is directing on the Atlantic coast. She enters a world of adult strife, for Baldwin's academic associates on the dig are former colleagues and friends who now despise him. As Marjorie pursues her own literature-drenched fantasy life, writing her novels — talented juvenilia — and identifying herself to the pitch of morbid horror with Lady Jane Grey, she becomes aware of the complexities of the conflicts around her. She observes her

father's moral degeneration when she is witness to his seduction of an unwilling girl student working on the dig; she is present alone with him when he collapses and dies of a heart attack. And in the weeks that follow she gradually and painfully breaks free of her obsessive identification with him, and accepts, with fate only knows what complications in the future, the surrogate parenthood of his best pupil and most bitter critic.

It is all superbly and truly done, without the rot of sentimentality, without the acid of youthful cynicism. Standing on the divide between childhood and adulthood, Miss Nichols has seen into both lands with an extraordinary clarity, and has brought them together into a wonderfully consistent continent of the mind, credible in its own terms and portrayed with a lyrical delicacy of the kind one has rarely encountered since Alain Fournier wrote *Le Grand Meaulnes*.

There is no need to ask where Miss Nichols is going. She has reached her own country of literature, and what should interest us now is how she will colonize it. *Ceremony of Innocence* is a book I shall keep, for I have a strong premonition its successors will lead me to read it again.

OUT OF ORBIT

Neil Compton

The Interior Landscape: The Literary Criticism of Marshall McLuhan. Selected, compiled and edited by Eugene McNamara. McGraw-Hill. $6.95.
Counterblast, by Marshall McLuhan. Toronto, McClelland and Stewart. $5.95.

MARSHALL MCLUHAN'S career as a super-celebrity may have been slightly briefer than that of the Beatles, but it was no less spectacular in its own way. He rocketed into astral eminence as the top prophet of pop in 1965, largely on the thrust exerted by his gnomic handbook *Understanding Media* (1964). After three or four years in highly visible orbit round our global village, he has now successfully re-entered the normal academic atmosphere and settled back into what many of his erstwhile promoters no doubt consider the obscure gravity of life as a teacher and scholar.

A lesser man than he could never have carried it all off so imperturbably. It would be fascinating to learn from McLuhan himself what it is like to be caught up in such an uncontrollable cycle of events. He would probably describe it with the same detached but energetic interest that he brings to bear on everything he writes about. Not for nothing is his favourite hero the sailor in Poe's "Descent into the Maelstrom", who saved his life be remaining calm amidst the overwhelming destructive force of the whirlpool.

Though McLuhan seems to have enjoyed his celebrity status, he is (as Tom Wolfe discerned) incorruptible. Who can forget the vision of McLuhan speaking for a fat fee at a packagers' convention and telling his appalled audience that packaging is on the way out (housewives of the future will resent anything that inhibits their tactile pleasure in handling what they intend to buy)? Perhaps autobiography is also doomed in the cool,

tribal McLuhanite tomorrow, but I should at least like to hear what instant fame amidst the lonely crowd meant to a man whose whole career expresses such a longing for community.

McLuhan's almost lustful urge to incorporate all earthly phenomena in his theories has made him vulnerable to at least one temptation of intellectual superstardom. Publishers vie for the privilege of immortalizing the least effusions of the great man's brain. McLuhan's recent books — *The Medium is the Message* (with Quentin Fiore, 1967), *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968) and *Through the Vanishing Point* (with Harley Parker, 1968) — all suffer in varying degrees from the vices of slickness, superficiality and excessive generalization. These would be serious flaws in books on any subject, however trivial; they are all but fatal to McLuhan's current theme, the electronic apocalypse. *Counterblast* is not immune from these faults, but it is certainly a cut above its immediate predecessors.

The book has a curious history. Back in 1954, I paid twenty-five cents for an eighteen-page fotoprinted booklet with the same title, signed by the author. (The jacket blurb of the new volume says *Counterblast* was conceived twelve years ago, but this is clearly an error.) In the tradition of Wyndham Lewis' famous magazine, it BLASTED and BLESSED a variety of contemporary phenomena:

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The MASSEY REPORT damp cultural igloo for canadian devotees of
TIME
&
LIFE
and
BLESS . . .
MASSEY-HARRIS farm machinery,
Canada's
REAL contribution to CULTURE.

The last few pages were given over to a few score short, pithy paragraphs expressing what by now have come to be McLuhanite commonplaces.

I remember thinking at the time that there was a conflict between the implied moralism of Lewis' BLAST and BLESS formula and McLuhan's insistence that a fixed moral point-of-view is inimical to good judgment. *Counterblast* (1969) is ingeniously designed and beautifully printed, and costs twenty-four times as much as its modest predecessor, but the discrepancy is still there, even though the text has been brought up to date (We are now invited to BLESS culture shock as dislocation of MIND into MEANING; and BLAST Sputnik for enclosing terrestrial NATURE in a MAN-MADE ENVIRONMENT that transforms the evolutionary process from biology to technology). The commonplaces are all to be found, better and more fully expressed, elsewhere in the master's works. Old hands will find them over-familiar while newcomers will probably find them merely confusing. If the medium is the message, it seems odd that McLuhan is so keen on subverting most of the advantages offered by the book form — its orderliness, its capacity for detail and its logical articulation. He would be the first to BLAST someone who used television as though it were only an audio-visual book. Nonetheless, *Counterblast*, (1969) is fun to glance through briefly, and is particularly recommended for doctors'

waiting rooms and ad-agency reception areas.

The fourteen essays reprinted in *The Interior Landscape* belong to a different world. They are a selection from McLuhan's best critical work during two pre-orbital decades, from 1943 to 1962: eloquent testimony not only to the remarkable consistency of his thought since the earliest days, but also to his mastery of the one essential art of a good literary critic — the loving elucidation of texts. Those who, like me, are sometimes outraged by McLuhan's habit of using out-of-context bits of Shakespeare or Joyce to support the most dubious propositions will find the well-known essays on Keats (1943), Hopkins (1946) and Tennyson (1951) as scrupulously scholarly as they are textually illuminating. Only the excerpt on Pope's *Dunciad* from *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) dilutes its real insights with interpretations wrenched to fit the McLuhanite dogma, like Holy Writ in the hands of a Jehovah's Witness.

This is not the place to show the continuity of McLuhan's conservative and Catholic principles throughout his astonishing intellectual journey from Jacobite and Chestertonian agrarianism to become the prophet of the cool revolution. McNamara wisely reprints the seminal essay "An Ancient Quarrel in Modern America" (1946) which interprets western intellectual history in terms of an enduring opposition between "rhetoricians" and "dialecticians", from the Sophists and Socrates in fifth-century Athens to South and North in the twentieth-century U.S.A. Few contemporary readers well share McLuhan's passionate partisanship on behalf of the rhetoricians. On the other hand, the article makes it easier to understand how he came to embrace electronic technology so eagerly, after Innis had shown him the role of media in shaping human culture. In any case, the only justification a literary critic needs for his ideas is that they help him to write good criticism. The superb essay on John Dos Passos (1951), comparing him justly but unfavourably with Joyce, triumphantly demonstrates the usefulness of this particular ideological framework to Marshall McLuhan. Similarly, one does not have to be convinced by the mild pro-Southern polemics of "Edgar Poe's Tradition" (1944) and "The Southern Quality" (1947) to appreciate the way in which

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these essays clarify two main varieties of American experience.

Until I read through this collection, I had not realized how central the metaphor of landscape is in McLuhan's critical vocabulary. He uses it to epitomize six centuries of literary history: from the microcosmic, analogical and symbolic landscapes of medieval and early Renaissance literature (and some modern Catholic writers), to the scientific Newtonian particularity of Thomson, the interior psychological landscapes of Wordsworth and the later Tennyson, and the fragmented discontinuous universe of New England literature and the modern newspaper. Even if one rejects the remedy prescribed by *Understanding Media* and its successors, this description of our intensifying cultural incoherence at least offers a basis for accurate diagnosis.

According to *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, "Schizophrenia may be a necessary consequence of literacy". It also seems to be a consequence of admiring Marshall McLuhan. I am not alone in having pilfered his work for insights, while remaining uneasily conscious of disagreements so powerful as to be moral in their intensity. An inveterate reviewer of his books, I have written a number of grudging or ambiguous notices over the past five or six years. It is a relief to be able to end this one with an unqualified tribute to a major literary critic.

QUELQUES ARPENTS DE PAPILLONS

W. H. New

D.G. JONES. *Butterfly on Rock.* Toronto. $7.50.

INSTRUCTORS of Canadian literature are occasionally asked to name a book that does for Canada what *The American Adam* does for the United States, and until recently there hasn't been one. Now there is. That by itself could be a short and complimentary review of D.G. Jones' *Butterfly on Rock.* His essay "The Sleeping Giant" has since its publication in 1965 been a standard reference for students, an illuminating mythopoeic glimpse of some of the tensions that Canadian writers have expressed in their inability to define the national culture. Adam, ark, and mountain lurk in Canadian writing as they do in American, says Professor Jones, but they are in exile here; Voltaire's few acres of snow have expanded into more acres of rock and more acres still of barren ground in which to wander. Canadians have been colonial not just by necessity, he adds, but by choice too, and in such a landscape Adam has sought independence less than a knowledge he can never quite grasp.

After the heavygoing introduction, which is repeated bit by bit in the subsequent chapters, anyway, the book begins with this essay and explores from there. One of the first propositions is so accurately simple that it sounds like a shout in

an empty room, but there has been so much brouhaha about the Canadian identity void that shouting is perhaps necessary:

> A . . . study of Canadian literature . . . reveals not only the anxiety which results from the lack of any clearly defined identity, but also, and sometimes simultaneously, a confidence that such an identity exists and is to be realized.

The "duality reveals itself in a number of recurring images" — which describes the methodology of this book — and one therefore discovers what is Canadian about Canadian literature by reading what Canadian writers have written. So far so good. It is at the boundaries where identities always get hazy. Canada has no corner on the Old Testament Imagery market, so can imagery — or anything — specify identity without becoming rigid? One of the certain deaths of literature is to enlist it in the aid of political definition. Chinua Achebe, for example, is least successful when (in *A Man of the People*) he gets caught up in the abuses and allegations of the Nigerian pre-war political scene. Similarly, though Hugh MacLennan's aims are laudable, the weakest parts of *Barometer Rising* are those that self-consciously celebrate national unity and do not subjugate the sentiment in the interests of the particular characters.

To exploit separatism in fiction for the sake of the cause rather than the idea, to arouse a specific political action rather than to explore a situation, risks a parallel literary disease; good political science may result, or possibly an astringent utopian satire, but the chances of good social fiction are remote. *War and Peace* of course renders society admirably, but it transcends it as well. It is not bound by the political framework in which it finds its source. And in Canada, where traditions are built by absorption, the wilful imposition of a boundary on identity seems strangely paradoxical. By this I mean that in the past there weren't any Canadians; Canadians *became*. That ought to be an ongoing thing. Susanna Moodie has become part of the Canadian literary tradition not in what she wrote, but in the subsequent response to what she wrote. (Margaret Atwood's poems in *The Journal of Susanna Moodie* are the most accomplished literary expression of that response so far — and are "Canadian". A subsequent "Canadianism" would presumably absorb Moodie AND Atwood and possibly something else.) Mrs. Moodie's sense of discovery — both of Canada and of exile — was that of a dispossessed Englishwoman. In *Butterfly on Rock*, observing Moodie in the context of writing since Confederation, that ambivalent discovery has also become the classic Canadian syndrome.

Douglas Jones offers comments on literature, not politics, and interpretations of imagery rather than judgments of literary value. Adam in the waste wood, Irving Layton marking "The birth of tragedy", Duddy Kravitz shouting "I don't care", and Margaret Avison's "Exporters. Glutting us: with Danish spoons" are all in his view images of exile, demonstrations that Eden was never apprehended in Canada. It is an important observation, for it helps explain why utopian visions are so rare in Canadian writing and why fiction here (as compared to the freewheeling imaginative movements of Australian novels, say) is so cabined in scope and so constrained by uncertainty. If we accept the book's premises, the limitation on vision occurs

because our communal imagination dictates it. Condemned into a world of harsh realities, our minds (enlivened outside Eden) are dimly conscious of a different world now in need of being named, and characters and personae — all in their own little worlds — try to locate it.

Jones takes his initial idea in five related directions. First: given Adam in exile, where is Eve? Living in Canada, too, and dejected, apparently — disguised as Hagar Shipley and Mrs. Bentley. They await arousal but guard against it. They fear the wilderness. They exude the "garrison culture" they represent. The "world of appearances" is in conflict with the "world of spontaneous feeling"; man finds himself in competition with land, not in harmony with it, and a sense of exile is the natural outcome. It is both the "condition and reflection" of his "unconscious", "irrational", and "demonic" yearnings. As Patrick Anderson puts it: "the land was and the people did not take it." Our souls thus remained unclaimed, and the Jungian possibilities of such a dilemma become manifest.

For a pursuit of the implications of such an antagonism between heart and mind, between love and law, Jones turns to Leacock, MacLennan, Pratt, Grove, and Cohen. He finds again what he calls an Old Testament insistence on controlling the impulsive wilderness through the force of will and law. In "Brébeuf and his Brethren" he finds North America as "a spiritual challenge" to Europe's Christian idealism. European culture extended into North American therefore *is* in its way utopian — and Canadian "utopias" thus appear as Presbyterian garrisons, commercially - conscious bishoprics, and the industrial splendour of "The City of the End of Things". They ironically invert the intent of the utopian vision, reducing the ideal into the "reality" of material "success". The mind that dictated the "ideal" reveals its limitations, and the man seeking his identity through reason must turn to seek out the shaman to find "a new language of prayer". The irony of D.C. Scott's "Onondaga Madonna", showing by means of a Christian icon the destruction of a people by Christian culture, evokes exactly this kind of situation. Perfection turns out to seem imperfect; Eden still hasn't been apprehended.

For Roberts and Lampman the difficulty then was to enunciate the apprehension they did have. If earth was ambiguous, often hostile, how could one love what wasn't even liked, without appearing at least to escape into evasive reminiscence or linguistic evasion? Some surrender seems mandatory to reach the next plateau. Pratt, says Jones, managed to delight in Leviathan; Birney could not; Roberts in his animal stories found "natural law" rigorously positive and beautiful; Macpherson recommends joy:

> The Lord that made Leviathan made thee
> Not good, not great, not beautiful, not free,
> Not whole in love, not able to forget
> The coming war, the battle still unmet.
>
> But look: Creation shines...

In the "But" is the heart's response to negation, the mind's arbitrary erection of alternate possibilities, and the stoic insistence on stubborn endurance. It carries all the force and all the weakness that it does in life; there is little logic to it, and it always proves effective. "To fish for the glory", says Jones, drawing upon Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, "is to catch the darkness too." Or in the terms

Layton uses, in the poem that gives Jones' book its evocative though cryptic title:

> There is no death in all the land,
> I heard my voice cry;
> And I brought my hand down on the butterfly
> And felt the rock move beneath my hand.

The Hidden Mountain, The Sacrifice, and *The Watch that Ends the Night* strive to explain a similar situation. In death is life; in sacrifice is discovery; in the reality is the shadow and in the shadow is reality. Such paradoxes are the stuff of myths and exactly the kind of conundrum that myth criticism happily expounds. *Butterfly on Rock* is a fascinating book, but like the ideals it describes, it possesses actively the limitations of its method. Jung makes it into the book, Freud is inferentially acknowledged, and Darwin is left out in the cold, yet it is Darwinian theory (as Sandra Djwa has recently argued in her work on Roberts, Pratt, and Birney) that has furnished the imagery and the outlook of so much Canadian poetry. The book of course does not attempt to fasten every door; it aims if possible to open them instead — to suggest ways of reading further rather than *the* way to read. It explores the imaginative life of a people, not the historical framework in which they lived. And it looks at the recurrence of particular image patterns as the key to that life.

What a reader should *not* go to the book for, then, is a historical survey of Canadian writing; it isn't there. Nor is there mention of every significant writer, and it is extraordinary to find that Lowry, Livesay, and W.W.E. Ross go unmentioned altogether, and that Richler and P.K. Page get the scant reference they do. But for the writers that the book mainly does consider — Anderson, Avison, Birney, Bowering, Buckler, Callaghan, Carman, Cohen, Grove, Lampman, Layton, Leacock, MacEwen, MacLennan, Macpherson, Newlove, Pratt, Purdy, Roberts, Sinclair Ross, Roy, D.C. Scott, Smith, and Souster (a substantial list) — there is ample recompense.

As it is not a book of explication, the reader never gets to grips with individual novels and poems as separate entire units. Except in the final chapter — so curiously tentative, compared to the others, and so like an essay from a book yet to be written rather than the conclusion of this one — the author discusses imagery without investigating an author's success or failure in his use or his technique. But that is not his intention. The fragments of prose and verse are integrated into a different kind of scheme that strives to elucidate the sensibilities that motivated them in the first place. It is a difficult rock to enliven, and Professor Jones' arresting attempt to do so will prove continuingly suggestive to readers who touch it with their minds.

books in review

INVISIBLE EDITING

Canada First. Ed. Peter Anson. Anansi. $1.95.

THE EDITOR of *Canada First; A Mare Usque Ad Edmonton* does his best to be invisible. In his introductory note to this collection of 19 new Canadian poets, Peter Anson says, "An anthology, as I see it, is much less like a collage than it is like a Tarot pack, intelligible only in terms of one's relation to the individual cards. My suggestion therefore is to give each poet his territory and let the borders evolve as they will."

It is all very well to let the reader relate to individual cards but one expects some order to the deck. *Canada First* lacks even alphabetical order. An anthology needs a theme, or a subject, or at the least a chronology. Anson says, "The poems in this book have been handled, not processed, i.e. they are here because a human being, eminently fallible, an editor, laid them here." But it is not enough to collect a group of poets east of Edmonton and expect us to be grateful their work has been touched by human hands.

To use Anson's metaphor, the borders of the poems are to evolve as they will, or to be more apt, willy nilly. Leaving poets to their border defences sometimes amounts to editorial desertion. With Robert Flanagan's poems, for example, it is difficult to tell where to begin and end. If the anthology is to be a pack, it might be useful to identify the cards. There is no clue in the display of poems on white space — or for that matter in the poems themselves. The reader deserves to know when to stop and start.

Each poet's work is prefaced by a brief self-portrait, "edited for space," the editor says. They should be edited for lucidity. Consider Jon Whyte's: "Born Banff, Ides March 1941; reborn June 23, 1968. Attended U. of Alta, distended Stanford. Columnist *Summit News*, Banff." The "reborn" and "distended" smack of an inside joke. Added to disorganization, inside jokes might have made *Canada First* a full-scale disaster. Fortunately, the poems themselves avert calamity.

Dave Solway celebrates "The Crystal Theatre," a decrepit movie-house with "sprung rhythm seats" and a "cargo of visceral nightmares." Along with Coca Cola, the Theatre dispenses "mustard and relish images." A run-down movie house, then, is our age's Crystal Palace. "God knows it's the best we can do," Solway concludes.

William Bauer's amusing series of nine poems deals with Everett Coogler, a greengrocer "on Highway 43" near a place called Hamsterville. The series suggests Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* but Coogler's vantage point is in life, not death. In "Modern Fame As She Is Known In Hamsterville," Coogler chases some vandals who have just wrecked his vegetable stand, "A half mile down the highway/Shrieking like a ghost indeed,/'Aphids!'/'Aphids!'/'Aphids!' "

Frederick Louder's fine poem "Crèvecour" reads like some Celtic legend with its sea and fog, young girls, and "eagles that hide in the mist." But Louder is also capable of perpetrating a poem with a

title like "Diaploos: III Pre-Cambrian Vortices."

In his two poems, Victor Skretkowicz, Jr., creates a kind of Alice in Wonderland. Alice is called Annie and her wonderland an orphanage peopled by characters like Thomas Trouble, Lily Laugh, Mr. Lion, as well as ju-jube and catalpa trees. Since catalpas have heart-shaped leaves and trumpet-shaped flowers they're good to have in poems.

D. L. Lamothe is, says his preface, "trying to steer poetry away from the written page, into a sound thing with a light jazz background." Some of his lines do sing, but is hard to tell what the first line of "Triangles for Grace" has to do with sound, or jazz, or poetry. "so 2nite i dru rations but triangularly 2 say the least." It may be *Canada First*'s worst line.

The opening group of poems in the anthology may be the best. They are written by the only woman included, Paulette Jiles. She has cunning and control. Married life does not fare well in "He Beats Her Off With A Rake," in which a husband introduces his wife thus:

> She's loving, she's cultured, she's true!
> She always knows just what to do!
> Her idea of a good time
> Is to go out and dine
> With Carmichael and Georges Pompidou!

Almost alone among the poets, she knows how to use rhyme. At times the images come on with the white-hot intensity I associate with the late Sybil Plath. In "Dallas":

> I am dirty, I am comfortable, I have my boots on.
> Sliding down onto the blank and shadeless plains
> That burn and burn like chili peppers,
> We are deadheading for murderous Dallas.

Miss Jiles falters when her images become too congested as in "The Tin Woodsman." The woodsman decides to "settle/In the shadow of this red rock/ and be metal." T. S. Eliot managed the red rock image better in "The Wasteland." But it's to Anson's credit as an editor that he puts her poems first. Apart from his own note and the act of selection, it's the only sign of his presence.

Next year House of Anansi will bring out an anthology to include the West of British Columbia. Its editor should realize he's not a Council of Versailles meting out "territory," but a force in making poems cleaner, stronger, clearer. Along with respecting poems as parts, he will pour them into a greater mould. That will be a book.

FRASER SUTHERLAND

A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS

JOHN COSIN, *A Collection of Private Devotions.* Edited by P. G. Stanwood with the assistance of Daniel O'Connor. Oxford.

DEVOTIONAL WRITING is not, at present, a form of literature standing high in public esteem. All the more reason to welcome this scrupulously edited and beautifully produced volume. Succinctly and modestly, without calling attention to its apparatus, it furnishes everything the reader needs for full understanding and appreciation of the text. Between them, the introduction and notes point us back into the history of devotional writing, establish Cosin as a credible historical figure, and show how in later years his book influenced the changing text of the Book of Common Prayer.

John Cosin was born in 1595 and died in 1672. The period of the Civil War coincided with his prime of life and he felt the full force of Puritan disapproval. While Master of Peterhouse, he was impeached by Parliament and had to flee from Cambridge. He appears to have gone into hiding but is known to have reached the safety of Paris by 1645. Here he served as chaplain to the Anglican Royalists. Soon after the Restoration, he became Bishop of Durham and as one of the most able survivors of the Jacobean Church, he exercised great influence.

In coming to grips with such a work as this, we must remember that prayer, in the seventeenth century, could be a way of life as well as a form of worship. Defoe, whose fiction is more real than actuality, has his Puritan Crusoe compile reflections which read like responses: "I am singled out and separated, as it were, from all the world, to be miserable. But I am singled out, too, from all the ship's crew, to be spared from death; and He that miraculously saved me from death can deliver me from this condition." And further on we find Crusoe, in the midst of his labours, engaged in prayer and meditation almost as a matter of course. If such was the attitude of a solitary independent of the period, it is easy to see that in England, in the context of the Established Church, a work such as Cosin's could simultaneously embody the warmth and flexibility of private prayer and the immemorially accepted framework of canonical hours and feasts, and that, far from being a piece of ecclesiastical manipulation or anti-Puritan propaganda, it could be, and in Cosin's case was, a labour of love, a willing offering.

It is not easy, by any intellectual or analytical process, to arrive at the rationale of such a work as this. It visibly embodies several kinds of overlapping sequences: the canonical hours carry one through the cycle of day and night; fixed and movable feasts account for the cycle of the year; the life of Christ is condensed into a single annual round. In addition to these cyclical celebrations, natural or imposed, there are saints' days that appear to follow no natural pattern, and such a wild oddity as Powder Treason Day on November 5th, to commemorate the foiling of Guy Fawkes.

There is, rather surprisingly, no logical progression, no progressive revelation or arrangement of ideas from simple to complex. At the same time, this book, in common with others of its kind, has a

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function beyond that of reminding the user at intervals of what he is supposed to believe. To the unsympathetic reader, the pages may seem stacked with tedious formulae: "Let thy merciful ears, O Lord, bee open to the prayers of thy humble servants. . . ."

But all such considerations are superficial, like the belief that Tudor prayer books were designed simply to keep the lower orders in their proper stations. What really emerges from John Cosin's pattern of devotion is the desire to wait upon God, in a purposeful rather than spasmodic way. In this context, the formulated petitions and confessions become a means of conducing, by a common wording, to the communion of saints. Private devotion, on the same pattern as public devotion, gives access to an eternal world, to a kingdom of priests.

From linguistic and literary points of view, the book is important as part of the stream that flowed into the Book of Common Prayer. The spoken language was enriched with phraseology from prophets, psalmists and evangelists. These have echoes into our own usage in Canada, "from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth."

ROY DANIELLS

A NARROW RANGE

JOHN METCALF, *The Lady Who Sold Furniture*. Clarke, Irwin. $4.95

ON THE DUST-JACKET of this collection of six stories, the publisher has reproduced the somewhat hyperbolic comment by *Saturday Night*, that "John Metcalf is as brilliant a master of the short story form as Maugham or Chekhov." Such a comparison is unfortunate, for it implies the possession of wit, ingenuity and narrative power to a degree certainly not achieved in these stories. Metcalf's range is much more limited, and there is nothing in this book to suggest that he is a writer of great vision or originality. But within his narrower range, Metcalf does have something to say, and says it quite well.

The title story is the best one of the collection, and through a series of lightly comic episodes it examines the fears and frustrations attendant upon love. The plot follows the stages of a love affair between a professional housekeeper in her early forties, and a young English teacher. Jeanne is insecure, moody and irritable; she is conscious of the encroachments of age, of her boniness and her sagging breasts, but she struggles to maintain her freedom, even though that freedom is only an illusion. Her lover, Peter, is also unhappy and unsure of himself, and through his relationship with Jeanne finds temporary relief from the horrors of his elementary school and its mad headmaster. Their affair is punctuated by Jeanne's abrupt departures from her job; when she is short of money, or when the law seems about to catch up with her, she sells all her employer's furniture to a dealer, and breaks open the meter before she leaves. Then she adopts another alias, and applies elsewhere for a housekeeping position. Her life is one continuous flight; and in this precarious mode of existence the author has found an apt symbol for what most people experience in early middle age, the fear of physical and spiritual stagnation. In contrast to this rather sombre theme, the tone of the narrative is light and ironic throughout, and sometimes there is a note of high comedy

of a characteristically English kind, such as in the scenes describing the activities of Mr. Arkle and his crew, as they remove everything saleable from a house. The humour of these episodes resides primarily in the language; like Harold Pinter, John Metcalf has a good ear for the peculiarities of the English working-class voice, and he uses dialogue effectively as a means of emphasising a comic situation. While his henchmen are loading the van with stolen chairs and tables, Mr. Arkle lectures Peter on the decline of quality workmanship and the dishonest methods of modern furniture-making. " 'You remember,' said Mr. Arkle, prodding Peter in the chest, 'you just keep it in mind. Your soft woods comes and goes but your mahogany goes on for ever.' "

The five stories which make up the second half of this book are all much shorter than the title story, less ambitious and less interesting. Here Metcalf also deals with fear and insecurity, mainly through a study of the experiences of children. In "Early Morning Rabbits" he explores the feelings of a young boy who shoots his first rabbit, and is suddenly confronted by the violence and brutality of life in nature. "The Tide Line" is a story on a similar theme, also conveyed through the consciousness of a child; a boy wandering alone by the cliffs suffers nameless fears when he comes upon the decaying corpse of a seagull, and hears the "iron cry" of a live bird wheeling above him. These and the remaining stories are all well executed, and can be praised for what critics like to call "craftsmanship"; but they lack impact, perhaps because too much of the author's energy has gone into the execution, and not enough into developing the substance of the story. The last story of the collection, "Dandelions", is a case in point. It presents a day in the life of an aging bookseller whose early dreams of antiquarian romance have petered out into a dull, routine existence. The scene moves from the monotony of his shop to the monotony of his home. However, the boredom of this life is perhaps too well conveyed, for the reader is soon bored himself by what turns into a tedious character sketch, which seems to hover on the edge of significance without ever achieving it. Chekhov and Maugham, different as they may be, both give the reader good *stories*, and hold our attention as much by narrative interest as by skilful composition. The trouble is that too many of Metcalf's stories are merely skilful. Only in "The Lady Who Sold Furniture", with its witty plot and pervasive irony, does he really succeed in engaging our interest in his characters and arousing our curiosity about their fates.

HERBERT ROSENGARTEN

STARRING LEACOCK

ELIZABETH KIMBALL, *The Man in the Panama Hat: Reminiscences of My Uncle. Stephen Leacock.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970. $6.50

ELIZABETH KIMBALL'S *The Man in the Panama Hat* promises a very special interest: subtitled "Reminiscences of My Uncle, Stephen Leacock", the book seems likely to provide the kind of intimate detail which has always seemed to me conspicuously absent from the published material on Leacock. Oh, we know about his tattered gown, his classroom manner, his passion for bass fishing. But we have

not known how he felt about his ne'er-do-well father, how his marriage functioned, what sort of relationship he had with his son. On his intimate relationships in particular, the record is oddly silent.

In a sense these things are none of our damn business anyway: but in Leacock's case the work is so enigmatic and tantalizing that one can hardly avoid curiosity. When he fiercely denies that Charles Dickens philandered — despite evidence to the contrary which he must have known — one senses a note of special pleading. Leacock felt strongly about his father, but he says only that his father left home in 1887, never to return. Other sources report that Stephen drove his father to the station, telling him that if he ever came back Stephen would kill him. What caused this depth of feeling? What was Leacock's childhood really like? We have had only the rumours — and, worst of all, the rumours are rich and provocative.

The strength of Mrs. Kimball's book is that she *does* cast some light on these matters. Here is the only published hint that Leacock's sexual life was in the least irregular, for instance, and perhaps the finest passage in the book is Mrs. Kimball's reconstruction, based on the family memories and other evidence, of Peter Leacock's last days at the family farm — days when young Stephen saw his brothers, his sisters and even his beloved mother subjected to physical abuse, culminating in a horrible night when Leacock *père* threatened to stab his wife, and young Stephen had to drive her to the security of a neighbour's house. Here is Leacock in a furious temper, roaring for a bottle opener and, when provided by little Betty Burrowes (later Kimball) with a corkscrew, hurling it the full length of the verandah while bellowing to his sister "*Daisy, you have raised an idiot.*"

A good deal of such material makes the book required reading for Leacock enthusiasts, and Mrs. Kimball also provides considerable background on the Leacock family, its character and its values. Unfortunately, however, the amount of family material distinctly overshadows the reminiscences of Stephen Leacock, and Mrs. Kimball's excessive attention to her own feeling about the family and her own childhood seems at once sentimental and self-indulgent. The reader suffers at times from an uneasy fear that he has blundered into a family reunion in which few of the participants are known to him, and all of them are engrossed in topics of little interest to him. Leacock was a member of what is evidently an interesting and mildly eccentric family, no doubt. But the details of the life of the extended Leacock family are of limited relevance to the character and achievement of Stephen himself — and, to be blunt, of limited interest to anyone outside the family circle. A good deal of the book is a kind of print equivalent of home movies.

Nevertheless, for all its flaws, the book does cast a more intimate light on our greatest humorist than anything else available; it will continue to be an invaluable source. Home movies, yes: but how many home movies star Shephen Leacock?

DONALD CAMERON

THE PARADOX OF LIFE

JANE RULE. *This Is Not For You.* Doubleday. $6.95

As DID *The Desert of the Heart,* Jane Rule's second novel portrays homosexual love, the possibility and morality of its fulfilment. It investigates the consequences of a choice made by Katherine George, the narrator, to resist an intimate life with Esther Woolf, whose innocence leads her progressively into unsuccessful relationships with men who fail to offer either heterosexual balance or moral reality. In the end, Esther enters a cloistered convent and Kate, resigned to her own tenuous martyrdom, accepts the limited "concept of self-sufficiency" as a welfare administrator in Greece.

Before I flesh out this synopsis let me say that *This Is Not For You* is an excellent novel written with classic talent and intelligence. What obsesses the author is the theme of paradox, and to appreciate that, one has to value the subtext as much as the supple style it enriches. What is morality? Can the paradox of life be resolved by anything other than truth to one's own feelings? But how, in what circumstances, are these to be trusted? And will they then conflict with morality?

Consider Kate, a half-breed Indian and a lesbian. Not too close a look reveals the extent of her paradoxical nature: a name half-way between two genders, a racial background at once divided, a female sex male in its appetite. She is a bastard, moreover, raised by a family not her own. As does Evelyn Hall in the first novel, Kate uses the image of Cain and Abel to contend (in a sermon she delivers with Esther before her graduation from college and the Church) that within each of us is both "the betrayer and the betrayed", in other words, both initiator and victim of an inescapable destiny. At the same time, however, that destiny paradoxically requires a choice: in it lies the frustration of being human, and a lesbian, in an illogical world.

Importantly, Kate's choice is one she must continue to make throughout the years of the 1950s her story recounts. Since their days as roommates together at college, Kate has consistently chosen not to admit her love to Esther, let alone fulfil it in a physical way. In this refusal rests her central story, addressed to, but not meant for, Esther. Certainly Kate's reluctance as "a moral primitive" would scarcely justify her choice when she is pragmatic elsewhere in satisfying her sexual needs with either a married woman, an aging spinster, or a Negress in London who breaks her nose and knocks out two front teeth. Rather the character of Esther is the key to the complexity of Kate's sacrifice.

From Kate, Esther earns the nickname "little dog" because of her blind loyalty, her tendency to walk a step behind, her penchant for dragging home junk. Out of Kate, she fashions rather a goddess figure during their college relationship, translating "unkind satire into good judgment . . . bad temper into righteous indignation . . . defensive arrogance into natural superiority." Throughout the novel, in America and England and Spain, Kate lays bare for us Esther's inherent innocence and therefore imperceptiveness. For the most part, Esther chooses to express herself as a sculptor, to offer herself up to a bohemian life, to men like Christopher Marlowe Smith,

fond of obscenities and father of two children; or Charlie, a drug addict with three wives and a "creative morality" which justifies anything including theft. From these she enters into marriage, then divorce from a man she discovers impotent, until a final choice lifts her from a disordered life of messy flats and tangled affairs, into a religious order of nuns. More or less a failure in the eyes of her friends and wealthy family, Esther becomes, at least in her own innocent and naive vision, fulfilled.

I think the ultimate paradox of Rule's first novel somewhat limited her success in 1964. That homosexual love was a doubtful means to salvation because morality appeared relative to convention rather than to love: this didn't convince me as altogether inevitable in terms of the choice made by her liberated main character, Evelyn Hall. The nature of the paradox in her second novel is fundamentally different and involves free will. Although convention might appear to limit Kate's morality in the same way, here it gets beneath a superficial concept, until one realizes what motivates Kate isn't the ingrained morality of society and religion (more important in the first novel), but an archetypal morality, refusal of one human being to risk injury of another (yet in this novel a paradox because the injury is an inevitable one). I believe the tension and success of *This Is Not For You* lies in the artistic inevitability of Kate's choice tempered by this morality.

In regard to Esther's happiness, "risking failure is less terrifying" for Kate "than risking success." Although she realizes she has only to ask for the other's love, she chooses never to force her will upon Esther who must establish "the freedom to choose" her own salvation. That the latter expresses her willingness on one occasion to let Kate have her, only sharpens our awareness of Kate's self-denial. In Esther's impulse to contradict her established heterosexual nature rests more an overture of generosity than a choice true to her own character: to take Esther for her own would involve a responsibility Kate hasn't a human right to assume. And so she damns two ways, frustration gives way to resignation. Her refusal to accept Esther is her betrayal of that woman to a world she is incapable of handling, but also the betrayal of herself and love to a sterile martyrdom.

While the first novel seemed too authorial, and lacked humour to undercut situations not effectively conceived, Jane Rule's latest work leaves author in wings (the first person being ideal for this writer), and weaves an adroit irony which cauterizes theme. While I have done slight justice to the secondary relationships which counterpoint the principal one here, I hope at least to have suggested a little of the novel's profundity, its acute humanism.

KEATH FRASER

ON THE VERGE

***** ERIC ROSS. *Beyond the River and the Bay*. University of Toronto Press. $8.50. This is a book by an imaginary author — Ian Alexander Bell Robertson — who lived (the real author will have us accept) in the early nineteenth century and prepared from documents then available a description of the Canadian Northwest that would be useful to prospective settlers interested in the Earl of Selkirk's colony on the Red River. One doubts if many settlers would be as sophisticated as the readers for whom fictitious Mr. Robertson writes, since he discourses in depth on the peoples of

the Northwest, on fur trade, transportation, the geographical regions, as well as on the prospects for agriculture and other industries; one would think his readership more likely to be among daring speculators or roving scholars than among the Hebridean crofters and Swiss ex-soldiers Selkirk collected. But such pretensions aside, the idea is an original one which enables real author Ross to assemble in interesting form all the information likely to be available to an enquiring man in London at the time. He achieves a creditable pastiche of the Regency expository style and projects convincingly the contemporary utilitarian attitude. But *Beyond the River and the Bay* is not merely a virtuoso work of reconstruction; the notes and bibliography make available to other scholars the wealth of Mr. Ross's research, so that in all respects this is a notable if curious addition to the historical literature of the Northwest.

**** DENNIS REID. *The Group of Seven.* National Gallery of Canada, $8.00 cloth, $5.00 paper. This is the catalogue raisonné of the fiftieth anniversary exhibition of paintings of the Group of Seven. It is at once a formidably useful and a visually repulsive book. It sets out to be more than a catalogue: to be, in fact, "a basic reference book" and "a thoroughly documented history of the Group of Seven". It succeeds in both aims. Mr. Reid has gathered and arranged in chronological patterns an amazing amount of information on the Group, its origins, its members, their lives, their practices as painters, their public careers, their mutual relationships, and from this time onward anyone writing on any of the painters concerned will find this volume indispensable. But the other function of a catalogue should be to attract viewers, while even a basic reference book should present its material in a way that does not impede understanding. The designer of *The Group of Seven* fails on both counts. 203 paintings are reproduced, all in a dismally grey half-tone; of these artists whose glory was in their use of colour not a single painting appears in colour. As for the layout of the book, it is execrable — each wide page divided into four broken narrow columns, jagged-edged and further broken by dense irregular wads of footnotes in a smaller type; to read is tiring on the eye and even more tiring on the patience. Design in a book should be an aid to understanding; this design is an impediment. One is told the designer is Frank Newbold; one can only express astonishment.

**** PIERRE BERTON. *The National Dream: The Great Railway, 1871-1881.* McClelland & Stewart. $10.00. Canadian history is distinguished, perhaps in event, certainly in treatment, by a peculiar mingling of the epic and the farcical which, so far as I know, is unique among the nations of the world. As Robert Fulford had recently asked, in what other country of the world is the Founder of the Nation regularly presented, even to schoolchildren, as a brilliant but outrageous drunkard? It is perhaps this peculiar nature of the Canadian historical outlook that explains why Pierre Berton, our great pierrot of journalism, should also be a historian of prowess. Berton's *Klondike* is, in my view, the best history yet written of the Yukon gold rush. Now, with the first volume of his history of the Canadian Pacific Railway (telling of the political struggles before the railway ever came into being) there seems every possibility that — when the book is completed next year — we shall be able to hail at least a comparable achievement. *The National Dream* is eloquent but economical, vivid but accurate; it combines a fine sense of the drama of that crucial decade when the fate of the railway — and hence of Canada — remained in doubt, with a proper sense of the human elements that combined in this vital stage of the effort to create a nation out of what seemed a geographical impossibility. The one flaw that makes it less than a five-star book is an addiction to the echoing cliché.

**** JAMES A. JACKSON. *The Centennial History of Manitoba.* McClelland & Stewart, $7.95. James Jackson takes the history of Manitoba from prehistoric times to Ed Schreyer's premiership in a book whose restraint and proportion make it almost a model of local history. The full interest of Manitoba's long and eventful history, and the significance of its geographical and historical position in the development and — indeed — in the very creation of Canada as we know it, are revealed without any sacrifice to the sensationalism often bred of a local sense of inferiority. Mr. Jackson is sure of his facts, and equally sure of the interest of his story; he is never therefore susceptible to the temptation to exaggerate trivia which besets so many regional historians, and he maintains a pleasantly ironic view of Manitoban pretensions wherever they depart from reality.

**** *Navigations, Traffiques and Discoveries, 1774-1848: A guide to publications relating*

to the area now British Columbia. Compiled by Gloria M. Strathern. University of Victoria, $18.50. This is the companion bibliography to Barbara J. Lowther's *Laying the Foundations,* published in 1967, which covered the period of British Columbian history from 1849 to 1899. Like its predecessor, *Navigations, Traffiques and Discoveries* is the model of an exhaustive bibliography, covering the area and the period so widely as to include any publications on Oregon or Alaska that may have bearing on the history of British Columbia, and amply annotating all the entries. What this volume does reveal is the richness of material that exists, for, avoiding such ephemerae as newspaper articles, some 631 titles — most of them books and not including translations and new editions — are presented. This is an exhaustive, indispensible and long-needed aid to the study of the early history of our Pacific province.

*** FRED LANDON. *An Exile from Canada.* Longman, $6.95. Elijah Woodman was one of the martyrs of Canadian radicalism. He was not involved in the Mackenzie uprising of 1837, but the circumstances of its repression influenced him profoundly, and he took part in one of the abortive Patriot raids of 1838; he was captured at Windsor and transported to Van Diemen's Land, dying on his way back across the Pacific after seven years of exile. In letters to his family he presented the record of his experiences. They remained unpublished, the last of the narratives of the transportees of 1837-8, until the late Fred Landon decided to use them as the basis for retelling the story of Woodman and his companions. For *An Exile from Canada* is more than the story of one man. The earlier part of the book is really a retelling of the Mackenzie rebellion and particularly of the Patriot attempts to invade Canada in the following year, but from the point of view of the followers who took the punishment rather than that of the leaders so prompt to flee when the movement collapsed. The latter part combines Woodman's experiences in exile with a background landscape of the conditions under which the transportees travelled and lived in the early days of the Victorian age. It is a moving and rather terrible document which leaves no doubt of society's role in raising up rebels against itself.

*** *The Norse Discoverers of America: The Wineland Sagas,* translated and discussed by G.M. Gathorne-Hardy. Oxford, $10.50. This pioneer work in Scandinavian-North American history was first published in 1921, one of the earliest books to discuss intelligently and fruitfully the case for the Norse discovery of America. Now, with an introduction by Gwyn Jones, and a preface by the author, still alive and still actively interested in recent discoveries that have confirmed so many of his arguments, it is at last republished, and, in spite of all that has appeared since, remains an amazingly fresh and useful book. It contains a translation of all the relevant saga material, but the greater and perhaps the more important part is the reasoned justification of belief in the Norse presence in North America. Much that Gathorne-Hardy argues — including his guess of the approximate locality of Vinland — has been confirmed; his belief that the Kensington Stone is authentic and suggests a Norse penetration into the present United States as late as the 14th century, when the Greenland colonies were abandoned, remains conjectural.

*** STEPHEN FRANKLIN. *Leacock.* MICHAEL CRAWFORD and KENNETH ARMSTRONG. *The Fenians.* Clarke Irwin Jackdaws. $2.75 each. The Canadian Jackdaw series is growing rapidly, and with these two collections reaches its twenty-fourth title. Like their predecessors, these are albums each containing a long historical essay on the subject chosen, plus facsimile reproductions of contemporary material — posters, newspaper reports, other actualities, including a record of Leacock. Very effective in dealing with historical events, which they can bring vividly into the reader's present, such collections do seem less effective with authors — Leacock in this case — perhaps because the writer's work does live in a world of its own and the actualities are, in the final run, somewhat irrelevant.

*** J. W PICKERSGILL and D. F. FOSTER. *The Mackenzie King Record.* Vol. 3, 1945-6, Vol. 4, 1947-8. University of Toronto Press, $17.50 each, $30.00 the pair. Mackenzie King, uncomfortably perhaps, but ineluctably, is part of our Canadian past, and it is possible that this strange, fantasy-ridden introvert, expert at getting and wielding authority yet inwardly plagued by a sense of being the mere tool of higher powers, was the most potent architect of modern Canada after Sir John A. Macdonald. The two volumes noticed here complete *The Mackenzie King Record,* an eloquent non-biography which consists of extracts from King's hitherto unpublished diaries united by bridging narratives. This is in no sense a work of literature; it is, however, an

invaluable historical source book, and one may even think of it as the material of art. The only factor that might make King ineligible as the subject of fiction or drama is the sheer banal improbability of the inner life of this man who looked like one of the mediums whose lore he respected and who ruled a country by the dictates of an unconscious which he regarded as the projection of another world.

*** RONALD SEARLE and KILDARE DOBBS. *The Great Fur Opera: Annals of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1970.* McClelland & Stewart. $4.95. To celebrate its tercentenary, and to emphasize a deliberate attempt to emerge from the cocoon of its history into the swinging present, the Hudson's Bay Company commissioned that fine caricaturist Ronald Searle and that notable wit Kildare Dobbs to compose a comic history. Humour is the *ignis fatuus* of Canadian literature, pursued often, rarely trapped. Searle and Dobbs have struggled manfully with its Protean substance, and have produced something that is a great deal better than most of our national funny books, touching every stop on the organ of laughter from the belly burster to the dirty snicker. There are inevitably flat jokes and stale jokes, but let him who could keep it up more amusingly for 124 pages cast the first beaver stone. As for the HBC, no gesture could be more in keeping with its British traditions than this act which celebrates its final naturalization as a Canadian company. For to invite laughter is surely the ultimate Anglo-Saxon sign of secure superiority.

*** R. C. MAYNE. *Four Years in British Columbia and Vancouver Island.* Johnson Reprint, $22.00. Commodore Mayne came to the West Coast of what later became Canada on a naval survey expedition in 1857; he left in 1861. The account of his experiences was published in the following year, and now, as part of the project of the Toronto Public Library and the Johnson Reprint Corporation to re-issue two hundred pre-Confederation books of historical interest, it appears in its first edition for more than a century. It is not a classic of travel-writing, and one reads it with the feeling that Mayne never really caught the excitement of his time, when the gold miners were streaming up from San Francisco to take part in the Fraser River and Cariboo rushes, and the warrior Indians were streaming down from the north to sell their daughters on the beaches of Victoria, nor, obviously, does he realise the historical interest the events of the period might have for people a hundred years away. He is too much the naval man reporting home, too little the young Englishman who must have felt far more than he was able to express when he led his expeditions across the untravelled spine of Vancouver Island and into the unclimbed mountains from the coastal inlets in search of possible routes to the goldfields. So much is thrown away, but even what is left is worth reproducing; there were so few good writers about in the West at that time (compared with the abundance of amateur and professional authors who found their way to Klondike) that almost any report which adds to our knowledge of the time is to be welcomed.

** JIM LOTZ. *Northern Realities: The Future of Northern Development in Canada.* New Press. $8.00. This is a somewhat mis-titled book, since Jim Lotz is not talking about the Canadian North as a whole but really about the Yukon. Occasionally he generalizes about northern people and the northern outlook, but one feels he has little direct knowledge of — say — Keewatin or Baffin Island, and all his facts of any significance concern the Yukon. Out of them he builds a realistic assessment of its value to Canada. It is not as an overflow area for population that he sees it, but rather as a permanent wilderness whose exploitation in terms of raw materials would be down-played and which would be valued for its spiritual as much as its physical advantages: as a learning area and a recreational complement to the rest of the country rather than as an extension of the south to be subordinated to its industrial needs and dominated by its social norms. A serious, slightly impenetrable but important contribution to the study of that near-half of Canada above the 60th parallel.

** HARRY GREGSON. *A History of Victoria.* Victoria Observer. $10.00. The nearest thing we have yet had to a comprehensive history of Victoria. It has its faults of proportion, and Mr. Gregson is liable to get trapped at times in complications of cliché and trivia, but he has put together much highly interesting information, and future and more polished historians will have a great deal to thank him for. *A History of Victoria* is useful to students of the history of the Pacific Coast for its assembly of facts obtainable only with difficulty elsewhere.

G.W.

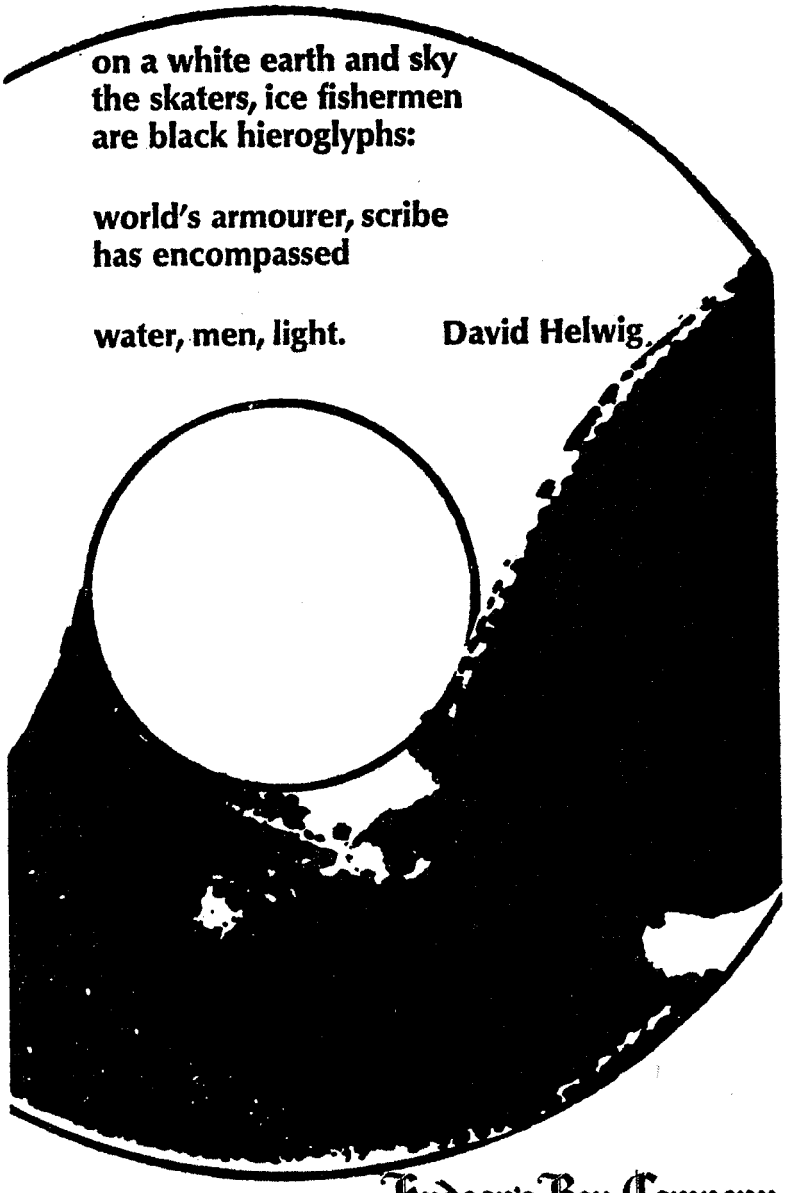
Now islands
are buckled to the world
on a shield of ice,

on a white earth and sky
the skaters, ice fishermen
are black hieroglyphs:

world's armourer, scribe
has encompassed

water, men, light.

David Helwig



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