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CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 67

Winter, 1976

MANNERS OF CRITICISM

Articles

BY ROSEMARY SULLIVAN, S. NAMJOSHI, JEAN MALLINSON, WYNNE FRANCIS, ANDREW J. POTTINGER, DAVID M. MONAGHAN, KEITH GAREBIAN

Poems

BY PETER STEVENS, CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON

Review Articles and Reviews

BY AUDREY THOMAS, R. T. ROBERTSON, HERBERT ROSENGARTEN, LARRY SHOULDICE, ANTHONY APPENZELL, PATRICIA MORLEY, ROBERT GIBBS, AL PURDY, PETER HAY, DOROTHY LIVESAY, GARY WERDEN, JACK WARWICK

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

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PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, VANCOUVER 8

CANADIAN LITERATURE

LITTERATURE CANADIENNE

NUMBER 67, WINTER 1976

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

PRINTED IN CANADA BY MORRISS PRINTING COMPANY LTD., VICTORIA

Second class mail registration number 1375

Publication of *Canadian Literature* is assisted by the Canada Council

Canadian Literature is indexed in the *Canadian Periodical Index* and is available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 35 Mobile Drive, Toronto M4A 1H6

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, addressed envelopes. Poems by invitation only.

Address subscriptions to Circulation Manager, *Canadian Literature*, University of British Columbia, Vancouver 8, B.C., Canada

SUBSCRIPTION $6.50 A YEAR

ISSN 0008-4360

editorial

MANNERS OF CRITICISM

MANNERS OF CRITICISM, like those of any other art, change constantly, sometimes in response to impulses that are worldwide, more often in response to the changing circumstances of an individual culture, But, while in certain areas of life change involves obsolescence, this is not the case with good criticism, any more than it is the case with good poetry or good fiction. We may not, for example, be able to imagine ourselves writing as Dryden or Arnold wrote, but that does not prevent us from responding to many aspects of their work: its insights into authors who were their contemporaries, its reflection of the mores of their period, its statements of critical principle whose application extends beyond their age, and, finally, its quality as prose.

It was thoughts of this kind that came to my mind when I re-read W. E. Collin's *The White Savannahs*, which appeared first in 1936 as a self-consciously modernist critique of Canadian poetry, and which has now been reprinted in the University of Toronto Press's Literature of Canada series (paper back, $5.95), with an excellent introduction by Germaine Warkentin. Re-reading *The White Savannahs* at the same time as I was looking back over the English critics who were influenced by the post-Romantic French tradition (Sainte-Beuve, Baudelaire, the Symbolists in general), critics like Pater and Arthur Symons, I recognized a kind of period tone that could not have been repeated with any authenticity of feeling after about 1939, though its analogues might be picked up at any time back to the 1880's In his kind of tremulous excitement over literature, Collin belonged by temperament to the earlier half of the twentieth century, and it seems significant that all his three books were published by 1936, and that though he still lives, 39 years afterwards, his production since World War II has consisted

of a handful of articles, the last of which appeared a decade ago, and the last but one 19 years ago.

Professor Warkentin bravely attempts to place Collin in the hierarchy of Canadian criticism, but she rightly finds the greatest strength of *The White Savannahs* in its author's "sense of immediacy". She goes on, and in my view less surely, to pin him into place, as she puts *The White Savannahs* "squarely between two types of Canadian criticism".

> At one extreme is the work of the strictly historical critic as practiced by Carl Klinck, Collin's contemporary at Western Ontario. At the other is the elaborate system-building of Northrop Frye. Between them is Collin, resolving difficulties by the continuous practice of the critic's 'art of reading'. For such an art to flourish the critic must have a profound belief in the life of literature.

What Professor Warkentin seems to suggest, even if she does not do so deliberately, is that, being between Klinck and Frye, Collin has some of the historical attitude and some of the system-making. But in fact one finds little trace of conscious systematizing in Collin's work, and only enough history to relate works to the lives of their authors and to the similar works of other authors. The stress, even when comparisons are made, is always on the poetry and on the reader's direct relationship to it, and to my mind Germaine Warkentin is much nearer the truth — and perhaps gives us the whole truth — in another passage where she remarks: "*The White Savannahs* is not a principled modernist tract but an excited report by a brilliant and only partially informed mind about the current state of affairs at the creative frontier of a new literature."

The White Savannahs was in fact part of the process by which Collin became a Canadian critic; it must be seen, to realize the full significance of the man's contribution to our critical tradition, in relation to the essays he wrote on French Canadian poetry at the same time as he was compiling the annual survey of Québec literature for the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, a task he continued from 1940-1946. Unfortunately, he did not sustain his commentary on Canadian poetry in English over the same period, and so we are forced to judge his work in that field according to the limitations of his experience when he wrote *The White Savannahs* in the mid-thirties.

Essentially, the basic experience was one he shared with many English writers and scholars between the 1890's and the 1930's, who fell in love with French post-Romantic literature, and were not only profoundly impressed by the poetry and fiction of the Symbolists (who continually crop up in *The White Savannahs*), but also adopted the easy and at times meandering manner of the Sainte-Beuve

causerie, which does not regard keeping to the point as a totally necessary virtue. Unlike the younger Canadian critics of our own day, Collin is not in *The White Savannahs* conscious of a self-contained national literature, within which all the necessary cross-references can be made; the consciousness of such a literature hardly existed at all in the 1930's. And so he is constantly, and without arousing any feeling of inappropriateness, referring back to models in French and English (but rarely American) traditions. Even when he points to the political affiliations of Canadian poets in the 1930's, he tends to see them in the context of the leftism of the English 1930's.

The choices he makes among the poets of the time partly reflect his unsureness of the terrain, but they also emphasize the erosion of the decades on passing reputations. Time has declared Pratt, Klein, Smith, Scott and Livesay to be the poetic winners of the 1930's, and it says much for Collin's acuteness of judgment that he picked them and discussed them with so much sympathy and understanding. But Marjorie Pickthall and Leo Kennedy are poets whose standing has declined greatly in recent years, and re-reading their poetry gives one little confidence that it will rise again. In praising them, one feels, Collin let himself be guided by the whims of the time rather than by a sense of sound poetry. Then there are the two mysteries of the book. Why, alone among the earlier Canadian poets, did Collin pick Archibald Lampman? Why not D. C. Scott and Charles G. D. Roberts as well? Was it perhaps because their success in accepted careers somehow repelled Collin, while Lampman's isolation and unhappiness, his bittersweet tone and his sense of failure, appealed to a romantic sense of the poet's lot? And why, instead of any of the Francophone writers of the time who were Canadian by birth and background, did he choose Marie Le Franc, metropolitan French by origin and an immigrant like himself? Today Marie Le Franc is even less remembered than Pickthall or Kennedy, and she seems a strange choice indeed for a man who afterwards became so knowledgeable in the poetry of Québec.

Nevertheless, and despite the shortcomings inevitable in any book on modernism in Canadian poetry written as early as the 1930's, *The White Savannahs* is a vital work that even now transmits some of the excitement that went into its writing, while readers who have become accustomed to regarding Northrop Frye as the original fount of mythopoeic criticism in Canada will be intrigued by Collin's emphasis on the role of the poet as myth-maker, and his frequent references to that epoch-making masterpiece, source and mirror of so much in modern poetry, *The Golden Bough*.

Criticism in Canada has changed since *The White Savannahs*, not merely in

attitude, but also in techniques, and at least one end of it touches on areas of exact scholarship of a kind that in the 1930's were never applied to Canadian authors. *Editing Canadian Texts*, collected by Frances G. Halpenny (and published by A. W. Hakkert with no price indicated) presents the papers given at the Conference on Editorial Problems held at the University of Toronto in 1972, and attended by no less than 75 scholars in the field. W. H. New introduces the proceedings with a general survey of the peculiar problems of editing Canadian texts, and the remaining speakers proceed into special fields, Bruce Nesbitt discussing the editions of Lampman, and Desmond Pacey the letters of Frederick Philip Grove, Pierre Savard talking on the critical edition of François-Xavier Garneau's complete works, and Sheila Fischman ending with a very interesting account of the editing of *Ellipse*, the journal devoted to publishing translated texts in both Canadian languages. *Editing Canadian Texts* is provocative reading because it suggests more than it says, and leaves one in no doubt that with the acquisition of a history, the study of Canadian writing has also acquired those peculiar problems arising out of the natural reticences and deceptions of writers which occupy scholastic critics in any developed literary culture.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

SUNSET

Peter Stevens

The low sun is looking you straight
in the eye. Paddling up that stare
you cannot splice his golden disc;
the headland shuts sudden
an eyelid closing upwards the gold
then you float
in the spread bruise the sun
has basilisked from the dying day-
light.

The moon drops blue
milk onto the lake.

SURFACING AND DELIVERANCE

Rosemary Sullivan

IT IS DIFFICULT to read Margaret Atwood's recent novel *Surfacing* without thinking of its imaginative counterpart, James Dickey's *Deliverance*, since so much is similar in theme and structure. Dickey speaks for both novels when he says that the motivating force of *Deliverance* is the recognition that the wilderness is fast disappearing.[1] Each novelist feels that self-definition can only be achieved through a return to nature in a test for survival. In flight from the "world of systems", each feels a need for submergence in a concept of the natural that verges on violence or madness. Atwood's novel was published almost simultaneously with her book *Survival*, a thematic guide to Canadian literature. It is the imaginative expression of the theoretical preoccupations of that book, a writer's attempt to make self-conscious some of the key patterns which constitute the shape of Canadian literature. To explore in what way Atwood's book is an expression of the Canadian tradition is important, but the startling similarities between Atwood's and Dickey's novels invites a quite different problem. Would a comparison of the two lead to any tentative conjectures as to national differences in the imaginative preoccupations of two cultures? Of course such an exploration would be difficult. Can any single work be taken as representative of the preoccupations of its culture?

In his brilliant study, *The American Adam*, R. W. B. Lewis indicates in what way this is possible. For the person interested in the history of ideas he explains that a representative imagery or anecdote can usually be discovered in the works of imaginative writers which crystalizes the concerns of a cultural period. Every culture as it advances toward maturity seems to produce its own determining debate over ideas that engross it: the order of nature, money, power, salvation,

the machine. Behind its terms of discussion is an image or motif that animates the ideas, for what is articulated is a comprehensive view of life. When these coherent images or narrative patterns are made self-conscious, the culture has finally yielded up its own special and identifying myth. As the image-making process is an evolutionary one, it is to be expected that cultural self-images will change. Rather than the nineteenth century American Adam that is Lewis' theme, much contemporary American literature seems to yield a nostalgic version of it, an attempt to flee from the mechanized world of human construction in pursuit of an aboriginal self recovered in a primitive nature that has become a forum of original sensation. While far from the only narrative pattern, it is yet an expressive and enduring one to which Dickey in particular gives powerful embodiment. Because so much has been written about the mythology of American literature, it is not difficult to see certain predominant themes of *Deliverance* as expressive of cultural preoccupations.

But Canadian literature is still in the process of finding its own mythology. What must be asked is whether, in *Survival*, Atwood has found an enduring image adequate to Canadian experience. The image she offers is that of a collective victim struggling for survival, of a culture obsessed with feelings of self-depreciation and insignificance and which often seeks to escape the responsibility of self-definition through its victim role. Whether this image actually identifies a native tradition can only be determined by the future imaginative works which will be created out of it, as Atwood herself insists, not simply as reflections but as explorations, attempts to make self-conscious the experience of being a victim in a colonial culture. To any Canadian however, the pattern seems to hold out the promise of truth. A theoretical conjecture in *Survival*, it is made into complex personal experience in *Surfacing* so that what was propositional becomes experiential, verifiable through its capacity to move with that intensity reserved for works which deal with more than the personal. In this essay I propose to explore the imaginative rendering of this tradition; its workability as a cultural pattern in *Surfacing*. A contrast to Dickey's *Deliverance*, so related yet so different, seems to me to be the best way to identify what is peculiarly Canadian about Atwood's novel.

Both *Surfacing* and *Deliverance* are explorations of man's relation to nature, a theme rarely so well expressed as by Charles Olson: "It comes to this: the use of a man by himself and by others, lies in how he conceives his relation to nature, that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence." Atwood and Dickey are fundamentally opposed in the discoveries their characters make about nature

and the resolutions to which these discoveries lead. Such discrepancies may define something more than the personal. They may be expressions of the enduring debates which preoccupy distinctive cultures over the most basic of problems: the problem of power; of the use of man by man; of the order of nature and man's relation to it.

JAMES DICKEY begins *Deliverance* with a revealing quotation from Georges Bataille: "Il existe à la base de la vie humaine un principe d'insuffisance." We see through his characters Ed Gentry and Lewis Medlock that this "insufficiency" is a fundamental boredom, the cause of which is normality; the long declining routine of everyday existence embodied in the job, the wife, the suburban environment: "I was really frightened, this time. It had me for sure, and I knew that if I managed to get up, through the enormous weight of lassitude, I would still move . . . with a sense of being someone else, some poor fool who lives as unobserved and impotent as a ghost, going through the only motions it has." Ed Gentry describes himself as a get-through-the-day man who slides, living by anti-friction, finding the modest thing he can do and greasing that thing. His friend Lewis, though fundamentally different — "he was the only man I knew determined to get something out of life who had both the means and the will to do it" — is plagued by this same boredom. "He had everything that life could give, and he couldn't make it work." To understand this boredom is to recognize the fatalism which is at the core of all of Dickey's work. Life must fail, must prove inadequate to expectation because at its core is a paradox: the process of accustomization. Experience brings not knowledge but the death of intensity and a man "will risk *everything* for a bit of intensity that he thought he would never have again".[2] This quest for intensity is an archetypal ingredient of the romantic sensibility, but Dickey's solution is particularly American, a nostalgic return to primitive nature, seen so often in his poetry as the potent world of adolescence when the discrepancy between ideal and real was least marked. In *Self-Interviews* Dickey defines the ideal man as the intensified, totally responsive man with a capacity for complete participation, for commitment of the self to whatever is contemplated. As a consequence of modern mechanization which exercises only the pragmatic, functional capacities of the individual, this intensity is lost, to be replaced by a numbing of sensibility. The single way to break down this process is through a recovery of intimacy with nature, a re-integration with that half-dreaming, half-animal part in the human make-up that is funda-

mentally primitive, absolutely untouched by civilization and through which can be recovered a personally animistic relation to things.

Such is the basic pattern of *Deliverance*. Nature allures its two central characters Ed and Lewis as potential chaos — nothing in normal life can offer its edge. Hungering for a kind of life that isn't out of touch with other forms of life, they return to nature in a curious courting of disaster in order to prove their capacity for survival. The theme which develops is common to many American novels — the perilous testing of man against man, the bonding of male aggression in an assault on nature. What may prove disturbing to the reader however, is that the essential ingredient of intensity is violence. The capacity for survival is defined in the old terms: machismo, the virile code of risk, man pitted murderously against man in a trial of courage under pressure. When faced squarely, a nostalgia for the test of violence is seen to be the motivating force of the novel. Dickey never evades the importance of this theme to his work. In *Self-Interviews* he writes of war: "There's a God-like feeling about fighting on our planet. It's useless to deny it; there is . . . You can never do anything in your life that will give you such a feeling of consequence and of performing a dangerous and essential part in a great cause as fighting in a world war. . . . You feel a nostalgia for war because all the intensities of life, youth, danger and the heroic dimension, as nearly as you will ever know them in your own personal existence, were in those days." As Dickey adds, it is useless to say this is wrong; it is felt. This self-induced captivity to the "heroic dimension" is indelibly a part of the American psyche and is the product of a peculiarly American brand of romanticism, anti-social in its implications, which insists on the inevitable superiority of the primitive and instinctive over the civilized and cultivated. Under this code, women come to stand for social strictures. Ed's wife is responsible for his boredom "just as it's any woman's fault who represents normalcy." The flight into nature becomes a flight into a closed masculine world where a man can recover the heroic dimension normally lost to him.

Margaret Atwood's novel begins on a similar premise to Dickey's. Her unnamed narrator returns to the wilds of Northern Quebec ostensibly in search of her missing father, but her return is also a process of submergence in nature through which she discovers the artificiality of what Dickey calls the world of "men and their systems". The irony is that she is not even initially aware, as are Dickey's two main characters, of the boredom which is at the root of her experience. She lives anaesthetized, incapable of feeling yet ignorant of her incapacity to do so. The re-emergence in nature and in her past exposes this inadequacy to her. The

cause of it however is not the fundamental insufficiency at the basis of human existence which Dickey finds; instead, the numbing of sensibility, the entropy of feeling is the consequence of a process of self-deception. The novel begins with the narrator's having been divorced from her husband, in her mind a stereotype of the insensitive male who has tried to force her into the passive role of wife and mother. She has left him and their child in a bid for freedom. All this proves to be a lie. We learn gradually that the husband, child, and marriage are fictions. She was not married, but rather played at it in an affair with a married art teacher, and the child she has left "in another city" is dead, aborted in a dingy backroom clinic. She has fabricated an illusory past in which she plays the passive role of victim to escape moral responsibility for the death of her child. She explains: "I couldn't accept it, that mutilation, ruin I'd made, I needed a different version." She balances precariously on a thin edge of sanity carrying the dead child within her. The eventual demolition of her fictive life through her return to the wilds of her childhood brings her to the edge of madness; yet a madness which is the beginning of true vision. She discovers that victimization has been an excuse to escape responsibility for evil.

The culture of Northern Quebec, and by implication, of Canada as a whole is an important backdrop to the novel because the narrator's predicament is indicative of the culture which produced her. The northern landscape is a "mélange of demands and languages" where the only conspicuous signs of culture are the billboards: "THÉ SALADA, BLUE MOON COTTAGES ½ MILE, QUÉBEC LIBRE, FUCK YOU, BUVEZ COCA COLA GLACÉ, JESUS SAVES . . . an X-ray of it would be the district's entire history." It is described as a pastiche culture which escapes responsibility for self-definition by passivity. It claims itself as victim to American cultural domination thereby sharing a complicity in its victimization by a failure to fight back. Atwood's remarkable insight is to have seen that emotional entropy is simultaneously a cultural and personal predicament.

Deliverance and *Surfacing* begin on a similar premise. Their characters discover a fundamental inadequacy, an emotional entropy in their ordinary life. For Dickey this is to be identified romantically, impersonally as a fatal flaw, the paradox of accustomization in human experience. For Atwood the problem is moral and therefore personal — a self-deception caused by moral and emotional timidity. Both analyses can be seen as products of cultural predisposition. The diagnosis which both novelists offer is the same. At the core of the dilemma of emotional ennui is a failure of feeling, of total response, identified through the characters' attitudes toward nature which are fundamentally flawed. For Ed Gentry nature

is a dead past which she has exorcised. Inevitably, a rejection of nature is a rejection of a fundamental part of the self. Atwood speaks for both novelists when she defines the problem as a separation of body and head, logic and feeling, the insistence of the mind to abstract itself from the process of being: "We refuse to worship; the body worships with blood and muscle but the thing in the knob head will not, wills not to, the head is greedy, it consumes but does not give thanks". For both authors the only means by which an integrity or wholeness of self can be recovered is through a literal and metaphoric return to nature and thus to the unconscious element of the self in search of new vision. Both offer a kind of psychic bending backward in a gesture of repossession to an earlier primitive integrity of self. Yet in search of authenticity, Dickey turns to a cult of sensation; Atwood turns inward to moral self-castigation.

For both novelists the experience of returning to the wilderness is an experience of penetration to a previously unknown or repressed self, the unconscious. Dickey's character Ed Gentry compares entering nature to his entrance into the unknown, into the unconscious in sleep. It was "something unknown that I could not avoid, but from which I would return". Initially nature appears to him as a massive indifferent force that is not morally explicable, but in confrontation with it a man discovers his capacity for survival which rests on a standard of physical courage, sheer nerve; survival "came down to the man, and what he could do." In the crisis for survival, the cult of sensation is recovered: "I had never lived sheerly on nerves before, and a gigantic steadiness took me over, a constant trembling of awareness". Under the pressure of death, things never witnessed, never beheld so closely before are absorbed by an almost mystically supersensitive awareness. Suffering itself is desirable as sensation: "It had been so many years since I had been really hurt that the feeling was almost luxurious"; fear is exhilarating: "I felt wonderful, and fear was at the centre of the feeling: fear and anticipation — there was no telling where it would end."

We are in that part of the American imagination that seeks out war, the wilderness, the calculated risk, violent death as the only means of recovering the sense of consequence and meaning lost to the emasculated world of contemporary experience. However Dickey does not leave us in the cult of sensation. He offers a profound and disturbing insight. When a man enters into nature's violent cycle he finds himself in a moral vacuum, the terrible freedom of which is exhilarating and enjoyable. The threat of nature is unconsciousness, mindlessness. In its predatory cycle, man partakes of its vast indifference. When Ed Gentry is about to kill the hillbilly who has assaulted his friend, Dickey writes: "I still believe I

felt, in the moonlight, our minds fuse. It was not that I felt myself turning evil, but that an enormous physical indifference, as vast as the whole abyss of light at my feet, came to me: an indifference not only to the other man's body scrambling and kicking on the ground with an arrow through it, but also to mine." With his victim framed in the sight of his weapon the death appears to him to have an abstract beauty: "I had never seen a more beautiful or convincing element of a design. I wanted to kill him just like that." A powerful drunken exhilaration comes from the awareness that "there's not any right thing." This is an extraordinarily powerful conception. To conclude that mortality is a graft, civilization a veneer over instinct, is conventional enough. It is even common to speak of this instinct as positive, life-energizing. But to explore the mindless violence of the unconscious freed by the enormous physical indifference of nature and discover in it the pure exhilaration of evil reminds us of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. What is astounding is that this leads to no moral insight. Dickey has made self-conscious the lure of violence which is endemic to American romanticism, but he is honest with himself when he draws no moral revulsion from this. It is too easy to judge the novel's theme as tamer than it actually is. The return to the wilderness is a metaphoric return to the hidden reaches of the self where, in an atmosphere of terror, the release of the murderous capacities of the self is experienced as an exhilarating freedom. Dickey would probably insist that there are areas on the edge of civilization — the Southern outback being one — where social morality is ambiguous and even dangerous, and a man must create his own moral code to survive. Drew Pearson is naive in assuming that normal standards of justice can support him in such circumstances. This is of course true. But Dickey's theme is not the aberrations of social justice. The real core of energy in the novel comes from the exhilaration which man discovers when he escapes social normalcy to re-enter the predatory-aggressive cycle of nature from which he has withdrawn at the cost of emotional wholeness.

In *Surfacing* the return to nature is also the motivating theme, but with very different results than in Dickey's *Deliverance*. Nature becomes a forum, not for emotional intensity but of moral self-scrutiny. The novel deals with the problem of power. The narrator has neatly divided the moral world into killer and victim, the intrinsically innocent who are misused and the evil predators, the "Americans", who can relate to the rest only through the megalomaniac assertion of power. The putrid body of the heron is their symbol in the novel; they kill it

since "the only relation they could have to a thing like that was to destroy it". Atwood seeks to propel her character beyond this simplification to the recognition, similar to Dickey's, that violence is intrinsic to the human personality: "To become like a little child again, a barbarian, a vandal: it was in us too, it was innate." But the question remains, what moral conclusion does she draw from this discovery? She does not find the primitive exhilaration which Dickey's character feels, but rather insists on the need to move beyond the predator-pursued, killer-victim mentality. Perhaps the difference between Atwood's and Dickey's viewpoints can be clarified through the relation each author adopts toward the animal world. Throughout Dickey's work the animal world is seen as mystery, challenge, otherness, and the only relationship man can have to it is the life-death one of the hunter-hunted — the hunter matching himself against his victim and conquering, assimilating the primitive animal energy and wildness to himself. Dickey is motivated by a nostalgic desire to re-enter the cycle of the man who hunts for his food, a compulsion perhaps created by that need which he expresses so often in his work to know the universe emotionally. Atwood rejects the nostalgia of this position. In the relation he conceives to nature, as Olson says, is defined the use of a man by himself and by others. It is too easy to be caught in the trap of predator (even when powerfully motivated by the desire for a primitive animistic intensity) where the only relation one can conceive to external nature and therefore to other men is that of power. In fact, in the terms of *Surfacing*, Dickey reveals himself in this attitude as Atwood's archetypal American. His test of courage and manhood lies not only in a man's capacity for self-control but in his ability to bring others under the control of his will, to manipulate their fate in the god-like role of the hunter. For Dickey in all human encounters, including love, there are two roles, and given such a range it is obvious which side one chooses to be on. Atwood sees beneath the predatory cycle of nature another, sacrificial cycle: "The animals die that we may live . . . but we refuse to worship . . . the head is greedy, it consumes but does not give thanks." The inchoate mumblings of the narrator in her madness conceal real insight. We must move beyond the victor-victim relationships, which are simplistic categories, to a new vision which recognizes that if nature is a sacrificial cycle of life dying to sustain life, then man's position in it is not hunter but suppliant and the energy he absorbs from nature is not that of power but of awe, the capacity to worship. Atwood works through to this insight in a very powerful fashion, dispelling the narrator's simplistic notions of good and evil in one of the most dramatic moments in the novel.

The narrator has been diving in search of the mystic Indian symbols which her father had been studying before his death. In one of her plunges she discovers her father's corpse which, bloated and distorted, appears in its watery element like the foetus she had aborted. The death symbols of the novel conflate: heron, foetus, corpse, as, for the first time, she recognizes her own culpability. She too has within her the "American" capacity for death but in wilful self-deception has rejected her own murderousness. The scene is powerfully handled, the submergence in water being simultaneously a plunge into the past and into the unconscious regions of the self where the ghosts of the past are confronted. Her discovery is of course an insight into the perilous nature of innocence. To define oneself as innocent (i.e. victim) is per se dishonest since being human inevitably means being guilty.[3] The narrator's subsequent madness is a process of expiation and rebirth.

For the narrator, the revelation of the foetus-corpse appears as a vision occasioned by gods unacknowledged or forgotten. Through it she achieves a contact with the springs of feeling long dried within her, a contact which is sacred because awakened by a power outside the self. On the edge of madness she searches out the sources of this power. Through a ritual of purification she sears away the human form encasing her, trying to become animal and in her frenzy has a succession of visionary experiences. The pattern for this *sacred initiation* into nature is derived from primitive initiation rituals. A probable source is Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism*.[4] Shamanism, as described by Eliade, is a technique of ecstacy, a process of induction into the sacred. Whoever aspires to be shaman must go through a period of psychic isolation in which the mind swings between extremes of ecstasy and madness, and the aim of which is transformation from the human state. The prescribed rituals are outlined by Eliade and Atwood adapts these to her own end. They follow a precise psychological order: retreat to the bush — symbol of the beyond — to a kind of larval existence (the physical and psychic regression of Atwood's character); prohibitions as to foods, with certain objects and actions taboo (in her madness, the narrator intuits rules which dictate appropriate foods, permissible areas; the fasting induces hallucinatory states); hypnotic sleeping (the narrator builds a lair and sleeps in a position simulating a larval state); secret language (the narrator regresses to non-verbal communication); dismemberment or cleansing of the body in symbolic death (the narrator purges her "false body" in the lake water); spirit guides assist the aspirant in his quest for resurrection (the images of the miraculous double woman and the god with horns). Atwood is able to offer this initiation ritual which

symbolically simulates the death and resurrection of the regenerate self in remarkably dramatic personal terms. The quest she ascribes to the narrator is clearly visionary: "The gods, their likenesses: to see them in their true shape is fatal. While you are human; but after the transformation they could be reached". After an arduous period of preparatory waiting transformation does occur, radically altering the narrator's perceptions of nature. The first such visionary experience she undergoes is one of mystical translation to otherness. She feels that disintegration of the empirical self and reintegration into nature that is characteristic of mystical experience: "I'm ice-clear, transparent, my bones and the child inside me showing through the green webs of my flesh. . . . I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning. . . . I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place." Nature thus seen from the inside is a living continuum of pure being, no longer the indifferent or hostile force from which she had felt alienated. Her mother later appears to her in human, then animal form as if the boundaries of the animal and human are co-terminous after death. Finally nature appears as a kind of Manitou, a forbidding and awesome presence in the landscape; it's the "thing you meet when you've stayed here too long alone. I'm not frightened, it's too dangerous for me to be frightened of it; it gazes at me for a time with its yellow eyes, wolf's eyes. . . . It does not approve of me or disapprove of me, it tells me it has nothing to tell me, only the fact of itself." That nature should appear as Manitou is interesting. Atwood implies a vision of the divine not as the benevolent oversoul of the nature pantheist but as a forbidding indigenous presence with which one seeks a truce.[5] As are all manifestations of the divine, it is also one of the ghosts of the self; exploited, destroyed, tamed or encroached upon only at grave cost to the self. But if awesome and terrifying it has other aspects since it is immediately transmuted to the form of a fish, a sacred icon, or protecting spirit: "It hangs in the air suspended, flesh turned to icon, he has changed again, returned to the water. How many shapes can he take?" The vision implies that nature is neither hostile nor benevolent; it exists in itself, a living process which includes opposites — a process of life as energy. Sanity returns with the capacity to be awed by nature, to respect its fearful and sacred rituals, its unknown gods. But the rational mind abstracts itself from this process of being. One of the most profound insights of the book comes from the narrator's father: "He wants the forest to flow back into the places his mind cleared: reparation." Like Robertson Davies in *The Manticore* Atwood offers a vision of the sacredness of the natural world, into which man can enter by abandoning his will to power: "The ideal would be somebody who would neither be a killer or

a victim, who could achieve some kind of harmony with the world, which is a productive or creative harmony, rather than a destructive relationship".

IN BOTH *Surfacing* and *Deliverance* we are led to ask in what way the energies of nature have proved convertible. When the characters emerge from the outback, what knowledge do they bring with them? Dickey's characters certainly emerge chastened. *Deliverance* is prefaced with a second quotation which makes this point: "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rocks, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground" (Obadiah, verse 3). In retrospect we see that the characters come to recognize that the desire to impose one's own idea or order on nature ends in failure. As the narrator says of Lewis Medlock, he "wanted the thing [in life] . . . that must be subject to the will". He confuses his power to control the map-image of nature with power over the reality. Through the chastening power of the river he discovers his hubris; he learns he cannot take on the whole nature, and recognizing his mortality, he becomes more human. Yet we are left with a marked feeling of deflation at the end of the novel because little has changed externally. After the violence of nature, the business world becomes precious for its normalcy — boring but not so much as before. The wife is seen as tender, professional, tough, qualities which had been undervalued. Though the two main characters had hoped for the promise of "other things, another life, deliverance," they end as middle-aged "tenderfeet" gathering around a calm civilized lake drinking beer and water-skiing. Have the energies of nature then proved inconvertible? We turn to Ed Gentry for the answer since he alone carries within him the surviving image of the river, symbol of mindless primitive energy. Dickey summarizes his character's insights in an interview for *The Southern Review*:

> In this country a man can live his whole life without knowing whether he's a coward or not. And I think it's important to know. And what you're supposed to believe, gradually, and to see about Ed Gentry, is that he, as he plots out this ambush of the hillbilly, what you are supposed to be aware of is that this decent guy, this art director, this minor pillar of the community, decent family man, suburbanite, is really a born killer. He figures it out exactly right as to how to kill this guy, and he does it. He carries it out, and gets away with it. I mean he doesn't have to keep on doing it, and do these things again later on in life — he's done it once and that's all he needs to do it. That's all he needs to know, that

> he's capable of it. And as you see in the last few pages, it's a quietly transfiguring influence on him. He knows. He knows what he did. He knows what he'll do, if he has to, because he's done it.[7]

We are left with the test for survival as measuring-up, the ability to assume an aggression-attack mentality, the myth of self-reliance translated into machismo, and thus tottering from true insight into parody. Can there be no more profound test of heroism that this test of violence as a man goes it alone in the untamed wilderness, a test so rarely possible today that it drives a writer of Dickey's brilliance nostalgically to create a hillbilly outback with triple murder and sodomy as the subject of his first novel? Yet there is something evasive about this wilderness at the core of the American imagination. Wright Morris poses the problem in *The Territory Ahead*: "Nature — even nature red in tooth and claw — is child's play when confronted with human nature". As always D. H. Lawrence gets it perfectly: "Absolutely the safest thing to get your emotional reactions over is nature."[8] In this wilderness a man works out but his own salvation alone, making up his moral code as he goes along. If there are others with him they are either his victims (both real and the savage phantoms of his unconscious mind) or his dependants who increase his heroic stature as victims he must save. It is essentially a solo performance in a test of manhood. What is disturbing is the inherent simplification of this vision. The problems of human motive, of nature versus human nature, of social responsibility are evaded, perhaps with the recognition that morality means the death of intensity since its essential ingredient is measure.

This mythification of violence is not evident in Canadian literature. Even when the theme of a literary work is violence, and indulgence is psychic violence in particular, as in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, the attitude assumed is usually different. The stance taken is often ironic. (It has been too little noted how persistent in Canadian literature is this technique of ironic deflation which often becomes a self-depreciating humour, bordering on self-parody). An essential distinction in the responses of the two literatures toward violence is implicit in Atwood's *Survival*; a distinction which is not meant to be self-congratulatory. One aspect of American romanticism is the cult of sensation, with its potential exoneration of violence as a psychic test. The counterpart to this in Canadian literature is the myth of violence internalized, masochism or victimization. Northrop Frye draws the distinction precisely when he says that the violence and destructiveness which are turned outward in the American psyche, are repressed and turned inward in the Canadian. The myth of self-reliance, of the heroic

dimension, which can degenerate into machismo or measuring-up, is inverted in the Canadian tradition. Life-destroying forces are usually seen as personal: paralysis through guilt, inability to act, lack of feeling. And this leads to a dangerous simplification which is Atwood's major point in *Survival.* The myth of victimization leads to an evasion of responsibility. Responsibility is located elsewhere.

Atwood's purpose in *Surfacing* is to alert to the dangerous self-indulgence of masochism. As she writes in *Survival,* the danger of being a victim is that it creates a need: the obsession with victimization can become the will to be a victim, inferiority developing into a fatalism, a will to lose. One must move beyond these simplifications of power. It is essential to moral maturity to recognize the capacity to kill as innately human, but moral and social sanity does not impose it as a test of strength and survival. Courage is of another order altogether. For Atwood the experience of nature offers at best survival, with one's moral and civilized self intact; there is no deliverance to another state since, after the moment of vision the gods once more prove theoretical: "No gods to help me now, they're questionable once more, theoretical as Jesus. They've receded, back to the past, inside the skull. . . . No total salvation, resurrection." Yet, however ambiguous the momentary experience of the sacred otherness of nature has been, it does lead to a predication about man's relationship to himself and to others. At the end of the novel the narrator has achieved the simple conviction of the need "to prefer life, I owe them that." The problem then remains to become human: "Does anyone ever achieve it; being human. If you define human beings as necessarily flawed, then anyone can be one. But if you define them as something which is potentially better, then it is always something just out of reach."[9]

In retrospect, what finally strikes the reader about Dickey's vision in *Deliverance* is the romantic nostalgia for a spontaneous response to nature that is its impelling force. It is the reverse side of an earlier American myth: from the myth of inexhaustible resources to the myth of resources exhausted, all or nothing. No better work of criticism has been written on this theme than Wright Morris' *The Territory Ahead,* nor any better novel than *The Great Gatsby* with Fitzgerald's brilliant ending: "He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night. Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year after year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter — tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our aims farther. . . . And one fine morning — So we beat on, boats against the current, born back ceaselessly into the past." Huck Finn's wilderness, the territory ahead, is always in the

past so that the present is always a diminution. The essential human problem for Dickey still remains the need to create other wildernesses of the imagination in which can be discovered something commensurate to man's capacity for wonder. Perhaps this is why the moon-shot seems, for him and for others, the potential basis of a new compelling myth. In his poems, if not in *Deliverance*, this theme is convincing. Yet it is the basis of something tragic in the American imagination which moves between poles: on the one hand the search for intensity (a source of the pageantry and idealism so powerfully a part of American life, but also of the cult of violence from which Dickey is never entirely free and which has as its corollary a rejection of social normalcy, a desire to escape from culture) and the nostalgia and despair which come from a rejection of present life, so that the novelist from either pole is on the outside, and the novel while it may have a Faustian intensity, is rarely able to offer the profound social panorama which we associate with the genre. There are of course many exceptions but the American novel has too long drawn its deepest energies from the romantic for these to break a general rule.

The Canadian psyche is essentially different, perhaps more European, because the romantic, exploratory and idealistic have always been tempered by the reflective and observant. Canadians have tended to focus on a consequent lack of energy and intensity in Canadian fiction, conscious only of a standard of American romanticism. But instead of that intensity, another kind of depth can and is being achieved. The conflict which is external in American literature — the artist against his society as romantic, anti-hero, or existentialist white negro on the outside — which often leads to brilliant rhetoric as with Norman Mailer or nostalgia, can be internalized as the author within his society absorbs its conflicts into himself, as Atwood's character begins to do in *Surfacing*. This may lead to a novelistic tradition of mature moral vision on a broad social canvas; with a new version of imaginative survival not in flight from the society of man's construction but within society, because individual liberation is synonymous with collective social liberation. The Canadian novel may take as its theme the need to put down roots, to participate joyfully, as Atwood says, in one's own place, recognizing that self-knowledge "Who am I" can only be answered in terms of "Where is here".

NOTES

[1] William Heyen, "A Conversation with James Dickey," *The Southern Review*, 9, No. 1 (January 1973), 150.

[2] James Dickey, *Self-Interviews*, ed. Barbara and James Reiss (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1970), p. 167.

[3] See Graeme Gibson, interviewer, "Margaret Atwood," *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 22.

[4] Mercea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, tr. Willard Trask (Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 64, 288.

[5] See Atwood's description of indigenous gods in *Survival*, p. 54.

[6] Gibson, p. 27.

[7] Heyen, p. 155.

[8] Wright Morris, *The Territory Ahead: Critical Interpretations in American Literature* (New York: Atheneum, 1963).

[9] Gibson, p. 26.

MY FATHER, DYING

Christopher Levenson

The world contracted to a single room,
a single view over suburban trees.
Everything is outside, beyond, remote.

Over a glass of water, flowerpots, paper towels
he has complete dominion:
fastidious with age, he re-arranges
incessantly all that's within his grasp
as if playing chess with some unseen opponent
and pondering each move.

Our words have atrophied,
my rude health a rebuke.
I tell him friendly lies and watch him
diminishing into childhood, helplessly
lifted and washed.
Will alone is not enough.

Everything is within, inaccessible,
a safe whose combination I have lost.
The last right of age is silence.
His eyes drained of perception have long since
put aside all false shame. His one good hand
toys endlessly with the threads of the coverlet.
I try to read the parchment of his face.
Outside the world decays.

DOUBLE LANDSCAPE

S. Namjoshi

THE CENTRAL TENSION in P. K. Page's poetry arises from the effort to mediate between the private world and the external one. It is possible to describe this tension in political terms, but it would be misleading, in my opinion, to trace its source to a sympathy for political minorities or for the underdog or for the "victims" of society who are isolated in some way, but cannot subscribe to their external reality. These elements exist, but are not, I think her major preoccupation. As I hope to show, her "involvement" is primarily that of an artist, rather than political. The two kinds of involvement are not mutually exclusive; but the second is subordinate to the first, and is, indeed, an extension of it. That the artist must make the effort to mediate between the internal and the external is central to her poetry. No matter how painful the process may be there can be no turning away, no ivory tower aestheticism. Even the observer's stance is rejected and though several of her poems deal with it, she is extremely critical of its validity. That the temptation exists is an almost inevitable result of the tension at the core of her poetry. The individual trapped in his ivory tower of memory and reminiscence, the victim in the grip of impossible social circumstances, are merely off-shoots of the central persona: the woman caught within the confines of her inner reality, her personal Noah's Ark, seeking some way to reconcile the internal and external, to make a harmony out of the double landscapes. And for this woman the essential mode of mediation is the artist's activity, the painter's art (helped out, as always, with a little luck of what is otherwise known as grace).

Initially an examination of her "political" poems — those that deal with victimization in some form or another — is instructive. Not only do they clarify her position, but even in these poems it is possible to see a secondary issue emerging that is more characteristic of the body of her poetry. The *Preview* group of which she was a member had leftist leanings, and several of her poems reveal

what may be termed a "pro-proletarian" consciousness. In poems such as "The Stenographers", "Shipbuilding Office" and "Offices"[1] (quoted below) she seems to be drawing upon personal experience.

> Oh believe me, I have known offices —
> young and old in them both —
> morning and evening;
> felt the air
> stamp faces into a mould . . .

There is "class consciousness" in her poetry, but it is a rather white-collar, anglicized one.[2] Poems such as "Bank Strike — Quebec — 1942" and "Squatters — 1946" deal specifically with strikes, but her most obviously political poem perhaps is "Election Day".[3] In the poem she votes against the Tories and casts her ballot, "a bounder, in the box". She has, of course, deliberately stolen the word "bounder" from the vocabulary of the class that she votes against, but her very familiarity with it gives her away. Again, when the election is over, the threat at the end of the poem, whether it refers to a future Tory defeat or a coming insurrection (probably the former), sounds childishly defiant and quite hopelessly innocuous:

> I pass the empty lot. The old dog
> has trotted off to bed. The neighbourhood
> is neatly hedged with privet still, the lights
> are blinking off in the enormous homes.
> Gentlemen, for the moment, you may sleep.

What is most interesting about the poem, however, is the distinction that P. K. Page makes as a matter of course between the private and personal. When she goes out to vote, she leaves behind the "tight zone" of her "tight and personal thought". As she listens to the election results she is aware that for the moment her privacy is no longer intact, though on this occasion she does not seem to mind very much.

> Radio owns my room as the day ends.
> The slow return begins, the voices call
> the yes's and the no's that ring or toll;
> the districts all proclaim themselves in turn
> and public is my room, not personal.

It is difficult not to feel that she has done her duty as a good citizen and can now return to her normal pre-occupations.

Certain other poems are concerned with issues that have only recently become "political". "Outcasts" appears to deal with sexual deviants.

> Subjects of bawdy jokes and by the police
> treated as criminals, these lovers dwell
> deep in their steep albino love —
> a tropic area where nothing grows.

"The Condemned" describes people in prison, "In separate cells they tapped the forbidden message". And the poem "His Dream"[4] could be given an interpretation that the Women's Liberation Movement would approve of, though it would be misleading, I think, to see P. K. Page as a Feminist on the strength of one poem.

> He dreamed his eyes made colours as they looked
> at roses, sky and sun,
>
> . . .
>
> He was charmed
> that all were eager for his coloured stare.
>
> But, for the woman, he was unprepared.
> She stood beside him but refused to take
> what she was offered, even with a choice
>
> . . .
>
> . . . one by one
> each object he had coloured now rejected
> the colour he had given it, instead
> made of itself the colour it had needed:
> sky-blue, sun-yellow, and the roses — red.

It is possible to see the woman as a figure denying a male definition of her, but it is more accurate, I think, to see her as the artist's conscience refusing any mediation that is not truthful.

As a rule, the poems in which P. K. Page deals with tyranny in one form or another reveal a sympathy for the victims rather than an identification with them. There are, however, two poems, which to my mind, form an exception. These are "Only Child" and "Portrait of Marina".[5] In the first the only child grows up into his mother's image of him, "her very affectionate son, the noted naturalist", but at the very moment of her triumph his dream recurs. He finds himself catching the birds one by one, naming them, breaking their necks, and tossing them on to the wide material lap. Marina is a more passive victim. She is made to devote her life to the re-creation of her father's sea experience in tapestry.

Now, what is most noteworthy about the poems "Only Child" and "Portrait of Marina" is not the fact of victimization as such, but the precise way in which the tyranny is exercised. The only child is not permitted to work out the relationship between his feeling for the birds and the fact of their external existence in his own terms. Instead, he has to accept the relationship worked out by his mother. As it happens, for her, mere labels and classifications suffice as mediators.

> There were times he went away — he knew not where
> . . .
> suffered her eagerness on his return
> for news of him — where had he been, what done?
> He hardly knew, nor did he wish to know
> or think about it vocally or share
> his private world with her. . . .
> . . .
> He had no wish to separate them in groups
> or learn the latin.
> or, waking early to their song remark, "the thrush,"
> with certain swervings flying,
> "Ah, the swifts."

Marina's case is a little different. She has a specific task to perform. She has to make the picture out of blue wool for her father, but the experience out which she creates is not her own.

> To her the name Marina simply meant
> he held his furious needle for her thin
> fingers to thread again with more blue wool
> to sew the ocean of his memory.

The picture that it would have been right for Marina to make would have involved the inter-action of her private universe with the external world. This is what Marina has been denied. And this mediation between the internal and the external, the private and the public, the individual and the world is P. K. Page's central concern. The problem of power relationships is peripheral and only arises when the freedom to mediate is denied. The denial of this freedom is tyranny. There is an involvement, but it cannot be expressed adequately in purely political terms. Even in the poems which are concerned with power relationships her chief preoccupation is still in evidence.

From the foregoing it should be possible to guess that P. K. Page would not agree with the point of view of the isolationists, those who deliberately cut them-

selves off from their surroundings. The poems in which she deals with people who take the observer's stance, the outsiders, foreigners, permanent tourists, do, in fact, show that she is familiar with the stance, but considers it wrong, even unnecessary. There is a hint of compassion for such people, and the reason is obvious. They have, of their own will, deprived themselves of the chance to mediate between the internal and the external. They are their own victims, and the fact of their estrangement denies them the possibility of harmony. She addresses the "foreigner" as follows:

> A room will hold you a smile
> but you will not look.
> From a long past of walking you have come
> wearing blinkers and the balanced look.

"The Permanent Tourists" are described as "the terrible tourists with their empty eyes/ longing to be filled with monuments". And of the "Isolationist" she says that he "Lived like a saint and finds himself a leper". Even the poem "Old Man",[6] in which she is reasonably sympathetic to the European emigré, who does not feel at home in Canada, ends with the lines:

> He hates this pallid place
> and dreams of a bright green future in the past.

The irony is evident. For the totally estranged there can be no reaching out from the ark of isolation.

THE MAIN BODY of P. K. Page's poems deals with the individual's attempt to bring the microcosm into alignment with the macrocosm, so to speak, more directly. Very frequently the dichotomy corresponds to two landscapes and almost as frequently one of the two is white, perhaps, and the mediation between the two worlds then corresponds to the painter's activity, or occasionally to that of the gardener. However, it would be a mistake to look for any consistency in the representation of the landscapes or in the way in which the attempt to mediate is viewed. In different poems the snowscape can represent an idealized landscape, a childhood scene, a harsh reality, a blank canvas or an internal dream. Nor is the inner world shown as consistently superior to the external reality. The inner world may correspond to a nightmare, a wishful dream, a pleasant memory, an artificial reality or a genuine perception. Similarly, the

external world may correspond to a reality of false conventions (the tea-table), a man-made dystopia enclosed by office walls, a formal garden, an elaborate tapestry, a climate of winter, a climate of summer, an area of whiteness, or an overgrown area of lush vegetation.

The artist's effort is directed towards bringing the two landscapes into some sort of alignment that permits a glimpse of the truth. Curiously enough this effort is often accompanied by a great deal of pain and the outcome may be either frustration or despair. These negative feelings arise, I think, from four major causes: the stress inherent in the situation; a fear of the more cruel and unkind aspects of the external world; the hopelessness of trying to make other people see what she sees; and an anxiety that the artist in her eagerness to depict what she sees may, in fact, have depicted what she wishes to see. An examination of some of the key poems should make this clear.

The title of an early poem, "Schizophrenic" is revealing:

> Strong for the dive he dived one day at tea —
> the cakes like flowers, the cups dreamy with cream —
> he saw the window a lake and with a scream
> nobody heard, shot by immediacy[7]

The window corresponds to the human eye, of course, which is the gateway between the two worlds.

At times the discrepancy between the two landscapes is indicated in terms of summer and winter. The white sheets of paper that the stenographers use are representative of winter, and may have suggested the thoughts of the ice-man, but these thoughts are, in fact, memories of summer.

> their eyes . . .
> flutter in the snow-storm of paper . . .
> . . .
> In the pause between the first draft and the carbon
> they glimpse the smooth hours when they were children —
> the ride in the ice-cart, the ice-man's name,
> the end of the route and the long walk home . . .

And since the eye is the gateway between the two worlds, the last lines of the poem have a certain inevitability.

> In their eyes I have seen
> the pin men of madness in marathon trim
> race round the track of the stadium pupil.[8]

The sense of frustration is the result of a total inability to make the two worlds cohere. Even insubstantial memories seem preferable to the mechanical "realities" of office life.

In a later poem, "Arras", the disquiet arises from another cause. The peacock introduced by the eye into the external tapestry is vaguely sinister. The tapestry is like a formal garden.

> But a peacock rattling his rattan tail and screaming
> has found a point of entry. Through whose eye
> did it insinuate in furled disguise . . .
> I confess:
> It was my eye.
> Voluptuous it came.

The sense of fear in the poem derives from the fact that no one else sees it:

> I thought their hands might hold me if I spoke
> . . . but they stand
> as if within a treacle, motionless,
> folding slow eyes on nothing.[9]

Here she almost seems to derive a grim satisfaction from the fact that the peacock is a disturbing element, even though the others fail to perceive it.

There are poems, however, in which P. K. Page shows a mistrust of the painter's activity, particularly of the painter's infusion of colour into objects. To paint can also mean to paint over. She prefers the whiteness to a tinted landscape, and this corresponds in certain poems to a preference for snowscapes. "Stories of Snow" is an example of such a poem:

> Those in the vegetable rain retain
> an area behind their sprouting eyes
> held soft and rounded with the dream of snow.[10]

Now, the distinctly "Canadian" elements in the terms of the dilemma are, of course, obvious: the white landscape, the months of being confined within four walls, the sense of not quite belonging, the duality which arises from a reality within a reality — a temperate almost tropical climate inside and winter outside. However, it is worth pointing out that the traditional associations of snow within the framework of English literature do not correspond to the Canadian experience of snow, and that P. K. Page is aware of the discrepancy and uses it to great effect. In Canada the snow is neither ephemeral, nor exotic, nor merely a cover

for some hidden reality. To a large extent the snow, embodying as it does the menace of cold, is the reality. The deliberate exoticism of the "stories of snow" in juxtaposition with tropical exoticism transfigures the snow stories into a fusion of the extraordinary and the everyday, the fantastic and the familiar, even — if one chooses to use the terms — of the ideal and the real. "Images of Angels" employs a similar technique. In the transfigured landscape (a white and gold landscape) those extraordinary angels "part musical instrument and part daisy"[11] are entirely convincing.

It would be incorrect to assume that the effort to make the two worlds cohere invariably leads to failure or feelings of frustration and suspicion. The writing of the poem is in itself an achievement; so is the transfigured snowscape described above. There are, in addition, certain poems in which the sense of being in harmony with the world comes through more explicitly. "Now This Cold Man . . . " is a case in point. The act of gardening (re-arranging the outside world) corresponds to the activity of the painter; a harmony is achieved, and the thawing of the cold man accords with the external thaw.

> Kneeling in welters of narcissus his
> dry creaking joints bend with a dancer's ease,
> the roughened skin softens beneath the rain . . .
> and something rare and perfect, yet unknown,
> stirs like a foetus just behind his eyes.[12]

The poem "As Ten As Twenty" which appears as "Love Poem" in her first book of poems expresses this feeling of oneness in a different way:

> For we can live now, love;
> a million in us breathe, . . .
> They, in us, free our love,
> make archways of our mouths, . . .

Here the individual breaks through his isolation, his personal "ark", and experiences a feeling of kinship with the whole world. The last stanza can in fact, be interpreted in such a way as to suggest a reference to Noah's ark.

> As ten, as twenty, now
> we break from single thought
> and rid of being two,
> receive them and walk out.[13]

Such an interpretation, perhaps, stretches the imagery a little, but does not alter

the essential meaning. As its first title indicates, it is, of course, a love poem, but it includes the world.

However, it is the poem "Cry Ararat!", the last poem in her last book of poems, which is in my opinion, her most successful effort at bringing the private world and the external world into alignment. "Ararat!" is the cry of the isolated individual trapped within the confines of his private ark. A glimpse of Mount Ararat affords him the hope of a possibility other than the chaos of the flood outside, or the stifling closeness of his own four walls. He need not withdraw into his private world, nor is his individuality submerged in the flood.

> In the dream the mountain near
> but without sound
> A dream through binoculars . . .
> Swiftly the fingers
> Seek accurate focus . . .
> then as if from the sea
> the mountain appears . . .
> These are the dreams that haunt us,
> these the fears.
> Will the grey weather wake us,
> toss us twice in the terrible night to tell us
> the flight is cancelled
> and the mountain lost?
>
> O, then cry Ararat!

The dove returning to the ark with a green twig in her beak serves as a mediating agent. The promise of land that she brings with her justifies the effort, if justification were needed.

> The dove believed
> in her sweet wings and in the rising peak
> with such a washed and easy innocence
> that she found rest on land for the sole of her foot
> and, silver, circled back,
> a green twig in her beak.

The last few lines describe the kind of effort and concentration demanded of the artist.

> The leaves that make the tree by day,
> the green twig the dove saw fit . . .
> The bird in the thicket with his whistle

the crystal lizard in the grass . . .
this flora-fauna flotsam, pick and touch
require the focus of the total I.

It is fitting that this poem should give its name to the book which contains her poems "new and selected". It is a definitive and serious investigation of her theme, and brings the dilemma postulated by her to a final resolution.

As a postscript I cannot help expressing a minor misgiving. Must a deluge occur before such serenity can be achieved?

NOTES

[1] For "The Stenographers" see P. K. Page, *Cry Ararat!* (Toronto/Montreal: McClelland & Stewart, 1967), p. 71; for "Ship-building Office" *Preview*, Montreal, No. 15, August 1943; and for "Offices" *Preview*, No. 16, October 1943.

[2] The poem "Ecce Homo" (*Contemporary Verse*, No. 1, September 1941) is of some interest as a first reaction to London.

[3] For "Squatters-1946" see *Contemporary Verse*, No. 19, Fall 1951; for "Bank-Strike-Quebec-1942" see *Unit of Five*, ed. Ronald Hambleton (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1944), p. 37; and for "Election Day" see *Cry Ararat!*, pp. 65-55.

[4] For "Outcasts" see *Contemporary Verse*, No. 16, January 1946; for "The Condemned" see P. K. Page, *As Ten As Twenty* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1946) pp. 18-19; for "His Dream" see *Contemporary Verse*, No. 31, Spring 1950.

[5] See *Cry Ararat!*, pp. 44-45 and pp. 83-85.

[6] For "Foreigner" see *Cry Ararat!*, p. 61; for "The Permanent Tourists" *Cry Ararat!*, p. 76; for "Isolationist" *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, 6:4, March 1943; and for "Old Man" *Canadian Forum*, 25:299, December 1945, p. 216.

[7] *Contemporary Verse*, No. 10, April 1944.

[8] "The Stenographers", *Cry Ararat!*, p. 71.

[9] *Cry Ararat!*, pp. 100-101.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

[11] *Cry Ararat!* pp. 34-35.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

KINGDOM OF ABSENCE

Jean Mallinson

I AGREE WITH W. J. Keith, who recently edited the *Selected Poetry and Critical Prose* of Charles G. D. Roberts, that — with two exceptions, the early poem "The Tantramar Revisted" and the later "The Iceberg" — Roberts' best poems are the descriptive lyrics, mostly in sonnet form, which appeared in *Songs of the Common Day*, with a few scattered here and there in the earlier *In Diverse Tones* and the later *The Book of the Native.*

> The quiet, unostentatious tone of this descriptive poetry — the exploration and discovery of 'what beauty clings/ In common forms' — is something that Roberts can achieve and maintain with apparent ease. Here he avoids the simplistic on the one hand and the pseudo-profound on the other. . . . Once again, to call this poetry 'descriptive' implies no sense of limitation; indeed, his general avoidance here of anything that could be called a 'criticism of life' becomes a positive strength. . . . it is still possible to discern an intriguing reaching-out towards a profundity of outlook — the seeds of what might well grow into the individual vision of an unquestionably major poet. Roberts seems poised on the threshold of greatness. An astute contemporary reader of *Songs of the Common Day* might well have looked to Roberts' next poetic volume for the revelation of his mature genius.[1]

Reading through Roberts' critical essays, particularly his Introduction to the anthology *Poems of Wild Life*, "Wordsworth's Poetry" and "The Poetry of Nature" I wondered if the possible reason for his failure to achieve the promise of *Songs of the Common Day* is that he could not reconcile his critical theory with what he was in fact doing in the poems which we most admire. Roberts describes accurately his own temperamental preference in "The Poetry of Nature" when he says that the power in nature which moves us "may reside not less in a bleak pasture-lot than in a paradisal close of bloom and verdure, not less in a roadside thistle-patch than in a peak that soars into the sunset. . . . it may work . . . through austerity or reticence or limitation or change." He goes on to divide "the poetry of earth" into "That which deals with pure description, and that

which treats of nature in some one of its many relations with humanity." The argument of his essay is that purely descriptive poetry is scarcely worthy the name, and that the true poetry of nature, as seen in Keats and Wordsworth, is to be found only when nature has passed through "the alembic of the heart," when "man's heart and the heart of nature ... [are] closely involved." He praises Byron, who found in nature "an expression of his hopes, his fears, his cravings, his despair", Keats, "his soul aflame with the worship of beauty, ... impassioned toward the manifestations of beauty in the world about him".[2]

It is evident to anyone reading Roberts' best poems that this Romantic view of the poetry of nature was suited neither to his temperament as it is revealed in his poems, nor to the landscapes to which he was drawn and in the midst of which he had grown. The more he removes himself and his temptation to relate or reflect, the more precise and objective and detailed his lines, the more we are moved. The two sonnets from *In Diverse Tones*, "The Potato Harvest" and "Tides", communicate a clairvoyant sensitivity to the nuances of colour and sound in the landscape. There are human figures in the first poem, but they are seen from a distance, almost heard rather than seen:

> Black on the ridge, against the lonely flush,
> A cart, and stoop-necked oxen; ranged beside
> Some barrels; and the day-worn harvest folk,
> Here emptying their baskets, jar the hush
> With hollow thunders; down the dusk hillside
> Lumbers the wain; and day fades out like smoke.

There is more projection of human feelings into landscape in "Tides": The ebb-tide "sighs" "Reluctant for the reed-beds", "the winding channels grieve". The restrained melancholy and the evocation of water, tides, even the specific line "ebbing in the night-watches swift away", are very like Arnold, but the final line "And in parched channel still the shrunk stream mourns" has a grip and strength which is Roberts' own, at his best.

Before discussing Roberts' preoccupation with absence, I would like to look at some remarks in James Cappon's essay "Roberts and the Influences of his Time", published in 1905.[3] Cappon is judicious in his appreciation of Roberts' finest qualities, and agrees with Keith that "the deepest thing in his poetic passion and experience is his poetry of natural description." He wrongly, I think, says that the basis of Roberts' nature poetry was "a pure aestheticism" but aptly calls it impressionistic. His main criticism of Roberts as a poet is his apparent inability to deal with human life:

> This narrow range of observational power is evident in the absence of any direct treatment of human life, of human as distinguished from naturalistic sentiment, . . .
>
> Nor is the poetry of these sonnets likely to make any strong appeal to a more philosophically minded class of readers, . . . The sonnet sequence hardly leaves any strong unity of moral impression on our minds. There is a want of a basal note in Roberts in this respect which makes his poetry little more than a wavering impression taken from the surface of things and giving no comfort, no stay to the mind. . . . With all his gifts, then, Roberts evidently lacks two things. . . . He does not as a poet give us either a lively, vigorous presentation of life or a profound and critical interpretation of it.

It is certainly true, as Cappon says, that for one who wrote so much, the range of Roberts' poetry is narrow; but it seems to me that it is precisely the almost absence of human figures from the landscapes in the poems that makes them interesting. Of the sonnet "Mowing" Cappon remarks

> But there is no mention of mowers; there is no human figure in the field. This artistic asceticism may be serviceable in obtaining a certain purity of impressionistic effect, . . . But for poetry at least the example of Millet is probably better than that of Rousseau, . . .

It seems to me, on the contrary, that the strength of the poem lies in the sense it conveys of mowing not as something which is done, but as a relentless process which happens. The mowing machine is in a sense an intrusion in nature, but the imagery links it to nature:

> This is the voice of high midsummer's heat.
> The rasping vibrant clamour soars and shrills
> O'er all the meadowy range of shadeless hills,
> As if a host of giant cicadae beat
> The cymbals of their wings with tireless feet,
> Or brazen grasshoppers with triumphing note
> From the long swath proclaimed the fate that smote
> The clover and timothy-tops and meadowsweet.
>
> The crying knives glide on; the green swath lies,
> And all noon long the sun, with chemic ray,
> Seals up each cordial essence in its cell,
> That in the dusky stalls, some winter's day,
> The spirit of June, here prisoned by his spell,
> May cheer the herds with pasture memories.

There is in these sonnets a range of times, seasons, vistas; but I get the impression that it was to "austerity and reticence" as he calls it in his essay that Roberts

responded most authentically. In "Burnt Lands" we find an early exploration of negation, the absence of things:

> . . . such fields as these,
> Where comes no cheer of summer leaves and bees,
> And no shade mitigates the day's white scorn.
> These serious acres vast no groves adorn;
> But giant trunks, bleak shapes that once were trees,
> Tower naked, unassuaged of rain or breeze,
> Their stern grey isolation grimly borne.

In "The Winter Fields" he describes

> Winds here, and sleet, and frost that bites like steel.
> The low bleak hill rounds under the low sky.
> Naked of flock and fold the fallows lie,
> Thin streaked with meagre drift.

I do not wish to suggest that Roberts wrote only about winter and the absence of things and people. Yet he seems most authentic when writing of these things. He is by temperament drawn to the bleak and the austere. Margaret Atwood's remark that "There is a sense in Canadian literature that the true and only season here is winter: the others are either preludes to it or mirages concealing it"[4] is true of Roberts. Yet his emotional preference for stubble fields, deserted landscapes, grey sea and sky is often weakened by the poetic language in which it is expressed. His poem "The Stillness of the Frost" comes close to confronting his fascination with the negation of winter, though it is marred by the rhetoric of the closing lines. It is interesting that in its use of the negative it anticipates P. K. Page's poem "The Snowman":

> Out of the frost-white wood comes winnowing through
> No wing; no homely call or cry is heard.
> Even the hope of life seems far deferred.
> The hard hills ache beneath their spectral hue.
> A dove-grey cloud, tender as tears or dew,
> From one lone hearth exhaling, hangs unstirred,
> Like the poised ghost of some unnamed great bird
> In the ineffable pallor of the blue.

P. K. Page's poem ends

> And I could hear no sound
> As far as I could hear except a round
> Kind of an echo without end

rung like a hoop below them and above
jarring the air they had no need of
in a landscape without love.

Roberts, too, perceives the winter landscape like the world as it must have been, at the dawn of time, when it lay "cold,/ Unwaked to love".

These poems are only a handful among the hundreds that Roberts wrote; far more numerous are the fatuous and facile poems in which he fails to move aside, but rather places himself and his ideas in the landscape and the poem, and the result is usually the shallow rhetoric of what Roberts called "poems of aspiration".

IT SEEMS TO ME from a superficial acquaintance with Roberts' poetry that he possessed a modest talent for an easy mastery of verse form, and an acute and sensitive eye and ear, not for people but for landscape. The influences which led him to dissipate his poetic gifts were no doubt various but his central dilemma is one that is shared by all colonial writers. It is the problem of style in a context which has no indigenous literary tradition, and for which the only available models are old-world forms, not entirely appropriate to the novelty of experience in a new land. It takes a writer of genius, a Whitman or an Emily Dickinson, to solve the problem in a radical way, and as Cappon shrewdly says of Roberts' poetry, it "remains very much a pure literary tradition, the element of natural impulse in it being hardly strong enough to make original moulds for itself."

The continuing existence of this problem, even today, is both a challenge and a distraction to the writer, and one of the causes of the preoccupation with style and the tendency toward mannerism and eccentricity of style which is typical of North American literature at its best and its worst. Style, here, is never something given, it always has to be invented. But Roberts was a facile imitator, not, in poetry, an innovator. What he did best, descriptive poetry, he rated lowest and abandoned.

The strength and weakness of North American style has always been its reliance on the colloquial, either a sense of communal speech rhythms, or, as in the case of the contemporary Black Mountain poets and those they have influenced, the elevation of the idiosyncracies of an individual poet's breath and speech, to the basis of a system of poetics. The weakness of colonial style is, as I have said of Roberts, its often timid reliance on traditional models which belong to the poet linguistically but which are not appropriate to the novelty of experience in a new

setting. It is perhaps particularly unfortunate that Roberts and others in his time had or thought they had, not only a style but a philosophy of nature which it was hard to evade. Had he been writing from eighteenth century models it might have been more apparent that pastoral poetry as it was then written in England was absurdly inappropriate as a model for writing about his experience in the Canadian bush, and he might have invented something new. In fact, in his poetry he lacks strength, adventure, nerve; he is derivative. He did not turn to colloquial speech as the basis of a new style as, with mixed results, did Drummond. His uneasiness concerning what he was about in poetry — along with the presence of an eager market — turned his imagination toward the animal story in its various forms, a genre which both Keith and Margaret Atwood consider particularly Canadian, and in which Keith thinks Roberts made his most important contribution to Canadian literature. Here he could use his knowledge of the wilds unhampered by Romantic convention; here he could appear to disappear; and here, to judge by Keith's comparison between prose passages from the stories and similar passages from the poems, he found his strength. Keith says:

> In his prose Roberts never pontificated. He made no attempt to impose his view of the world upon his readers. None the less we have been able to extract from the short stories a coherent position which may without undue pretentiousness be called a vision of nature.... I see the difference [between the prose and the poetry] as literary rather than philosophic. I prefer the prose because I believe it to attain a noticeably higher degree of artistic success than the poetry.[5]

There is one late poem, the title poem of *The Iceberg and Other Poems*, published in 1934, of which Keith says in his introduction to the *Selected Poems*:

> Interestingly enough, 'The Iceberg' itself is one of the few pieces in which a relation to the animal stories can readily be seen. In tracing the cycle of an iceberg from its spawning 'A thousand miles due north/ Beyond Cape Chidley' to its final merging in the 'all-solvent sea' of warmer latitudes, Roberts offers in verse an equivalent to the kind of animal story I have called the representative chronicle — a story in which we are presented not with the unique adventure of a single individual but with a characteristic life-pattern. Moreover, Roberts has boldly employed the first-person narrative voice so that the poem expresses, as it were, the actions of a natural force harshly independent of man. [By strictly confining himself] ... to an unemotional reporting of events, he succeeds in communicating a viewpoint that is frighteningly non-human.

Most of Roberts' late attempts at free-verse are pale imitations of Whitman; but in this remarkable poem he masters in his own way the irregular cadence of the

free-verse line, and embodies — in the speaker, the great iceberg — his fascination with the inhuman, the negative, which has been tracking him through his poetic career. Now he turns and faces it, the landscape which is without love or hate, which is, so far as human values go, absence, indifference:

> Under the pallid dawning
> Of the lidless Arctic day
> Forever no life stirred.
> No wing of bird —
> Of ghostly owl low winnowing
> Or fleet-winged ptarmigan fleeing the pounce of death, —
> No foot of backward-glancing fox
> Half glimpsed, and vanishing like a breath, —
> No lean and gauntly stalking bear,
> Stalking its prey.
> Only the white sun, circling the white sky.

At the centre of the poem is a vision of the ocean — ecological, organic, indifferent to our concerns — and, in the midst of it, "the Alp afloat", "A shape pearl-pale and monstrous", which somehow becomes an organic part of it:

> And now around me
> Life and the frigid waters all aswarm.
> The smooth wave creamed
> With tiny capelin and the small pale squid, —
> So pale the light struck through them.
> Gulls and gannets screamed
> Over the feast, and gorged themselves, and rose,
> A clamour of weaving wings, and hid
> Momently my face.
> The great bull whales
> With cavernous jaws agape,
> Scooped in the spoil, and slept,
> Their humped forms just awash, and rocking softly, —
> Or sounded down, down to the deeps, and nosed
> Along my ribbed and sunken roots,
> And in the green gloom scattered the pasturing cod.

The iceberg waits, in the fog, "greatly incurious and unconcerned", as a ship approaches: it "towered, a dim immensity of doom". The cataclysmic destruction of a great ship and its passengers is simply one incident among the others that mark the voyage of the iceberg from the Arctic north to the southern seas where

it becomes "A little glancing globe of cold" and then its "fragile, scintillating frame" merges "forever in the all-solvent sea".

In an essay published in 1886, "The Outlook for Literature"[6], Roberts has written with perception about the problems of creating a literature in a new country. He is aware of the powerful potential subjects, particularly in the landscape:

> These stern coasts, now thundered against by Atlantic storms, now wrapped in noiseless fogs, these overwhelming tides, these vast channels emptied of their streams, these weird reaches of flat and marsh and dike, should create a habit of openness to nature, . . . If environment is anything, our work can hardly prove tame.

These are the words of a man upon whom the landscape he knows has made a deep impression. Environment *is* something; indeed, in a country where so much had been left behind that social and cultural arrangements often seemed arbitrary, nature provided the only real imperative. But Roberts, though he wanted to write what he called "that characteristically modern verse which is kindled where the outposts of an elaborate and highly self-conscious civilisation come in contact with crude humanity and primitive nature"[7] too often harkened to what he called "the voice from the drawing room" rather than the "voice of the wilderness". He sensed and shared what he perceived as his countrymen's apprehension lest they be seen as uncultured, unconventional, rugged. His achievement as a poet is uneven, flawed, very short of first rate, yet when he was able to forget the ambiguous burden of late Romantic preconceptions and lose himself in that landscape which he called "stern, overwhelming, vast, weird" his work did not prove tame.

NOTES

[1] Keith, W. J., Introduction to *Selected Poetry and Critical Prose* of Charles G. D. Roberts, ed. Keith, University of Toronto Press, 1974, pp. xxiv-xxv.

[2] Roberts, Charles G. D., "The Poetry of Nature" in Keith, *op. cit.*, pp. 276-281.

[3] Cappon, James, "from *Roberts and the Influences of his Time*, 1905, in *Masks of Poetry*, ed. A. J. M. Smith, New Canadian Library, McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., pp. 45-54.

[4] Atwood, Margaret, *Survival*, Anansi, Toronto, 1972, p. 49.

[5] Keith, W. J., *Charles D. G. Roberts*, Copp Clark, 1969, pp. 106-107.

[6] Roberts, Charles G. D., "The Outlook for Literature" in Keith, ed., *Selected Poetry and Critical Prose*, pp. 260-264.

[7] Roberts, Charles G. D., " 'Introduction' to *Poems of Wild Life*," in Keith, *op. cit.*, pp. 265-270.

LAYTON AND NIETZSCHE

Wynne Francis

LAYTON HAS NEVER made any secret of his debt to Nietzsche. On the contrary he draws our attention to it insistently — by choice of words and phrases (etiolation, antinomies, the glare of noontide, joyful wisdom, the stillest hour, good Europeans, new tables); by symbols (sun, flame, fire, star, dance, serpent); by explicit reference in titles and elsewhere to Apollo, Dionysus, Heraclitus, Zarathustra, the ubermensch, Eternal Recurrence. Prefaces as well as poems abound in themes and motifs drawn from Nietzsche: his Heraclitean premises, his Hellenism, his moral psychology, his repudiation of Christianity, his aversion to orthodoxies, institutions, systems, his affirmation of life, his unfaltering faith in the redemptive powers of creativity. With such evidence as this Layton certainly leaves no doubt as to the Nietzschean cast of many of his ideas.

There is more than an affinity of minds between the two writers. Layton claims that he "recognized himself" in Nietzsche, that Nietzsche's work confirmed his own vision of reality. It was at least partly a matter of temperament. Layton had no need to borrow from Nietzsche what he already possessed: a cheerful disposition, a volatile temper, a contrariety of spirit, a love of paradox, a zest for controversy and polemic, a strong sense of irony, a voracious appetite for life. Add to this a charismatic personality, a sense of mission, the gift of rhetorical persuasion and an extraordinary measure of self-confidence. Layton brought all these qualities to his reading of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, for example, and without doubt they facilitated his acceptance of the ideas he found therein. The two men are obviously kindred spirits and Layton responded as one of "the few" to whom Nietzsche directed his message.

The fact of "recognizing" himself in Nietzsche had the catalytic effect of releasing a torrent of creative energy which through the years Layton has spent, para-

doxically, in "finding" himself. Exploring reality through his poems has involved plumbing the depths of his own experience and thereby discovering himself. Nietzsche urged upon his followers the need to discover the "true self": "Become who you are!" If we have any doubt that Layton has been acting on this prescription we need only look at the poem "There were no signs", he chose to place at the beginning of both the 1965 and the 1971 *Collected Poems.*

> By walking I found out
> Where I was going.
>
> By intensely hating, how to love.
> By loving, whom and what to love.
>
> By grieving, how to laugh from the belly.
>
> Out of infirmity, I have built strength.
> Out of untruth, truth.
> From hypocrisy, I weaved directness.
>
> Almost now I know who I am.
> Almost I have the boldness to be that man.
>
> Another step
> And I shall be where I started from.

During the Forties when Layton's orientation was predominantly Marxist his poetic output though significant in quality was relatively slight in volume. He knew himself to be a poet even then and he worked hard at perfecting his craft; but his vision was diffuse, its emotive potential relatively low. The impact of Nietzsche took effect early in the Fifties. It clarified Layton's vision, brought it suddenly into sharp focus. And it swept away the cobwebs of his Marxism, for the dialectical interpretation of history which had attracted Layton to Marx is also present in Nietzsche but in a form more hospitable to the spirit of lyric poetry and more consistent with Layton's own observations of current world politics.

Between 1951 and 1958 Layton published ten books of poetry (including the thirty-one poems in *Cerberus*). In each of these books successively, the structure of his vision was more fully elaborated until its outline was clearly defined in "For Mao Tse-Tung: A Meditation on Flies and Kings" (1958).[1] Recognizing this poem as an important statement Layton chose from it the title of his next book, a volume of collected poems, *A Red Carpet for the Sun.* This title phrase is taken from the very fruit of his "Meditation . . ." — a quatrain of intensely fused

metaphor which is Nietzschean to the core and, in retrospect, quintessentially Layton.

> They dance best who dance with desire,
> Who lifting feet of fire from fire
> Weave before they lie down
> A red carpet for the sun.

Among other important poems of the Fifties which are profoundly Nietzschean are "In the Midst of My Fever", "Seven O'Clock Lecture", "The Cold Green Element" and "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom". Conceived during a period of extreme personal anguish each of these poems is a powerful statement on the function of poetry and the fate of the poet, themes which are central to both Nietzsche and Layton. Almost all of the lesser poems of that decade can also be read with profit in the Nietzschean perspective. Their astonishing variety of subject matter and style attest to the fecundity of Layton's imagination and the versatility of his talent as well as to his thorough command of Nietzschean idioms and motifs. His first Nietzschean preface was written in the Fifties also. It appeared as a "Note" to the second printing of *A Laughter in the Mind* (1958). The title and the inscription for this book are drawn from Nietzsche, and the preface makes the first emphatic statement of themes which dominate Layton's "Forewords" from then on. One has only to compare this "Note" with his untitled preface to his work in *Cerberus* (1952) to realize how much of a hold Nietzsche has taken on Layton's thought during the intervening years.

During the Sixties and Seventies the outpouring of Layton's talent continued unabated, his Nietzschean base still firm. The increase in recent years in the number of introspective poems should not deceive us; they are quite consistent with the duty of the "ubermensch" to seek his true self. Nor should the Israeli poems distract us. They are not a departure but a fulfilment of Layton's dream of the Jews — namely that they possess the greatest potential to become "higher men".[2] Witness the admiration he shares with Nietzsche for the Old Testament prophets, including the "last" and greatest of them, Jesus of Nazareth. Of the poems that have been born of Layton's far-flung travels in these two decades, the occasional exotic subject does not obscure the basic vision. In fact, the hundreds of poems Layton has published since "For Mao Tse-Tung" have not changed either the outline or the internal structure of that vision. What they have contributed is a fabulous intricacy of patterning and a rich texture. Layton's "red carpet" is of a close and expert weave.

A recognition of the basic Nietzschean thrust of Layton's work should not lead to reductive conclusions about his talent. As a poet he owes no more to Nietzsche than T. S. Eliot does to Christianity. What Eliot found in Christianity was a store of images which he felt to be true and a mythic structure upon which to articulate his vision. Layton's talent is his own; his originality, like that of any other poet, derives from his imagination and his personal life experience. Nothing in Nietzsche prepares us for the pathos of "The Bull Calf", the poignancy of "Berry Picking", the curious, symbolic drama of "The End of the White Mouse", the gaiety of "The Day Aviva Came to Paris", the wry good humour of "Shakespeare" or the fun, the rage, the terror, the delight — to say nothing of the fine craftsmanship — with which Layton makes his poetic statements. Nor does a reading of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, for example, prepare us for the brilliance with which Layton develops the sun imagery to be found therein. He has made the sun a central symbol in his work and has elaborated an intricate and thoroughly consistent pattern of fire and flame imagery to support it. Once the significance of the sun symbolism is fully recognized, literally hundreds of Layton's poems can be read with great insight without recourse to Nietzsche. Yet the basic Nietzschean structure is there, throughout, and to be aware of it is to read all of Layton more intelligently.

We have noted that a central concern of both writers is the nature and function of art and that Layton has explored the role and fate of the artist in a number of his finest and most complex poems. His most lucid rendering of the Nietzschean aesthetic is the much-anthologized "The Birth of Tragedy" (1954). This poem has of course been enjoyed by thousands of readers without benefit of Nietzsche but for those who wish to explore it deeply some awareness of the source of its ideational content is mandatory.

The title of the poem is identical with that of Nietzsche's famous first book, a prolix essay on the origin of art. In retrospect, Nietzsche condemned this essay as being too Hegelian and dualistic — "errors" which he corrected in his later work; but he never repudiated or abandoned the premises he established in *The Birth of Tragedy* regarding the dialectical nature of art and the supremacy of aesthetic over all other values. These ideas were seeds which flowered in all his later works. Since Layton throughout his work takes account of both the seeding and the flowering of Nietzsche's aesthetic we need first to look at the early statement and then extract from the later work those developments which are relevant to Layton's poetry.

THE VERY TITLE of Nietzsche's essay is important, juxtaposing as it does the pain and joy of birth with the suffering and death connoted by tragedy. It introduces a theme which persists throughout Nietzsche's (and Layton's) aesthetic: joy and suffering are inextricably related in both life and art. The essay was intended to trace the history of art from its origins in Greek myth and ritual to its greatest development in tragic opera; but we soon discover that Nietzsche is exploring not merely the history but also, and with greater enthusiasm, the mythic and psychic origins of art. This is implicit in the use he makes of two Greek art-sponsoring dieties.

The first of these is Apollo the sun god, god of light and reason and of all the plastic arts, especially poetry. Most significantly, Apollo is the god of transfiguration: it is Apollo's gift of "fair illusion" which enables man to apprehend reality, to find meaning in nature and significance in life. (Nature requires man's reason and imagination to give it meaning: ". . . my forehead bringing/ intelligence into this featureless waste" writes Layton in "Thoughts in the Water" (1956). And "The Fertile Muck" (1956) begins "There are brightest apples on those trees/ but until I, fabulist, have spoken/ they do not know their significance . . . The wind's noise is empty.") Illusion organizes chaos, gives form to experience, permits man the dream of a world of individual "appearances" and a vision of a radiantly harmonious universe where all things individual have their role and importance. This capability Nietzsche calls "redemption through illusion". Raised to the level of art the Apollonian spirit is gloriously manifested, for example, in the rendering of experience through the disciplined rhythms and graceful images of a lyric poem. (The serene joy of Apollo triumphs in Layton's "New Tables" (1954) and in "The Sweet Light Strikes My Eyes" (1968) which ends ". . . God, the sweet light strikes my eyes;/ I am transfigured and once again the world, the world is fair.")

Such a complete victory for Apollo is rare however for he has as a constant adversary a dark god of terrifying power. Dionysus represents reality, the abyss of chaos. He is the ever-turbulent, destructive force which is the unknowable source of all experience. A human being cannot experience reality directly and survive as an integrated whole, for the Dionysian element is the explosive, disintegrating force of raw energy. By itself this energy cannot give meaning to life or produce a work of art, for it is imageless, non-rational, formless. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche relates Dionysus to the non-plastic art of music which he regards as the one artistic expression closest to the "will" of the universe — that ever-

surging discordant energy which is reality. The test of the Apollonian poet is the degree to which he can resolve the discord, translate the dissonance of Dionysus into a tolerable, pleasurable "music". (Layton employs this theme in "Orpheus" (1955): "... the poet's heart/ has nowhere counterpart/ Which can celebrate/ Love equally with Death/ Yet by its pulsing bring/ A music into everything." And elsewhere he extends the "discord-music" metaphor to include "silence". A finished poem, like a musical score, is silent; it has resolved the clashing antinomies and it remains as a vivid record of the struggle with reality: "Energy must crackle on a silent urn ..." ("The Graveyard", 1968).

The greatest poetry in other words is that which takes the fullest account of reality. Apollo's triumph of serenity and joy must be won at the necessary expense of a tragic struggle with the Dionysian forces of darkness, chaos, suffering and death. Throughout *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche views the development of art as a suspenseful series of dialectical encounters between these two spirits. Apollo always triumphs eventually, else there would be no art to write about, though Nietzsche betrays a very strong attraction to Dionysus without whom Apollo would have no function.

Dionysus makes his most fascinating appearance as the earth god, god of darkness, dismemberment and death, who is associated with the vegetation myths and fertility rituals. Here his dark powers are evoked by jubilant satyrs in frenzied celebrations of creativity and rebirth. In such orgiastic celebrations the individual while under the spell of Dionysus loses himself, gives free reign to his passions, forgets himself completely. For this reason Dionysus is pictured as the god of wine, of intoxication, of rapture, of lust. Extravagant self-abandon dissolves the bond of the individual will, shrugs off the restraints of reason and makes possible an ecstatic communion of the individual with his fellow-creatures and with all of nature. At such moments man is returned to the "material womb of being" where he enjoys a sense of union with the original Oneness of the universe. This is the Dionysian experience which for Nietzsche represents another mode of redemption. (Layton's satirical poems offer a veritable troupe of Dionysian revellers — satyrs, nymphs, fauns, inebriates, gamblers, rakes and roués, some modern, some bearing Greek or Roman names — all of whom engage in some form of self-abandon and thumb their noses gleefully at respectability, prudery, repression and self-righteousness. Many of his love poems emphasize the delirious joy and the redemptive power of lust. And in some of his most complex poems the Dionysian reveller takes the form of a social outcast — a buffoon, a crippled poet, a caged artist, a cretinous child, a murdered dwarf, a madman frenzied by his revered vision. All

such poems reveal a tragic loss of self as the cost of a deeper insight into reality; and the pain, suffering and "death" involved are suffused with an anguished ecstasy.)

But this form of redemption, Nietzsche claims, cannot be known as such until the Apollonian spirit "rescues" the individual, asserts control over the flood of passion and sublimates it in a form that can be apprehended, contemplated and enjoyed. Considering such formative power it would seem to follow that the proper name for the artist as such is Apollo. On the contrary Nietzsche insists that art has its origins in two radically dissimilar realms and that the greatest form of art derives from a dialectical tension between the two. The artist in *The Birth of Tragedy* is Janus-faced; his name is hyphenated: Apollo-Dionysus. The two spirits, linked in a tense and tragic struggle, give birth to the greatest, most redemptive forms of art. But the hyphenation also indicates that the two gods of art are united against a common enemy. Nietzsche, describing the history of Greek tragedy, attributes its eventual decline to the growth of the Socratic spirit. The name he gives to the forces which are inimical to art is Socratism.[3]

Socratism is the spirit of rational inquiry which seeks always to interpose theoretical knowledge between experience and reality. It substitutes "truth" for reality, implying that reality is knowable and that the way to it is through logic and reasoning. Socratism prevails wherever men put their faith in science and technology, in education and progress, in evolution, social engineering or political programmes, to the virtual exclusion of "spiritual" and aesthetic modes of redemption. By extension, the term Socratism implies Nietzsche's censure of all closed systems and orthodoxies (be they philosophical, scientific, political or religious) which paralyze the will, expunge the mythic dimension of experience and relegate the blessedness and perfection of man to some future historical period or afterlife. The Socratic mentality breeds an easy optimism and a false pessimism (both objectionably romantic) and evades the real issue of man's predicament. A society in which this mentality is prevalent exerts a levelling force: it sacrifices the individual to the state; it suppresses the non-conformist and the heretic and it will not tolerate the artist except as a very tame version of Apollo. (These are motifs which govern many of Layton's prefaces and characterize numerous poems in which he attacks the mentality of the bourgeois, the philistine, the bureaucrat, the academic, the critic, Marxists and especially Russian communists. As for tame poets, Layton's contempt is writ large in such poems as "The Modern Poet", "No Shish Kebab" and "Anti Romantic" as well as in several "Forewords" where he castigates poets for their cowardliness.)

And since the spirit of Socratism is intent upon either the correction or the extirpation of all evil and disruptive forces, its chief target, Nietzsche claims, is Dionysus whom it will ostracize, incarcerate or destroy at every opportunity. ("Dionysus is dead:" says Layton in his "Foreword" to *A Red Carpet for the Sun* (1959), "his corpse seethes white-maggoty with social-workers and analysts." The many poems which feature the artist being tormented and rejected by a "Socratic" society culminate in the strikingly original "With the Money I Spend" (1961). Here the poet speaks to his loved one who represents the spirit of Beauty, Poetry: "The Leninists are marching on us./ Their eyes are inflamed with social justice./ Their mouths are contorted with the brotherhood of man./ Their fists are heavy with universal love. . . .")

Nietzsche regards such a society as having lost touch with reality. It is sick and very much in need of redemption. This judgment applies to the whole post-Socratic Christian world. Among his own contemporaries Nietzsche described a limpness of spirit, a moral flaccidity, an apathy in the face of evil — the result of centuries of excessive rationalism, debilitating Christian values,[4] and an evasive and ennervating romanticism. Man's capacity for heroism has atrophied, leaving him defenceless against the forces of destruction. Nietzsche foresaw that a rising tide of superstition, mysticism, violence, meaningless wars and terrorism would engulf the Twentieth Century. To be saved, to be restored to health and sanity, modern man must revive the tension between good and evil and regain a respect for the terrible powers of Dionysus. And he must recognize the evil in himself and assume the burden of guilt. Only then can he hope to organize the chaos of Dionysianism and rechannel his energies towards creative redemption. (Layton, who has lived to see Nietzsche's dark prophecies come true, is not so sure that redemption is close at hand. The horrors and obscenities of current events continue to provide him with tragic documentation of his own psychological and megapolitical vision. As Nietzsche's heir, and as a poet-prophet in his own right, he continues to exhort his fellow men to recognize the evil of their days, to accept their share of guilt and to strive to create a new life of dignity, sanity and freedom.)

Nietzsche closes *The Birth of Tragedy* with a call for the restoration of the tragic vision — a firm reyoking of the powers of Apollo and Dionysus. If this can be assured, he is more than willing to give Socratism its due: it is a necessary antithesis to art at its best and an eternal provocation to the assertion of the supremacy of aesthetic values. On this note *The Birth of Tragedy* ends, with a call to Dionysus to take his place at the centre of the stage.

It remains to observe how in Nietzsche's later work the figure of Dionysus comes

to dominate the stage. For, conceived at first as Apollo's antagonist, then linked with him in a common entreprise, Dionysus eventually assumes Apollo's full power and prestige. This most significant transformation comes about with Nietzsche's discovery of the "will-to-power".

At first he saw this concept as referring only to human psychology, as the basic eros urging man beyond self-preservation to fulfilment and perfection through the overcoming of the self. But then he extended it to all living things: Nature's reckless fecundity offered endless examples. Finally he saw that it characterized the entire cosmos. As such it was implicit in the "will of the universe" referred to in *The Birth of Tragedy*; but the cosmic will-to-power is no longer a frenzied undirected striving but rather the irrefutable urge to become which is forever forming and dissolving and reforming — giving birth to itself, dying and being reborn. To this will-to-power Nietzsche gave the name of Dionysus. Thereafter Dionysus is reality in process and Nietzsche now views him as the ultimate goal as well as the primary source of all existence.

Dionysus no longer requires Apollo to give him form; for within himself he provides for the dialectic between form and chaos, forever destroying and creating himself. As such he becomes the Eternal Creator in a Heraclitean universe of flux wherein the basic element is fire. Thus he even approximates Apollo's symbol, the sun. Zarathustra is a sunworshipper, and Nietzsche declares himself a worshipper in the "Dionysian faith". (The last verse of Layton's "Logos" (1964) expresses this faith: "I laugh and praise the Dionysian/ Everywhere irrational thrust/ That sends meteors spilling/ into dust/ This enchantment risen in the bone." So does "Zoroastrian" which begins "I want nothing/ to ever come/ between me and the sun . . . " In fact hundreds of his poems containing sun and flame imagery can be read with deeper insight as the tributes of a Dionysian to his God. And we may note that whenever Layton uses the word "God" seriously in his poems or prefaces, it is Dionysus to whom he most often refers. Fortuitously Dionysus as Layton and Nietzsche conceive him is not incompatible with either Heraclitus' Eternal Flux or the Jehovah of the Old Testament, a circumstance which allows for considerable flexibility in the interpretation of Layton's work.)[5]

In the light of his Dionysian faith Nietzsche entertains the hypothesis of Eternal Recurrence which postulates that everything that happens happens again and again forever, albeit in cycles (Great Years) which span periods of time longer than any known history. (Layton's "Eternal Recurrence" (1971) is a quite literal rendering of this concept. More subtle are "Orpheus" (1955) and "If I Lie Still" (1963).) The idea was not original with Nietzsche and at first he

found it abhorrent because it implied no end to pain, suffering and death. His Dionysian faith however assured him that by the same token life, creativity and joy could also recur eternally. If Eternal Recurrence is ground for a necessary pessimism it also offers the potential for boundless joy.

But the question remains: how can a man so sanctify every moment that he might want to live it again and again? Nietzsche's pessimism led him to despair of mankind in general: the many seem incapable of more than endurance, passive suffering. (Layton expresses his compassionate contempt for the *massenmensch* in "For Mao Tse-Tung ..." (1958) and numerous other poems; he differs from Nietzsche only to the extent that he puts out the call to all men to become "creative sufferers" though without much hope of response.) "The few", those to whom Nietzsche directed his message, might learn to live the "good life". To these he held up the ideal of the *übermensch.* (This figure is named in several of Layton's poems; in others he appears in various guises, notably as Layton's persona in "Beach Acquaintance" (1967) and as the more subdued figure in "A Dedication" (1964).)

The *übermensch* is not a man of the future, the goal of evolution. And certainly he is not a supernatural saviour or superman. (Layton ridicules these misconceptions in "Paging Mr. Superman" (1958).) Nor, though he has appeared in history (Socrates, Caesar, Napoleon, Goethe are Nietzsche's examples), is he the product of history or of anything but himself. The *übermensch* creates and recreates himself through self-knowledge and self-discipline. He is a passionate man who learns to control his passions; a man of reason who trains himself to act rationally as if by instinct; a suffering man who takes joy in life whatever the cost. He exults in the will-to-power which pulses so strongly through him driving him to "cultivate" himself, to strive continuously toward higher modes of being. He is strict with himself and ruthless toward anyone or anything which threatens to inhibit him or restrict his freedom to change and grow. Thus he grows from weakness into strength, from sickness into health, from cowardliness and slavery into boldness and freedom. ("Out of infirmity, I have built strength ..." writes Layton in "There Were No Signs", "... Almost now I know Who I am./ Almost I have the boldness to be that man....")

The *übermensch* is a Yea-sayer. Nietzsche's formula for greatness is "amor-fati" — the joyous affirmation of one's own existence and of the life-force in eternity. (Layton, praising the flame of life as it passes through him writes: " 'Affirm life,' I said, 'Affirm/ The triumphant grass that covers the worm;/ And the flesh, the swinging flesh/ That burns on its stick of bone.' " ("The Swinging

Flesh", 1961)) The *übermensch* is a Dionysian. His self-realization is a continuous process of self-discovery and self-overcoming. His achievement is not to be judged in moral or utilitarian terms; rather, like a work of art, he is valued for his wholeness, his integrity and grace — in a word, his style. ("It's all in the manner of the done," says Layton, "Manner redeemeth everything:/ redeemeth man, sets him up among,/ over, the other worms, puts/ a crown on him, yes, size of a/ mountain lake,/ dazzling more dazzling!/ than a slice of sun" ("It's All in The Manner", 1954).)

"The most spiritual men are the strongest," claims Nietzsche.[6] And the most powerful life is the creative life. It is not surprising therefore that of the types of men with the mark of the *übermensch* (the hero, the philosopher) Nietzsche favours the artist. The Dionysian artist "creates himself", as Nietzsche said of Goethe, through his art, and he delights in the process however painful and self-destructive it may be. He is thereby most like a god — like Dionysus — overjoyed with his continuous recreation of himself in the universe. Dionysus the eternal creator is god the eternal artist. The human Dionysian poet is therefore both the creation and the analogue of the divine artist, since he recreates himself and the world in every poem he writes.

This final vision of the Dionysian artist was implicit in Nietzsche's earliest book. In an ecstatic passage in *The Birth of Tragedy* he wrote: "Only as an aesthetic product can the world be justified to all eternity. . . . Only as the genius [e.g., the poet] in the act of creation merges with the primal architect of the cosmos can he truly know something of the eternal essence of art. . . . He is at once the subject and object, poet, actor and audience." (To realize how closely Layton parallels Nietzsche even to this conclusion one need only read his "Like a Mother Demented" (1968), a poem in which man's dilemma and the irony of the whole cosmic drama implied above is made tragically clear.)

THE PERSONA in Layton's "The Birth of Tragedy"[7] is Nietzsche's Dionysian artist. With the accent on "birth", on becoming, the poem explores the creative process on three interconnected levels — the natural, the human and the cosmic. Happily engaged in the writing of his poem the poet delights in his ability to give meaning to the life-and-death process which he observes in his natural surroundings. (". . . In me, nature's divided things/ . . . have their fruition.") He pays tribute to Apollo and Dionysus ("the perfect gods") whose spirits assist and reward his strivings. He exults in his own growth, sacrificing his

old self as he gives birth to a new one. He rejoices in his freedom as one who, accepting his fate, enjoys a harmony with the whole of the destructive-creative continuum. He salutes the cosmic artist at work in the universe as the "birthday" of a new cycle of existence is celebrated. And since the creative process is one of eternal recurrence the last line returns us to the beginning where we find the poet in the act of redeeming the moment: "And me happiest when I compose poems."

The poem is not "Dionysian" in the popular sense. It does not exploit the more lurid and dramatic sufferings of the tormented poet, the figure of the dying god shrieking his exultant defiance. By contrast it is the more thoroughly Nietzschean for its exuberance and "cheerfulness". Zarathustra taught not an easy optimism but a cheerful courage. Nietzsche's concept of happiness was a sense of power suffused with joy.

"The Birth of Tragedy" was published in 1954. Twenty years later Layton wrote another poem on the poetic process which deserves to be considered as the obverse side of the same coin. The mood of "The Birth of Tragedy" was one of serene joy, its stanzaic form allowing for fluctuating flame-like rhythms to express elation. "Ithaca" is more tightly structured, its turbulence contained in four taut quatrains to sustain the desired tension. The persona is once again that of the Dionysian poet; but the poem carries us closer, in the poetic process, towards completion and, in the cosmic process, towards the precipice of destruction, dissolution, death. Again the moment of creativity is celebrated, this time the excruciating joyous moment when the poet is about to achieve a finished poem: "... the imperial moment just before/ the relieving ambiguities of ejaculation,/ when he can still urge on his ecstasy/ and ecstasy and fate are one ..." High in the sky Helios, too, appears to await the zenith: "... the exact instant of plenitude and decline ..." ("Mid-day; moment of the shortest shadow;" wrote Nietzsche, "end of the longest error; zenith of mankind; *incipit Zarathustra.*") Layton greets the moment of fruition and destruction with an ecstatic "amor-fati" as the last verse captures the climax in a fitting Heraclitean image:

> The total white exquisiteness before corruption
> when the wave's wide flaunting crest
> with smash and tumult prepares to break
> into bleak nothingness on Ithaca's shore.

In 1974 Layton also published *The Pole-vaulter* the title of which is taken from the poem "Pole-vaulter", its persona an ageing *übermensch*: "... Spry and drugged with love/ I pole-vault/ over my grave." The book is dedicated to

two contemporary Jewish women writers who in their fight against Russian Communism exhibit heroic courage. "The world is redeemed by [such] pole-vaulters," says Layton in the Foreword. The book has two inscriptions. The first is drawn from Nietzsche:

> In the end it must be as it is and always has been:
> great things remain for the great, abysses for the
> profound, nuances and shudders for the refined,
> and, in brief, all that is rare for the rare.

The second inscription reads:

> We must live so we can tell what man is capable of
> doing to man. Perhaps this is God's will.
> "Jew in Treblinka"

The most recent volume of Layton's selected poems, *The Unwavering Eye*, (1975), takes its title from a poem which pays explicit tribute to Nietzsche. It concerns a response to life and to oncoming death. The poet observes the elements of nature engaged in their eternal dialectic. Over them presides the symbol of Dionysus, the great eye of the sun, now "glaucomic". A central symbol in Layton's work, the sun here represents the steady gaze of Nietzsche whose vision, though blurred towards the end by madness, never flinched from reality. "... Nietzsche, hero and martyr ... died innocent, a gentle lunatic ... "

> The abyss belched
> and pulled him downward
> by the two ends of his drooping moustache
>
> Now I cannot look
> at a solitary sunlit stone
> and not think of Nietzsche's unwavering eye

Nietzsche did not want disciples; he provided no dogma or system which "followers" might lean on. Zarathustra taught the over-coming of the self, the glorification of the moment; the affirmation of life through all eternity. A true Dionysian is on his own: he must assert his joy in his own individual existence with all that that entails of cosmic dialectics, history, heredity, environment and personal attributes. Thus, though much in Layton becomes clearer through an understanding of his Nietzscheanism, his talent and originality derive from a combination of sources unique to him. Nietzsche sometimes spoke of the will-to-power as an

"instinct of freedom". As a poet, Layton equates these terms with his gift in one of his finest poems on the poetic process:

> So whatever else poetry is freedom. Let
> Far off the impatient cadences reveal
> A padding for my breathless stilts. Swivel
> O hero, in the fleshy groves, skin and glycerine,
> And sing of lust, the sun's accompanying shadow
> Like a vampire's wing, the stillness in dead feet —
> Your stave brings resurrection, O aggrievèd king.
>
> ("Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom", 1958)

NOTES

[1] I have elsewhere published a close reading of this poem which reveals its Nietzschean structure.

[2] Cf. "Note" to *A Laughter in the Mind*: "A Hebrew, I worship the Divine in extraordinary men, know that all flesh is grass and that everything ripens into decay and oblivion.... It seems to me now I have always known this...." As a post-Christian pagan Layton draws on both Hellenic culture and Hebraic values. His yearly travels in Greece and his concern with Twentieth Century Jewish history lend immediacy to this traditional dialectic especially in his poems of the Sixties and Seventies.

[3] Nietzsche is as ambivalent towards Socratism as he is towards Christianity. His attacks on these forces are directed against their negative effects, as he sees them. He has a great reverence for the "true" Socratic spirit of inquiry, and he reserves an important place for reason in his philosophy.

[4] Nietzsche's chief score against Pauline Christianity — as distinct from the original teachings of Jesus — is that it has lent itself as an ally and instrument to the Socratic state by sanctifying repression of the passions and self-effacement of the individual and by promoting thereby a "slave morality". (For similar reasons Layton has aimed scores of attacks at the rigidly orthodox, the hypocritically pious and the puritanical among both Christians and Jews.)

[5] Considering the omnipotence of this Dionysus one may ponder the role of Apollo in Layton's work. In his "Foreword" to *The Swinging Flesh* (1960) he says: "Like all artists I am concerned with Appearance and Reality and with the traffic that goes on between them. Appearance I both love and distrust and think of as an enchanting mistress, fertile in invention, endlessly playful." Allowing for the change of sex, this mistress is Apollo. In the perspective of the Dionysian faith everything is antinominal: Apollo's gift of "illusion" is therefore also "deception", the "will to falsehood in the hearts of men" ("Seven O'clock Lecture"). Poets are "liars"; poems are "anodynes" — temporary relief from the pain and suffering of existence. "Art also finally crumbles and falls back into life as the water-lily's brightness crumbles into the pondscum that surrounds it." (*A Red Carpet for the Sun*, 1959.)

[6] It is important to note that Nietzsche makes no division between the physical, the mental and the spiritual. The spiritual is simply the highest manifestation of the will-to-power.

[7] I have elsewhere published a detailed explication of this poem.

THE CONSUL'S "MURDER"

Andrew J. Pottinger

THE MAJORITY of *Under the Volcano*'s critics have directed their attention away from any interpretation of the work's psychological or "literal" level, and the consequent emphasis on symbolic and mythic interpretation has seriously dehumanized the novel. Further, the reader who fails to consider in detail this "immediate" level of *Under the Volcano* may come to overlook a major component of Lowry's meanings — a dimension of irony, centred on the theme of alienation, which he painstakingly and specifically built into the novel during its rewriting, and which emerges only through an alert reading of the work as an "engaged" novel, an account of human confrontation in historical time.

Lowry adopted a fictional technique in his major novel which conforms, more exactly than interpretations of the novel's mythic structures tend to recognize, to Sartre's description of the modern novelist's imperative:

> ... we had to people our books with minds that were half lucid and half overcast, some of which we might consider with more sympathy than others, but none of which would have a privileged point of view either upon the event or upon himself. We had to present creatures whose reality would be the tangled and contradictory tissue of each one's *evaluations* of all the other characters — himself included — and the evaluation by all the others of himself, and who could never decide from within whether the changes of their destinies came from their own efforts, from their own faults, or from the course of the universe.
>
> Finally, we had to leave doubts, expectations, and the unachieved throughout our works, leaving it up to the reader to conjecture for himself by giving him the feeling, that his view of the plot and the characters was merely one among many others.[1]

Under the Volcano conforms to this prescription by presenting the critical reader with a universe of inter-personal evaluation which parallels in its complexity that of his own day-to-day experience. It is thus equally difficult for him to make "final" *moral* judgments of the actions in Lowry's fictional world as it is to answer the moral questions he actually faces every day.

By way of preliminary illustration, consider an action whose setting is even more politically intense than the Mexico of *Under the Volcano* — Robert Jordan's killing the young Spaniard who opposes his leadership of the guerrilla force in Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls.* Hemingway goes to great lengths to present all the evidence most readers need in order to exculpate Robert from any moral guilt. The question of moral guilt arises, and is determined conclusively, within the fictional world of the novel; the reader is only called upon to assent, not to deliberate. His reading experience, in this particular respect, is very unlike his experience of day-to-day moral issues where the relevant evidence he might like to have in order to make a decision is not always available, and where other evidence seems intractably ambiguous in its moral implications. Hemingway's fictional world is morally simplified for his reader in a way that Lowry's is not.

Hemingway cannot, of course, be fairly taken as a representative for other modern novelists either in general or in particular. His position is extreme. Other novelists, however, may present far more complex moral worlds than Robert Jordan's while, nevertheless, setting out just as Hemingway does to clarify the issues involved on the reader's behalf. But the extremism of Hemingway's fictional technique in this respect makes his treatment of Robert Jordan's action an especially illuminating contrast with Lowry's treatment of a similar fictional event. Geoffrey Firmin's violent death at the hands of the three "Chiefs of Police" seems quite clearly to raise the same kind of moral issues as Hemingway "disposes of" in the case of Robert Jordan — issues which any comprehensive interpretation of the intense final chapter, and hence of *Under the Volcano* as a whole, ought to consider. In fact, a conscientious reading of this last chapter shows that moral guilt for Geoffrey's death is not positively ascribed by Lowry's narrator to anybody in particular, least of all to the men who actually kill him.

Lowry's narrative stance, unlike Hemingway's, forces the critical reader to note, above all, the temporal nature of the protagonist's situation; the "events" taking place in Parián, at the Farolito, have to be interpreted by each of the participants in the drama before they can act upon them. The same "fact" *may* be fitted into different patterns in the minds of different observers and so come to acquire quite divergent significance for Geoffrey on the one hand and for the three

police chiefs who kill him on the other. Unlike the reader, the three police chiefs and Geoffrey do not have the luxury of time in which to analyse each other's actions as objectively as possible; they are not free, as the reader is, to evaluate the various possible, but equally plausible interpretations of their adversaries' behaviour.

A comparison of the "Mexican version" of the novel[2] with the published one precisely highlights the attention that Lowry paid during revision to the construction of a pattern of incriminating circumstantial evidence that mounts up, piece by piece throughout the final chapter, against the Consul. Many, if not most, of the changes made by Lowry to this chapter were features that increased the damning appearance of Geoffrey's behaviour in the eyes of the three chiefs who must interpret what they see under the pressures of passing time. That the Consul omits paying for his drinks and for María is a modification of Lowry's original plan, as is the presence in Geoffrey's jacket of Yvonne's letters addressed to "Firmin", and Hugh's incriminating documents. In the Mexican version of the novel the Consul had destroyed the letters by the time he came to be searched, and he had not lost his passport earlier in the day. Geoffrey's drawing the map of Spain is similarly an addition in the later version of this chapter. These changes achieve two major effects: first, they emphasize, for the reader, the Consul's entrapment in circumstance; secondly, they serve to heighten the irony whereby the police-chiefs, in turn, though in a different sense of the word, are "entrapped" by their own propensity to react with the utmost suspicion towards foreigners.

The reader has, of course, been given a privileged insight into both Geoffrey's personal history and his mental processes through eleven preceding chapters during which his mind is the focus of attention. The three chiefs of police must gain a very different image of the Consul. If they have no additional information concerning him than that which they acquire during this final chapter, their image of Geoffrey is constructed partly from reports by the patrons and barmen of the Farolito, who could observe his behaviour from the time he arrived, partly from their own direct observation of and discussion with the Consul himself, and is apparently completed by information received over the telephone from some higher authority.

The possibility that the police-chiefs have an image of the Consul as an arrogant, drunken, alien criminal and spy who might well "turn dangerous" at any moment — he does, after all, make an assault on the chiefs, brandishing a deadly weapon — constitutes their "defence" in the eyes of the critical reader who faces the problems of ascribing moral guilt for Geoffrey's death. The police might well

see themselves as confronted by a man attempting to cheat their countrymen and representing their ideological enemy, Bolshevism. He resists what might be, in their eyes, a legitimate arrest while showing no signs whatever of acting peacefully; and he is finally shot in fear as much as in anger when he attempts to escape. Careful examination of two passages in particular shows how Lowry's narrator allows this defence to remain consistent with the facts, and thus refrains from endorsing Geoffrey's subjective and suspicious interpretation of the police-chiefs' actions. In the scene leading directly to the shooting, the Consul's killer is described in detail:

> The Chief of Rostrums was looking down at him.... "What the hell you think you do around here? You *pelado*, eh? It's no good for your health. I shoot de twenty people." *It was half a threat, half confidential....*
>
> "I blow you wide open from your knees up, you Jew *chingao*," *warned* the Chief of Rostrums....
>
> (My emphases)

The language the "objective" narrator chooses to describe the Consul's killer is reserved and non-committal as far as moral judgment is concerned, and actually tends to intensify the moral ambiguity of the Chief of Rostrums' position. The use of the terms "threat" and "warned" suggests that up to this stage there may be no "premeditation" in the Chief of Rostrums' mind. His behaviour, verbal and otherwise, is quite consistent with his having an image of the Consul as a dangerous criminal. The three chiefs may well have had their image of the Consul confirmed on the telephone, and it is thus ignorance and mistaken identity, combined with suspicion, which lead to their shooting a politically and legally innocent man. Hugh, whose documents Geoffrey is mistakenly carrying, and which incriminate him so clearly in the eyes of the police, is, indeed, many of the things which the police-chiefs suspect Geoffrey of being. He is staying with the Consul for only a few days before sailing to Spain with a cargo of high explosives, and, as a journalist, he is sending information to England which reflects adversely on the *Sinarquista* cause.

The reader might conclude from this that the chiefs are morally justified in *arresting* Geoffrey, but that their warnings and threats are shown to be nothing but camouflage for a more sinister purpose: such harassment would make any man react violently. This, however, would constitute a moral decision on the part of the reader which is not directed in any strict sense by the text. If the reader ascribes moral guilt to the police for their harassment of Geoffrey, he has passed through a *process* of judgment similar to that which he undertakes in the com-

parable situations of everyday life. He comes to a decision that Geoffrey's lying about his name, carrying incriminating documents, lack of a passport and drunken arrogance is insufficient warrant for the police-chiefs' response; but this decision will be based on the reader's own moral code — not upon any code implied or set forth in the novel. Lowry structures the moral universe of *Under the Volcano* in such a manner that the narrative voice sanctions no particular interpretation or evaluation of its fictional events. The reader is left, as Sartre puts it, "with doubts, speculations, and the unachieved"; and he is left, like the protagonists, "to bet, to conjecture without evidence, to undertake in uncertainty and persevere without hope."[3] Without more evidence than Lowry is willing to allow his reader, in the form, for example, of omniscient insight into the police-chiefs' minds, the novel raises the moral issues surrounding a man's violent death and yet, effectively, leaves the reader in little better a position than the protagonists when it comes to resolving them.

This point is further borne out by the narrator's presentation of the mental image (thieves, murderers) that Geoffrey constructs of his "persecutors", the fascist Unión Militar:

> He started. In front of him tied to a small tree he hadn't noticed, though it was right opposite the *cantina* on the other side of the path, stood a horse cropping the lush grass. Something familiar about the beast made him walk over. *Yes — exactly as he thought....* Unbidden, an explanation of this afternoon's events came to the Consul. Hadn't it turned out to be a policeman into which all those abominations he'd observed a little while since had melted, a policeman leading a horse in this direction? Why should not that horse [the property of the dying Indian in chapter VIII] be this horse?
>
> (My emphasis)

The narrator makes no claim here to veracity of vision on the Consul's part. The key phrase introducing Geoffrey's mescal-driven speculation is an extreme example of semantic ambiguity — "Yes — exactly as he thought". Given the context, this phrase cannot reasonably be interpreted as an objective statement on the part of the narrator, "Yes — it was exactly as *Geoffrey* had thought"; the reader must interpret it as the reported thought in Geoffrey's drugged mind, "Yes — exactly as *I* thought", in which case the description and deduction that follow are both entirely subjective. In other words, there is no unambiguous claim made *by the narrator* at this crucial point concerning the guilt or innocence of the Unión Militar with respect to the Indian's death. The fact of the horse's presence with its restored though empty saddlebags does not make the Consul's explana-

tion any more acceptable to the impartial reader than, for example, the possible explanation of the police-chiefs' treatment of Geoffrey offered above. Their possession of the horse does not imply that the police have actually stolen either it, or the money which, incidentally, nobody has seen any way. Again, however, it should be emphasized that to say this is not to say that the police-chiefs are innocent, or to insist that their motivation is such as to justify the Consul's arrest from a moral point of view. No final moral judgment is indicated or suggested by these facts alone.

Under the pressures of time, however, Geoffrey must, on the basis of the limited evidence at his disposal, make exactly the same kind of prematurely final evaluation of the police-chiefs as they must, in turn, make of him. He sees the members of the Unión Militar not as men but as "fascists". In the Mexican version of the novel this interpretation of Geoffrey's was far more blatant and melodramatic — he says to the police-chiefs in his final outburst, for example, "You're pure evil". In the published version this overt political stereotyping is more restrained but the principle remains the same. As far as the Consul is concerned, the three men he confronts are not human beings, "innocent until proven guilty", but the embodiment of everything he detests.

The Consul's prime demand during his final outburst is "Give me those letters back!" For the police-chiefs, Yvonne's letters are material evidence confirming their suspicions as to Geoffrey's being a spy. However, owing to Geoffrey's paranoid interpretation of the police-chiefs' role in the death of the peasant, he sees their possession of his wife's love-letters as a horrible travesty of cosmic justice: the letters come to represent the possibility of wholehearted human trust and communion; and the police-chiefs seem, consequently, to represent the forces that destroy such communion. He sees them quite literally as the source of alienation and distrust that allows, or forces, men to "pass by on the other side."

The mescal the Consul has consumed facilitates the giving body, in a hallucinatory fashion, to these interpretations and deductions. Because he prejudges the police-chiefs in this manner, as the source of alienation and suffering, he also sees in their faces first, "a hint of M. Laruelle", the thief who robbed him of Yvonne; second, an image of himself as "the Chief of Gardens again", as the man who had allowed the dying peasant to lie alone, unaccompanied, in the dust; and third, a further image of "the policeman Hugh had refrained from striking this afternoon" and who, Geoffrey thinks, is directly responsible for the peasant's death.

The irony of this passage is extreme. The Consul recognizes the horror of alienated humanity, and indistinctly sees this lying at the root of his own and all men's

predicament; but he himself suffers from the same alienation in making such a judgment of the men he faces. In adopting the most "vicious" explanation possible of the police-chiefs' conduct, the Consul himself fails to escape from the trap of his conditioning: he fails to give the police the consideration as human beings which he feels they withhold from both him and the common people represented by the dying Indian.

The revelation of this ironic dimension through a careful examination of the novel's "immediate" level in chapter XII points the way to an enlarged understanding of the theme of communion and alienation itself. In the final chapter, some aspect of the breakdown in human communication is presented on almost every page: by calling for "Mescal" as the chapter opens, the Consul cuts himself off from normal human perception; his not paying for his drinks arises from a mistrustful misunderstanding between "A Few Fleas" and himself; and his initially cynical response to Yvonne's letters — "Had Yvonne been reading the letters of Heloise and Abelard?" — is further evidence of misunderstanding and failure to trust another human being. He jumps to conclusions concerning the possession of the peasant's horse by the Unión Militar, and drunkenly refuses to give the three chiefs his correct name, not trusting them with accurate personal information. By their conversation on the telephone, the police-chiefs seem to confirm the mistaken identity of Geoffrey with the murderer who has "escaped through seven states", Geoffrey refuses to trust in the offers of help from the old lady and the fiddler/potter, while Diosdado seems to interpret his reaching out across the bar as an attempt to strike him. At every stage, suspicion and distrust obscure each participant's vision of his fellow men so that human communion becomes impossible.

At every stage, too, the frontiers of language act to separate the Consul from those around him. The final scene in the barroom is obviously an image of the complete failure of all human communication as Yvonne's letters are mingled with the stories of the drunken Weber, and with the deserter speaking incoherently of Mozart writing the Bible. And nowhere is this theme of alienation more powerfully dramatized than when the Consul traces the map of Spain in the mescal spilled on the surface of the bar.

No direct report of the Consul's mind is presented during this episode, but the narrative seems to suggest that the map of Spain is drawn in almost automatic response to his thoughts of Yvonne, whose letters Diosdado has just returned to him. He uses the map as illustration for memories of conjugal happiness with Yvonne, and as a means of establishing a human contact with Diosdado: "These

letters you gave me — see? — are from my wife, my *esposa*. ?Claro? This is where we met. In Spain. You recognize it, your old home, you know Andalusia?" His ploy is obviously vain. "The Elephant's" command of English is too weak for him to follow the Consul's speeding mind as Geoffrey explains the connection between the three of them: Yvonne, Diosdado, and himself.

Communication, and hence communion, is impossible between them not only, however, because of this language barrier, but also, perhaps, because Diosdado is suspicious of the Consul as an American spy even before they speak. Whatever Geoffrey says to him will be interpreted within this framework of suspicion, for the existence of which neither Geoffrey nor Diosdado alone can legitimately be blamed. It is a framework created by historico-political circumstances, by the fact that Diosdado, like the cinema proprietor of chapter I, has had experience of spies in the past, and knows they bring nothing but trouble to a man like himself. Diosdado seems to interpret Geoffrey as making some kind of indeterminate political point, and it may be due to this that the three Unión Militar men eventually arrive in the Farolito. The narrative voice never makes it clear whether Diosdado himself actually calls them, and they may well have been called by the "group at the other end of the bar", whose faces "turned in the Consul's direction." Even if they are not "called" at all, the map incident forms a basis for their accusing the Consul of being a "Bolsheviki prick".

On the one hand, then, the Consul unfairly jumps to conclusions: he interprets the policeman's leading the slain (we suppose) peasant's horse as incriminating the Unión Militar and confirming the suspicious picture of them he had painted for Hugh earlier in the day. He thus fails to give the policemen the benefit of the doubt. On the other hand, Diosdado, the other men in the bar and the police-chiefs all seem to fail to give Geoffrey this same human consideration. Distrust is mutual, and neither "side" can see straight or openly for their conditioning.

The final futile attempt at unconstrained human communion is made by the old fiddler who whispers *"compañero"* to the dying Geoffrey, and it may be, though there is no certainty here either, that the only characters who can see straight, who are not alienated from their fellow men by distrust, are the ordinary Mexican people "of indeterminate class" whom, significantly, "the Consul hated to look at".

The main critical insight achieved by the enquiry undertaken here is that Lowry's concern with man's alienation from his fellow man, in a world without moral norms or community, is embodied in the ambiguous narration itself: the

reader must become aware of and experience this alienation for himself as part of the reading process:

> The literary work, at its best ... provides *moving images* (in both the descriptive and perceptual senses of the phrase), and thus engages the reader, in Sartre's term, as *homme-dans-le-monde*, as man *in situation*, and to demands not dispassionate contemplation nor political or moral activity, but rather dialogue....[4]

The reader of *Under the Volcano* discovers his alienation from the protagonists each time he faces his own human response to their actions — a categorical imperative, for example, that an action like the police-chiefs' killing of the Consul be morally evaluated. He then finds himself in precisely the same kind of morally ambiguous and opaque universe as that of the protagonists when he recognizes the sheer lack of "contact" between himself and the fictional figures he attempts to judge. They are "closed off" from him. The narrative gives him a personal history of Geoffrey, the victim, which is full of ambiguity, to say the least, no matter how fully his consciousness is explored during the Day of the Dead; and he is alienated from Geoffrey's killers through his having neither omniscient insight into their minds, nor sufficient detailed information concerning their actual behaviour. The reader must eventually experience his own alienation when he finds himself unable to unearth any evidence within the novel to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that when they kill the Consul the members of the Unión Militar act against their consciences. This will seem a ludicrous conclusion only so long as the reader fails to recognize that the Consul's perception, partly due to the alienation induced and symbolized by his mescal drinking, is as distorted as that of his apparent persecutors.

Naturally, Lowry's introduction during revision of this powerful irony on the novel's literal level extensively affected the very important role played by myth and symbol in *Under the Volcano*. This study must largely ignore that dimension of the novel for reasons of space; but one or two relevant points may be made regarding the shift in relationship between the literal and other levels. In the Mexican version of the novel, myth and symbol served the purpose of "propaganda" — to cast the three police-chiefs, for example, as minions of Mephistopheles, and very little else. This attempted one-to-one allegorical relationship between symbolic and political realities inevitably presented the political and moral dimensions of human experience in historical time as flat and simplistic. The whole orientation of the novel consequently shifted during revision from being a *moralistic* attack on fascism as the source of all evil, towards emphasizing,

through irony, the very sin of which the novelist himself had been guilty in his earlier version: premature judgment of his fellow man.

Lowry both recognized and rejected the artistic aridity and invalidity of his own earlier version in which the major protagonists were little more than counters moved in the predetermined and conventional pattern of a mythic eternity where "life was a forest of symbols". He confronted the fully *human* questions of life in time which were implicit in the story he wished to tell, relinquished his earlier commitment to the essentially static universe of myth, and "restored to the event its brutal freshness, its ambiguity, its unforseeability".[5] And these latter are the very qualities that the reading proposed here emphasizes as characteristic of the published novel's literal level. The three police-chiefs remain at another level the minions of Mephistopheles in the story of Faust,[6] but they are also far more. The story of Faust comes, through Lowry's revision, to have a more meaningful and powerful bearing on the condition of modern man when the figures in question are not solely allegorical, but understandably human. In the published novel, instead of seeing men as ciphers, and, like Geoffrey, pointing to the fascists as the source of alienation, Lowry *dramatizes* the tragedy of a world where, under the pressures of time, it is either possible or inevitable that the Consul and his killers interpret the facts as they do. He presents the reader with a *fictional* world of which it is virtually impossible to decide finally whether its protagonists are any more capable than human beings of escaping from the influence of a world-wide atmosphere of distrust and suspicion that conditions every perception they make.

The relationship between Lowry's Mexican version and the published novel, when viewed in this perspective, is uncannily akin to the relationship which René Girard noted between Camus' *L'Etranger* and *La Chute*.[7] On a certain level, Lowry must have undergone the same kind of "existential conversion" as Camus, and perceived that it was an act of literary "bad faith" to give his narrative authorial sanction in the earlier version of the novel to Geoffrey's subjective vision of fascist evil. As in *La Chute*, the real question in the published version of *Under the Volcano* is no longer "who is innocent, who is guilty?" but "why do we, all of us, have to keep judging and being judged?" In *La Chute* Camus substituted for the Meursault of *L'Etranger* a hero with a different point of view. Lowry, in his published version, performs precisely the same kind of reorientation by "deserting" and "incriminating" his hero, denying Geoffrey's subjective vision the sanction of the objective narrator:

Meursault [like both the Consul *and* the Lowry who wrote the Mexican version]

> viewed evil as something outside himself, a *problem* that concerned the judged [the fascists] alone, whereas Clamence [like both the Lowry of the published version and his reader] knows that he, himself, is involved. Evil is the *mystery* of a pride which, as it condemns others, unwittingly condemns itself.... Reciprocity between the I and the Thou asserts itself in the very efforts I make to deny it: "The sentence which you pass against your fellow men," says Clamence, "is always flung back into your face where it effects quite a bit of damage."

The argument presented here may be generalized so as to apply to the whole world of the published novel, and not only to the culminating, extreme moral encounter. Each of the relationships and interactions that the reader observes, both in retrospect and in all their immediacy, *engage* him; and each one "ultimately invokes [an] exercise of discrimination and existential choice...."[8] In this way the reader brings himself up short against the intractable questions surrounding his own life: the uncertain relationship between freedom and morality, and the "absurd" imperative of having to judge one's fellow man under the pressure of time, while seriously alienated from him in a world where "community", in any meaningful sense, is non-existent.

NOTES

[1] Jean Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 218-19 (my emphasis).

[2] Richard Hauer Costa, in his article "*Pietà, Pelado,* and 'The Ratification of Death': The Ten-Year Evolvement of Malcolm Lowry's *Volcano,*" *JML,* 2, No. 1 (September 1971), 3-18, has noted the existence of two principal versions of the novel: the "Mexican version" completed in Mexico by 1938, and the "published version" completed in Canada.

[3] Sartre, p. 219.

[4] William V. Spanos, "Modern Literary Criticism and the Spatialization of Time: An Existential Critique," *JAAC,* 29, No. 1 (Fall 1970), 100.

[5] Sartre, p. 220.

[6] See Anthony R. Kilgallin's "Faust and *Under the Volcano,*" *Malcolm Lowry: The Man and his Work,* ed. George Woodcock (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1971), p. 26-37.

[7] "Camus's Stranger Retried," *PMLA,* 79 (December 1964), 519-33.

[8] Spanos, p. 100.

METAPHORS AND CONFUSIONS

David M. Monaghan

THE TITLE of a novel usually serves as a pointer to the author's main concern. However, this is not the case in Robertson Davies' *Fifth Business* because, if we follow the route signposted by the title, we find ourselves pursuing a secondary theme. The term "Fifth Business" refers to Dunstan Ramsay's vital, but peripheral, influence on the loves of Boy Staunton and Paul Dempster, men of importance in the public world from which he is excluded.[1] Thus, it suggests that this novel, like *A Mixture of Frailties*, is primarily about people whose lives are played out in public. As such we might expect it to be an elaboration of Ramsay's comment that "we cast [people in prominent positions] in roles, and it is only right to consider them as players." While it does deal with this issue, *Fifth Business* is mainly concerned with Ramsay and his private life drama rather than with Boy Staunton, Paul Dempster and the public worlds of business, politics and the theatre.

It is necessary to recognize the false emphasis of the title because it reflects what seems to be a real confusion in Robertson Davies' mind about the subject of *Fifth Business*. Besides being granted undue importance by the novel's title, the public theme is overstressed both in Dunstan Ramsay's introductory comments and in the concluding events. Ramsay's initial claim that he achieved the "full stature of a man" because he undertook the "vital though never glorious role of Fifth Business", and the prominence given to his part in Staunton's death which we are intended to take as the fulfillment of Liesl's claim that he can make a real life for himself by becoming Fifth Business, both assert his public role as the cause of his personal success. Robertson Davies thus asks us to look for a single complex theme in which the personal and public are inextricably bound together, rather than for two separate strands. However, the main action of the novel,

which comprises the story of Dunstan Ramsay's life up to and including his seduction by Liesl, does not support this contention. The public theme illuminates the private in that we learn much about the ideal of the authentic man from the limitations of people like Staunton and Dempster, who conceal their real selves behind public masks. But it is not a part of it in any direct sense since Ramsay becomes a mature adult because he eventually finds the courage to cast off the false self he has adopted throughout his adult life and not because he is involved in Paul Dempster's rise to fame as a magician or in the death of Boy Staunton, the Lieutenant-Governor *manqué*.

Clearly, what has gone wrong in *Fifth Business* is that Robertson Davies has, at times, misused the concept of Fifth Business. Its role in the novel is essentially a metaphorical one in that it crystallizes the complex of ideas which constitute the public theme. As such it can serve no useful function in relation to the main personal theme. However, it seems to have exercised such an influence on Davies' imagination that in the opening and closing sections of the novel he tries to make it the controlling metaphor rather than a subsidiary one. In order to understand what *Fifth Business* is actually about, as opposed to what Robertson Davies claims it is about, we must examine Ramsay's development in relation to its correct metaphorical core, the concept of "the boy". Only then can we see that the main theme properly reaches its climax with the seduction scene and that the death of Boy Staunton not only has no relevance to the main theme but also makes nonsense of what is established by the first climax.

The term "boy" is employed in three different senses which serve to define the three main stages in Dunstan Ramsay's development. It is first used in its literal sense to describe childhood, the period during which the individual on the one hand lives according to the standards of his family and immediate society and on the other begins to develop an independent self. Secondly, it defines the false adulthood which most of us achieve by choosing to shape ourselves according to the demands of a specific social code. Its most obvious use in this context is Staunton's adoption of the name Boy at the point in his life when he embarks on precisely this kind of self-formation. However, as Paul Dempster points out later, Boy's name symbolizes his desire to be loved and it is thus applicable to all those people, including Dunstan Ramsay, whose actions are shaped by a need to be accepted. Finally, the term boy describes the authentic man, that is, the man who casts off all social definitions and who achieves, in Father Blazon's words, "unity of the life of the flesh and of the life of the spirit". In order to discover this essential being the individual must yield up the egotistical aspects of the self to a

larger spiritual force and hence becomes a boy in the sense expressed, albeit sentimentally, by little W.V. " 'Our sense . . . is nothing to God's; and though big people have more sense than children the sense of all the big people in the world put together would be no sense to His. We are only little babies to Him.' " Ramsay is transformed into this kind of boy as a result of his encounter with Liesl.

Robertson Davies uses the term boy to epitomize two very different adult states because he believes that each of us constructs his adulthood out of one aspect of the dualistic authentic-inauthentic nature of the child. The inauthentic aspect of the child is that part which operates according to the demands made on it by family and society and the authentic is that part which compels it to express its essential spiritual and imaginative self, even if this involves contradicting its society's expectations. Thus, when Ramsay says that "a boy is a man in miniature" and that "a boy . . . is an imprisoned man striving to get out", he does not mean that the man is a product of the entire boy, but of a part of him.

The duality of the childhood experience is particularly strong in Dunstan Ramsay's case. Familial and communal influences play such a large part in the formation of his childhood self that, in his restrospective account of his early years, Ramsay pays considerable attention to defining his milieu. In Book I, Chapter III, he establishes the narrowly moralistic stance of the village and the "Scottish" qualities of common sense, prudence and concern for position which characterized the Ramsay family, before going on in the following chapters to demonstrate how fully these standards became his own. Ramsay's attitude towards the events surrounding the birth of Paul Dempster most clearly demonstrates the influence of environment on his character. Because of his Presbyterian background he feels an acute sense of guilt even though he played only a peripheral part in the snowball incident, and because of his society's view that sex is a "hog-wallow" this guilt is intensified by the vague sexual dimensions of the incident.

However, beginning with his interest in an insane member of the Athelstan family, a spiritual and imaginative impulse begins to draw Ramsay away from the conformity, order and rationality of Deptford society and towards the mysterious and irrational areas of human conduct. Eventually this aspect of Ramsay's personality finds consistent expression through his friendship with Mrs. Dempster.

Whenever Deptford society is made aware of Ramsay's authentic self it reacts with hostility, viewing it as the work of the Devil. This definition is established by the mad woman who shuns Ramsay because she suffers from the delusion that he is a "false friend", that is, the Devil. Amasa Dempster reacts in a similar way. When he discovers that Ramsay has been teaching Paul conjuring and

telling him stories of the Saints, he accuses him of being "the agent . . . by means of which the Evil One had trailed his black slime across a pure life."

The claims of the community and the self are finally brought into direct conflict when Mrs. Ramsay, having discovered his friendship with Mrs. Dempster, insists that Ramsay choose between them. The choice is essentially between clinging to the inauthentic aspect of the child, and being his mother's "own dear laddie", and committing himself to the authentic self which Mrs. Dempster has nurtured. Ramsay is too aware of his mother's faults to be willing to subjugate himself to her will. Moreover, having already been acknowledged "as a man", he does not wish to retreat into childhood. However, although he realizes that Mrs. Dempster "lived by a light that arose from within" and could lead him to full self-knowledge, he lacks the maturity to accept her as his guide. Thus, he avoids choosing either by joining the army.

Ramsay's lack of decision on this occasion has a crucial effect on his later life because it separates him from the spirit of Mrs. Dempster for some forty years. Having escaped his mother, Ramsay falls under the equally destructive influence of Diana Marfleet, who teaches him to cultivate the outer man at the expense of the inner. As we might expect from someone who is so committed to correct form that she "thinks it bad manners to be factual and serious", Diana offers Ramsay only the superficial kind of maturity involved in improving his word usage and his eating habits, and acquainting him with the "strange lands" of sexual knowledge and the musical show. The fact that Ramsay grants his sexual initiation the same importance as seeing *Chu-Chin-Chow* indicates the lack of any deep spiritual implications in his relationship with Diana.[2]

The nature of the damage which Diana does to Ramsay's personality is indicated by the name which he adopts to mark his new life-style. Just as St. Dunstan drove away the Devil by tweaking his nose with a pair of tongs, so "Dunstan" Ramsay, as a result of Diana's influence, rejects the Devil of his authentic self which had been so prominent in his childhood. The change which is thus wrought is pre-figured in Ramsay's two war-time nicknames. The first nickname, Deacon, implies a man committed to spiritual values and the second, Charley, a man who, like the entertainer Charley Chaplin, exists only as a public personality.

ESSENTIALLY, Ramsay emerges from his relationship with Diana as a boy in the sense epitomized by Boy Staunton. Hence, the adopted names Dunstan and Boy are synonymous. There are, of course, obvious differ-

ences between Ramsay and Boy Staunton — whereas Staunton adheres to the crudest materialistic values, Ramsay pursues intellectual goals. Moreover, Ramsay is always at least vaguely aware that there is something lacking in his chosen way of life. Nevertheless, they are similar in the crucial sense that each denies the inner, spiritual self. As Ramsay himself says in retrospect: "to him, the reality of life lay in external things, whereas for me the only reality was of the spirit — of the mind, as I then thought, not having understood yet what a cruel joker and mean master the intellect can be."

This common denial manifests itself most obviously in their attitudes to what they respectively assume is religious. Staunton's religious life revolves around the Anglican Church, but he demonstrates little understanding of its spiritual aspects. For him, membership of a Church is entirely a social matter and he joins the Anglican Church because it is "in some way more hightoned than the evangelical faiths, and thus [he is] improving [his] social standing." The Christ of Boy Staunton's faith is not the one who directed man to cultivate his inner self and to turn away from materialistic values, but is the one conjured up by the Reverend Leadbeater. This Christ is "a very distinguished person", "a designer and manufacturer", "a man of substance" and "an economist".

Ramsay's faith is the private one he developed during his childhood. However, although it evolved to satisfy the needs of the inner man, unlike Boy Staunton's religion, Ramsay nevertheless converts it into an expression of the outer man which, in his case, is the intellectual man. Rather than continuing to seek self-knowledge through the Saints, Ramsay increasingly looks upon them as subjects for scholarly research. His study of Wilgefortis, for example, involves him in seeking variants of the legend in which she is involved and even leads him to dabble in medical research on excessive facial hair, but it has little to do with the essential truth concealed behind the details of her life. Similarly, although Ramsay suffers materially in undertaking to care for Mrs. Dempster, the other icon of his private religion, he is inspired to do so by intellectual rather than religious motives: "Now I should be able to see what a saint was really like and perhaps make a study of one without all the apparatus of Rome."

By dedicating himself to externals Ramsay, like Boy Staunton, becomes excessively concerned with his public image and suffers from a consequent inability to enter into personal relationships. The public man is of so much more importance to Staunton than the private that, rather than try to develop his own personality, he dedicates himself to goals which will win him a worldly reputation. Thus, he pursues wealth and high social position and models himself on the Prince of

Wales. Since Staunton denies his own humanness, it is not surprising that he is unable to recognize the unique existence of others. Leola is the main victim of this trait because she is regarded as nothing more than an accessory to the image Staunton is trying to create for himself. When she fails in her role as wife of "one who had once hobnobbed with a Prince", she is simply rejected. Boy's attitude to sex further underlines his stunted approach to human relationships. For him, sex is divorced from love and is nothing more than a form of physical activity, analogous, in Ramsay's words, to "a workout".

Superficially, Ramsay's attitude to worldly reputation is the opposite of Staunton's since he eschews all conventional paths to public prestige. By choosing to remain a High School teacher he sacrifices any chance he might have of becoming wealthy or of improving his social position, and by engaging himself in the obscure field of hagiography he denies himself even a general intellectual reputation. Nevertheless, Ramsay is basically concerned with what others think of him and his unconventionality is, in many respects, as much a public pose as Boy Staunton's conventional businessman figure. Indeed, the person which Ramsay creates for himself is such a powerful social instrument that Boy Staunton, who is always alert to ways in which he can eke the full potentiality out of any public situation, invites him to his parties in order that he might serve as a counterpoint to the general tone of conventionality: "Sometimes I heard Boy speaking of me to the bankers and brokers as 'very able chap — speaks several languages fluently and writes for a lot of European publications — a bit of an eccentric of course, but an old friend'."

Although Ramsay mainly exploits his interest in the Saints as part of his pose of oddness, he also strives to win whatever academic reputation he can from it. Not content to pursue hagiography for its own sake, he brings himself to the attention of the Bollandists and repeatedly tries to impress them with the results of his research. Since Ramsay's pursuit of academic reputation is marked by a competitive spirit very similar to Boy Staunton's, it is appropriate that Father Blazon should define his attitude to the Saints as "spiritual athletics", a metaphor reminiscent of the workout image which defines Staunton's approach to sex.

Ramsay's failure to develop the inner man, "to forgive [himself] for being a human creature", as Father Blazon puts it, makes him insensitive to the needs of others. In general Ramsay does not use people in the blatant way Boy Staunton does, although he certainly uses Staunton himself as a source of income and amusement, but he is no more capable of entering into a genuine human relationship. Because of his intellectual bias, Ramsay chooses to be an observer, a position

which he feels frees him from all responsibilities to others. Thus, although he realizes that Staunton is destroying Leola by trying to mould her according to his own preconceptions, he refuses to involve himself: "I never intervened when Leola was having a rough time. . . . To be honest, I must also say that I did not want to shoulder the burdens of a peacemaker." Even when Leola makes a direct plea for help, Ramsay self-righteously rejects her on the grounds that he is "not to be a victim of her self-pity". This inability to comprehend the needs of others is epitomized by Ramsay's response to the news that Leola has attempted to commit suicide. Rather than sympathize with Leola's situation, Ramsay, for once very clearly revealing his concern with public reputation, expresses anger at the discomfort her tactless suicide note could have caused him: "Fool, Fool, Fool! Thinking only of herself and putting me in an intolerable position with such a note. If she had died, how would it have sounded at an inquest?"

Although Ramsay is scornful of Boy's attitude to sex, his own is no less inadequate since he usually withholds from sexual activity altogether in order to avoid any emotional entanglement. In the few instances where he has engaged in a sexual relationship he has successfully deprived the women with whom he was involved of any individuality by giving them allegorical names which reduce them to types: "There was Agnes Day, who yearned to take upon herself the sins of the whole world. . . . Then there was Gloria Mundy, the good-time girl. . . . And, of course, Libby Doe, who thought sex was the one great, true, and apostolic key and cure."

There are two reasons why Ramsay eventually manages to break with the false image which he has created for himself, while Staunton remains a boy, in the inauthentic sense, throughout his life. Firstly, although Ramsay misuses his Saints and Mrs. Dempster, he never entirely loses sight of their original function. As a result he frequently questions his way of life and has the potential for recognizing the "illumination" for which he seeks, should it appear. Boy Staunton, on the other hand, except for a fleeting moment of doubt, refuses to acknowledge that his life could have taken any other direction. Secondly, Ramsay is fortunate enough to meet Liesl, whose influence enables him to resurrect his almost submerged childhood self.

RAMSAY achieves self-knowledge in the single epiphanic moment of his seduction by Liesl. However, this climactic experience is the culmination of a more protracted process during which he has gradually been break-

ing loose from his accustomed life-style. Although Ramsay visits Mexico simply to carry out further research, he is so impressed by the simple piety of the worshippers at the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe that he begins to penetrate back to the genuine core of his interest in the Saints: "anti-clericalism and American bustle would soon free them of their belief in miracles and holy likenesses. But where, I ask myself, will mercy and divine compassion come from them." Ramsay's approach to experience alters further after he joins Paul Dempster's troupe because he enters metaphorically, as well as literally, into a world of magic. In contrast to his usual engagement in the analytical task of scholarly research, Ramsay undertakes to write a fictional autobiography of Magnus Eisengrim, in the composition of which he is "under no obligation to be historically correct or to weigh evidence", thus allowing primacy for once to his imaginative faculties. As a result, and without intending to do so, Ramsay begins to recapture the authentic self he last knew as a child: "Working on these illusions was delightful but destructive of my character. I was aware that I was recapturing the best of my childhood; my imagination had never known such glorious freedom."

The ground is thus made ready for the encounter with Liesl. This incident serves as a microcosm of Ramsay's entire development because it begins with him reverting completely to the role of social man. His attitude to Liesl's lesbian encounter with Faustina is conventional and moralistic and he berates her for deviating from all standards of "decency and honour". As Liesl points out, Ramsay is behaving "just like a little boy", and she sets herself the task of releasing the other, and authentic aspect of his childhood self, which she describes, again in keeping with the novel's dominant metaphorical patterns, as his "devil". Ramsay's response to Liesl's attempt to seduce him and hence prove he is "a human, like other people" is, as we might expect of a man who has withdrawn from human involvement for so many years, one of rejection. By pulling Liesl's nose, he reasserts that he is St. Dunstan and, as such, wants nothing to do with the Devil. However, this St. Dunstan self has been so weakened during the preceding weeks that when Liesl persists, Ramsay abandons his spectator position and yields to her. As a result of committing himself to another human being, Ramsay at last experiences "deep delight" and "an aftermath of healing tenderness!"

Ramsay, then, emerges from his experiences in Mexico as a boy in the sense that he now lives according to the dictates of his imaginative and creative self and is capable of engaging himself emotionally with others. This development completes the novel's main theme. However, as he concludes his use of the "boy" metaphor, so Davies turns his attention again to Fifth Business. As part of her

advice to Ramsay, Liesl offers the comment that he is Fifth Business. Her intention is simply further to convince Ramsay of the importance of his life by showing him that even those who live on the perimeter of great events have a role to play, and she makes no attempt to extend his function as Fifth Business beyond his involvement in Paul and Mrs. Dempster's lives. For Liesl, the essential Ramsay is still to be found in the authentic boy that she has nurtured into life. However, in the novel's final section Robertson Davies makes much more out of Ramsay's role as Fifth Business — so much so that he finally claims it as being the source of his maturity. This claim is, in itself, confusing enough because it dismisses most of what has gone before, but, even more puzzling is the fact that the values to which Ramsay adheres as Fifth Business contradict those to which he aspired as the authentic boy. By playing Fifth Business in the events which culminate in Staunton's death Ramsay reverts to his earlier position as a spectator and a moralizer. The encounter between Boy Staunton and Paul Dempster fascinates Ramsay in the voyeuristic way that Boy's marriage to Leola did: "I wanted to see what would happen, and my appetite was given the special zest of knowing who Eisengrim really was, which Boy did not, and perhaps would never learn." And it is nothing more dignified than a desire to see how the objects of his attention will react and a moralistic sense that Staunton should not go unpunished that inspires Ramsay, in the name of Fifth Business, to reveal Boy's involvement in Paul's birth: "Either I spoke now or I kept silence forever. Dunstan Ramsay counselled against revelation, but Fifth Business would not hear." Ramsay tries rather belatedly to conceal his unworthy motives by posing as Staunton's potential saviour and pleading that he admit to his involvement in the snowball incident in order that he might at last learn the truth about himself and become a human being. However, the tone he adopts in dealing with Staunton is too hostile and punitive for us to believe that he is primarily concerned with his salvation. By finally rebuffing Staunton with the cruel comment that he is King Candaules, Ramsay remains a detached meddler who subsequently is responsible for his former friend's death at the hands of the enraged Paul.

Since *Fifth Business* is Robertson Davies' most ambitious novel, and in its central sections, his most successful, it is regrettable that he should have let the metaphor of Fifth Business get out of hand. As it is, the novel makes complete sense only if we focus on the development of the boy concept and ignore much of what is claimed by the opening and closing sections.

NOTES

[1] The term also has secondary implications in that Robertson Davies gives some attention to the idea that, not only is Ramsay fifth business in the lives of others, but that they, in turn, are fifth business in his life. I have chosen not to deal with this implication of fifth business because, although the inversion of the main metaphor is neat, it serves finally only to express what we would normally assume in dealing with anyone, either in fiction or in real life — namely, that the individual's life is shaped by everyone with whom he comes into contact.

[2] Robertson Davies emphasizes the limitations of these experiences by contrasting them with Ramsay's later superficially similar but essentially different involvement in the magic show and seduction by Liesl. Whereas the earlier theatrical and sexual experience had only the value of novelty the later served to liberate Ramsay imaginatively and emotionally.

WAR-TIME MEMORIES

Christopher Levenson

War-time memories: unlighted trains
slowly crowding the railheads, sidings
alive with secret movement, the skies
a mystery, somewhere
the flare of a match, a voice
extinguished
the air-raid warden's face
as he emerged from the shelter
after the all-clear,
every action galvanic,
camouflaged in drama,
whole lives a prey to darkness.
I, only eight years old
at the barber's, gazing in *Picture Post*
at scenes from a distant theatre,
a desert draped in canvas
and tanks' twisted carcases,
relished the hushed tones, the stage whispers,
this shared past that divides like darkness
and hollows my blood.

THE REAL COURSE OF LIFE

Keith Garebian

THE NOVELS of John Buell are not mere exercises in the thriller genre. They are undoubtedly "entertainments" in the general sense in which Graham Greene used that word, yet they have a subtle approach to the course of life brought under dramatic examination. They demonstrate the symbiotic relationships between the real and the unreal, good and evil, innocence and guilt, deception and self-knowledge. Buell traces quests for soul-satisfaction made by his main characters past a line of no-return, and he is less interested in solving a crime than he is in exploring the mystery of an inexorably decaying world.

It is my intention to explore the nature of reality and the course of life viewed by Buell. I believe Buell's vision is metaphysical rather than merely "escapist", much as is the case with Graham Greene's vision, though Buell's stories and characters are radically different from Greene's. Buell is a writer with a style (although sometimes reduced in scope to make mass acceptance possible) that tries to do justice to the visible world. There is a depth in Buell which is sounded only as we become aware of the central direction in his stories. We discover in the author's symbolism, plot, and characterization a concern for the metaphysical which is no less intriguing than a concern for superficial experience. Of course, I do not use "superficial" in a disparaging sense for Buell shows how various experiences can engage the writer's full powers of sharp observation, objectification, and immediacy. However, my intention is to sound Buell's depth and for this purpose I eschew the mechanics of the thriller genre in order to concentrate on the author's vision of reality.

The central experience in Buell is what is called in *The Pyx* (1959) "the real course of life", where the vulnerability and self-knowledge of the victim are operative. Crime is the event that creates criminal and victim, for it intersects guilt and innocence, good and evil, but it is not an isolated phenomenon or the focal experience. The criminal event is a point from which Buell may probe — forward (as in *Four Days* or *The Shrewsdale Exit*) or backward (as in *The Pyx*) — into the course of life which produced it.

Good and evil — with all their attendant complications — grow within "the real course of life", and Buell's interest lies in observing the tensions between good and evil within the controls of a milieu. Buell's vision is informed with a sense that the mutable decay of milieux impinges upon the inner world of man, thereby creating confusion and emphasizing human limitations. When we confront the demonic world of Keerson (*The Pyx*), the criminal environment of Milt (*Four Days*), or the brute world of the motorcycle "toughs" (*The Shrewsdale Exit*) our worst suspicions of human vulnerability are tested. We expect human failure and we meet it when the outer world of reality is counterpointed by the inner world of man.

Buell observes the effects of human dream and ambition in the course of life which often overpowers the individual. Milieu interacts with character in such a subtle but ineluctable way that the danger of the "real course of life" is emphasized and magnified beside the weakness of the human soul.

Buell's mythic pattern is not oriented towards any romantic or sentimental resolution of the conflicts between dream and actuality, milieu and character. Rather, it is a pattern deeply tinged by a realism which, while not always neutral, does maintain a sharp focus on the growth of vulnerability and self-knowledge within the "real course of life". Milieu and character interact to produce mysterious destructiveness which affects the protagonist, but the conclusion of the *mythos* (story) is not achieved through a *de rigueur* resolution of iniquity. We are made to follow the protagonist's involvement with reality until such time as a line of no-return has been crossed. What survives at the end of the pattern is the "real course of life", that is, a measure of self-knowledge for the protagonist trapped in a decaying world.

From the very start, critics have perversely ignored the profound aspects in Buell's novels. *The Pyx* was received as a suspense thriller much in the tradition of an Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, or Mickey Spillane story. It was bruited that *Four Days* (1962) was a thriller to leave us gasping, and *The Shrewsdale Exit* (1972) was praised for telling a powerful, "shocking" story that was engrossing in its depiction of "impossible odds". But there is more to Buell's work than sensational excursions into evil ritualism and crime. What we should not lose sight of is "the real course of life" — something that is vividly outlined in *The Pyx*, chronicled in *Four Days*, and vindicated with strong feeling in *The Shrewsdale Exit.*

The Pyx introduces Buell's concern with the power and danger of reality by depicting dual worlds in insidious conflict. Elizabeth Lucy's world of dream is in

jarring collision with the world of action, and when we encounter the Black Mass symbolism we note the discord between virtue and vice in a scandalous, underground context. *The Pyx*, of course, thrives on its dualities: Elizabeth Lucy flirts with Catholicism and spiritual puritanism as she wanders deeper into Keerson's diabolism; the "nothingness" of her soul and the "solidly real" world outside her are metaphysical poles which are objectified and dramatized rather than abstracted and intellectualized.

The Pyx, it is true, does not immediately suggest its own richness. It is not a successful book, for the Black Mass ritualism, so central to the meaning and *dénouement* of the story, is too tenuous. Nevertheless, the major interest for me is not the diabolism nor the crime-solving by Detective Henderson; it is the interplay between the two worlds of Elizabeth Lucy as they create "the real course of life". As in any mystery thriller there is a conflict between the outer and the inner in human experience, but here Buell charges this conflict with a grim, hallucinatory quality that grips us through the eerie blend of Elizabeth's outer and inner worlds.

The outer world of *The Pyx* is the ambience of Montreal (strongly felt in the film but not as vividly in the book) with its *mélange* of the spiritual and the material, virtue and vice. This mixture serves as catalyst for the collision between Elizabeth Lucy's flirtation with Catholicism and her eventual involvement with Keerson's Black Mass and his ring of vice. It is a world of sensationalism in both the sacred and the profane, for it intersects underground religion and scandalous crime.

From the very first page of the novel there is an attempt to separate the edges of the actual and the fictional. Jack Trudel, the cab-driver who witnesses Elizabeth's body hurtling from an apartment to the street below, is aware of a distance between dreams (of money and sex) and acts (for happiness in the massive city). But "the real course of life" blurs the distinction between dream and actuality. After witnessing Elizabeth's death he is confused and disturbed:

> Real violence was too much for him; in the cheap stories, he could always dream of sex; but the actual thing ... Already he was beginning to dismiss it as outside the real course of life.

By alternating between Past and Present in his narrative, Buell is able to create the blurring (in Elizabeth's life) of the outer world of act and the inner world of dream, nightmare, or illusion. Elizabeth, it is shown, has "no mental picture of herself as an outwardly visible person"; she has only an inner vision of aliena-

tion and chaos. Reality appears to be unalterable because she feels too far away from all around her and merely a medium for sensation. She is often described in the act of waiting where she is shown to be in a type of suspension. Her drug addiction (fed by insidious Meg Latimer) does not help and Elizabeth is frequently in a mental daze.

Elizabeth is suspended in Time, between an unwanted past and a fey present. She loses her right to choose and the trap leaves her feeling empty and damned.

One of the paradoxes in *The Pyx* is the anguished despair of Elizabeth as she experiences the "huge nothingness of evil confronting her" in the massive reality outside. In this paradox the apparently irreconcilable are the poles of nothingness and the solidly real. The two poles form a rack for Elizabeth and we watch her (in the words of Jimmy Rande, her friend with his own psychic disorder) grow increasingly taut with the strain. Elizabeth finds it impossible to change or become something else. There is a *taedium vitae*, an addiction to the hazing energy of heroin, and a hallucinatory submission to the rites of Keerson — all consequences of her unrealized "screamingly desired wish" to find the shadows of peace and repose.

There is a sense of Elizabeth's impotence in the course of events and this weakness is compounded by the absence of any reality in the heart of things to which she can attach herself and give substance and strength to her existence. She flirts with Catholicism, but, unwilling to submit to the sacrament of penance, she is without benediction. She is comforted by Jimmy Rande but drifts away from him. She becomes involved with Keerson and cannot elude his agents. Elizabeth perceives that reality is dangerous when it exists as something so largely outside the power of the human soul, but she can do nothing to escape or resist the reality.

THE IMPLICATION that reality is more potent than danger itself is also evident in Buell's second novel, *Four Days* (1962), which is ostensibly a chronicle of a young boy's fatal idealization of his elder brother who is involved in crime. Here the boy perverts reality (just as Elizabeth Lucy perverts religion with the pyx) by making Milt, his brother, the justification for his life. Here, too, the victim is the one who cannot "assess the situation or read the signs." He can only react, like Elizabeth Lucy, and await the ambush of life.

Reality is shaded more deftly in *Four Days* than it is in *The Pyx*, mainly because Buell does not have to gamble with the nuances of the Black Mass. Evil

still exists as part of the massively real but this time the hugeness of evil is not so much in the reality outside the victim as it is in the victim's ideal itself. It is Milt who is evil, and the young boy's reverence for Milt becomes, in effect, a reverence for evil.

The prime process in Buell's story is the boy's tumble into a mysterious destructiveness. By aligning himself with Milt, the boy distorts the nature of reality. He assigns to Milt's criminal scheme an importance that is greater than the external world around him. The plan is not viewed as part of reality, but reality instead is seen as part of the plan:

> Reality was now this plan; he didn't question its source or judge it or choose; it was there, and it offered a continued existence with Milt, an alternative to nothingness, like finding a light switch in the dark. But the house around the switch eluded his insight.

The boy therefore has only a partial security — a security, moreover, that is an illusion because the final reality is destructive.

Deception for the boy, however, is part of reality. Just being alive makes him feel that he is getting away with something. He is convinced that people have to be fooled and his sense of disguise becomes acute. Believing that evil will make him visible, he goes to church to blend with the congregation where "no one would see him unless he did things wrong." He avoids places in his neighbourhood where people might know him and he tries to ensure that others will not touch his inner reality.

However, his attempts at disguise are trying and fraught with danger:

> he *had* to be a boy on a bike, and that made him overaware of everything — he couldn't stop to watch things, he couldn't even look at them in passing. All of existence was shrivelled into this one action, and the sunlit city around him had to become an enemy.

Exposure to sunlight and people renders him vulnerable:

> The cars began to irritate him; nobody was looking at him, but he felt stared at: he was himself now, not acting, not protected inwardly by role-playing, and not realizing that his appearance was still in character; the self he felt was weak and vulnerable, exposed like a film in the sun, making him dread even a casual question by a stranger, and his fear made him create questions: 'Hot day, hey kid? Where are you going? Run a message for me, kid? Pull that bike over so I can pass. Tell your goddam brother — Don't worry, kid, keep moving, we got 'em fooled' — Milt's voice was back, giving purpose to his actions — 'Just before you get here you take off part of the uniform, cap, leggings, the jacket and put that in your bag — you don't wait for me — don't wait for me — don't wait.'

Concomitant with the senses of disguise and vulnerability is a feeling of suspension in time and space. Time does not exist for the boy except as a tightness or pressure that seems to "make things exist only within his head, free of the physical and devoid of duration, timeless, like pain." He feels a helplessness — a "sensation of being pulled away despite himself, of going helplessly where he didn't want to, and being distressed at not knowing the place he resented so much."

Paradoxically, such helpless suspension comforts him for it boosts his need for anonymity. "Nowhere" is better than "somewhere" because the lack of definition makes it an environment that does not oppress consciousness and where he can be safe in its anonymous unreality.

Tension is developed by the boy's attempts to resist the power of reality. The factual world seems to leap at him and he is disturbed by the moving scenery, the car, and even himself. He tries to obliterate or dim his own visibility. In his room he wonders if he should put on the light when the street outside is lit and the sky is still bright. He decides against it because the outside world will look bigger this way and draw itself into the room. Then there will be light everywhere and this will make reality too strong for him. The boy works on the assumption that vision or voyeurism is a reflexive action: to see implies to be seen. "If you see the trees, they can see you now." The relentless clarity pushes him — after Milt's violent death — along a beach until he is sure he cannot be seen.

The boy discovers that reality cannot be annihilated either through his false image of Milt or through his search for darkness and cover. His compulsion to be invisible converts, in the final moments of his drama, into a hallucinatory dream. He tries to swim away from the law which is trailing him for his connection with the criminal Milt, but his nervousness, exhaustion, and despair propel him into a hysterical dream that ends with his drowning.

THE TENSION of reality (so inimical to Elizabeth Lucy in *The Pyx* and the boy in *Four Days*) acquires a nightmarish horror in *The Shrewsdale Exit*, Buell's latest exploration of the victim theme. Joe Grant's story passes through three main phases: the horrifying murder of his wife and young daughter by three motorcycle thugs; Grant's vengeful attack on the murderers, his imprisonment, and escape into the isolated expanses of an interior farmland; and his compromise with the law and the locked-in system of society. Of the three phases, the first is probably the most exciting, as Buell captures perfectly the vulgar rhetoric of the psychotic murderers and the acute grief of Grant. The second

phase is more contrived although it is justifiable in terms of Buell's signal for retribution. The third phase, while impressive in its subdued tension and pastoral quality, does leave us with a feeling of disappointment because it never reaches a climactic *dénouement* anticipated in the earlier phases. However, the especial virtue of the novel is its delineation of the tension of reality — a tension that is heightened by Grant's line of no-return.

The major forces of tension spring out of the reality of murder: they are derived from the brutal assault on the Grant family, from Joe's anguished memory of the crimes, and from the buffeting of past and present. The tension charges the antithesis of the visible and invisible aspects of reality — just as it does in *Four Days*. Joe Grant, like the boy in Buell's second novel, feels insecure in light and threatened by his lighted room:

> With lights on, he hadn't been able to see outside and could be seen inside. It made him feel watched, hunted in some way, liable to detection. In the dark, all was reversed and he felt more at ease. He'd come a long way from the secure casual life of less than a week ago. Porch lights, hung in lanterns under the motel canopy, enabled him to make out everything in the room. He was still dressed, in the cotton pants and sport shirt he'd brought to be less noticeable. He felt too vulnerable undressed, too unready for a vaguely hostile universe. It was paranoid. He was aware of it, he just couldn't shake it off.
>
> The dim room made memory vivid. The toughs. The image of Sue and Patty in their hands. It was too much. Mercifully he was interrupted.

Joe wonders if he has been observed by anyone. When he drives he is coiled and tense, attempting to remain furtive. As much the hunted as he is the hunter, he watches his mirrors and tries to muffle or conceal his intrigue. Hence the low intensity of sound and light in those portions of the plot which concern Grant's intrigue.

For Grant, vision is linked to survival because to observe and not to be seen increase his chances of tracking his prey while eluding the law simultaneously. While reading a book on firearms, he happens upon the sentence: "The human organism cannot hold sights absolutely steady on the target." Here the physics of visual aim are a proem to the metaphor of hunter and target. This creates a pattern opposite to that in either *The Pyx* or *Four Days* because Grant does not attempt to escape the solid world outside him. Of his own choosing, he crosses a line of no-return and we do not derive a sense of dreamlike suspension on his part:

> He cleaned the pistol, put a frozen dinner in the oven, and drank the surviving

> can of beer as he waited for the food to cook. The line that was being crossed tugged at his attention. He had no myths to give glory to the crossing, only the knowledge of his wife and daughter, his own made-empty life. He should have been here last summer or even earlier, learning the cold skills that now disturbed him. Would it have been different? The pistol had nothing to say.

Knowledge of purpose and direction comes to him when he hears his own echoes, although the solid world does not necessarily answer his questions. Still, Grant is fully conscious and far removed from either Elizabeth Lucy's drugged suspension or the young boy's neurotic and immature self-victimization. Real sound, verified by his quick senses, awakes him out of dream (whenever he yields to memory or fantasy) into knowledge of the visible, tangible world outside him.

Experience becomes a puzzling and haunting fact in Buell's stories because it undergoes change in the retelling by witnesses. As Grant repeats his story about the crimes against his family, the event grows less and less actual and becomes something different from what had happened. With this unsettling phenomenon there appears a vacuum in the soul of the protagonist and Grant feels the world around him growing emptier.

What complicate the fate of Joe Grant — and this is shown to be the crux of the victim theme in Buell — are the protagonist's responses to evil. The crux is reached at that point when the protagonist realizes that a line of no-return has to be crossed. Joe Grant acknowledges as much when he notes that the past is the past while the present demands a firm commitment to action. In *The Pyx*, Elizabeth Lucy learns from Meg Latimer that she must commit herself totally to Keerson:

> [Elizabeth] "Look, I'm here. I've come this far."
> [Meg] "It's not far enough."
> "All right, what is far enough?"
> "When you can't turn back. That's what far enough is."

Sometimes the line of no-return is reached prematurely as in *Four Days*, for example, where we are given every indication that the boy's desire to align his fate with his elder brother's has been a lifelong obsession which generates a fatal conflict with the law.

The Shrewsdale Exit crystallizes the complicated nature and fate of Buell's protagonists. Joe Grant faces imposing odds in a locked-in system and suffers much more than he deserves to, yet retribution is an elusive event. What we find in this story (which ultimately confirms the quality of Buell's realism) is an observation of a man "more sinned against than sinning" denied a vengeance

he has persistently sought. Grant discovers the overwhelming power of the societal system when he is in the penitentiary. Prison is a contrived expression of law — a force that oppresses as it restrains. Grant observes the nefarious effects of a legal system that can create a persecution complex for some people (Willy Dreye for example), and when he escapes from it he takes note of the larger, "whole system".

Elizabeth Lucy and the young boy are no less victimized by the worlds they inhabit or pass through. Their respective environments are postlapsarian in their corruption and seductive evil. Elizabeth Lucy is immersed in a drug and prostitution ring before she even meets Keerson and when she dies the violence of her end obtains silence and evasion from those who exploited her vulnerability. Her world, like the young boy's, is a massive place (full of massive pleasures and sensations) that forgets its victims unconscionably. Were it not for the likes of Detective Henderson in *The Pyx* and the priest in *Four Days* Buell's worlds would be unjust and as hostile as the vaguely threatening ones in Green's fiction. As it is, very few of Buell's characters expend any grief for Elizabeth Lucy and the young boy. Their world is dim and plastic, dominated by dark bars, empty rooms, and indifference. It takes a priest to pray for forgiveness but his prayer is as pitiable as it is pitying, for it is a helpless acknowledgement of the mystery of suffering and evil:

> The priest whispered a formal prayer for the dead, "requiem aeternam dona ei — " but his mind seemed to chatter its own colloquy: he has paid for his love, Lord, have mercy on him. You know the worst about him, and that's a circumstance for forgiveness, it was that way when You were on earth.

Buell's characters are not romantic heroes or heroines but acquire a flawed heroism almost by default. Buell reaches beyond the sentimental superficies of romantic heroes to the inescapable paradoxes of impure heroism. Of course, there are no rigid categories in Buell's fictional worlds because reality is much too complex and ambivalent for neat divisions. The protagonists do not consciously seek after heroism although the young boy in *Four Days* is the closest thing to an exception. They quest after peace and soul-satisfaction rather than for power in a material sense. Elizabeth Lucy is too weak to physically survive Keerson's attrition but spiritually she becomes one of the good finally resisting the forces of anti-Christ. Joe Grant's self-knowledge and renunciation of revenge purify his soul and make him a person whom suffering and evil have touched without destroying. His heroism is purified by his decision to abandon revenge and it is denoted in

terms of a victory. Only the young boy in *Four Days* consciously seeks a connection with the heroic, but he is too immature and neurotic to be considered the same way as Grant. He yearns to be attached to Milt and converts his desperate solitariness and flight into an untenable posture of romantic heroism. He is, of course, too weak to defeat the law but there is a special pathos about his solitariness, for the boy's anguished loneliness is a sign of love — an undying, unyielding love for his brother — and in this way he vindicates the potential of the human soul to magnify itself in a world made all too solid and gross by materialism.

As IN THE FICTION of Graham Greene, Buell's novels provide a suggestion of "grace" in a decaying world. Buell is fascinated by the idea of a "fall" to the degree of identifying the workings of "grace" as a counterbalance to human weakness and corruption. True, there is no leap to God, no tortuous discovery of faith in the Greene *cachet*. However, salvation is sought — not in religious terms but in a metaphysical sense of harmony. Even as some of the protagonists tumble into destruction in a hostile universe they receive some form of benediction. Occasionally they deliberately seek the blessing but frequently blessing comes to them unsought. Elizabeth Lucy, who does not ever submit to orthodox Church rites, eats the sacred host rather than desecrate it according to Keerson's sacrilegious orders and in so doing she expresses her fundamental goodness. She establishes herself on the side of God and becomes stronger than chaos because she believes in sacredness. As the dying Keerson proclaims, Elizabeth is one of the good — as Henderson is one of the righteous. But benediction or "grace" need not be in religion itself. For Joe Grant there is not even a flirtation with religion. At the funeral of his wife and daughter the only fact brought home to him is the experience of real presences — other than God's. Grant's "grace" is the memory of Sue and Patty for they are "a sort of benediction." Of course, another "grace" is Grant's choice of justice and the renunciation of violent revenge at the end of his story.

The religious nuances in Buell share affinities with those in Greene and the strongest example of this occurs in *Four Days* where the young boy's spiritual fate is left an open, throbbing question — slightly reminiscent of the ambiguous soul-consequences of Pinky and Rose in *Brighton Rock*. Of course, the boy in *Four Days* hardly possesses Pinky's cold, cruel, criminal nature but he does opt for Milt and makes of his evil brother an unrealistic idol of strength. Where Pinky

lapses from his boyhood faith and weeps silently in a movie-house for his lost innocence, the boy in Buell's book uses religion as a "perfect front" for his involvement with Milt. Religion is debased to the level of automatic responses and unexamined prayers in Latin. The secret seal of Confession is used as a protection against the law but the boy's love for Milt is indeed an expression of God's own charity and when the priest prays that God might forgive the boy we might well think of the suggestion in *Brighton Rock* that Pinky, who admits his own damnation, could still inherit the strange mercy of God.

However, Buell, unlike Greene, does not concern himself with a context for eschatology. God's wishes and actions are irrelevant because it is people who choose for themselves. Perhaps, we could argue that the characters subconsciously seek God but even if this were demonstrable it would remain outside the realm of theology because it is an issue for psychologists. When drama begets its own sense of the spiritual in Buell it is only in the manner of a character seeking something larger and stronger than the human soul. It is described as a "shadow" of peace and repose in *The Pyx*, or a distant light of peace in *Four Days*. But it remains vague and outside the soul. Only Joe Grant finds an approximation of it and then it emerges as something non-religious: a clarity of self-knowledge acquired after remorse and revenge have been purged.

Buell's novels tempt us into anticipating a climactic retribution which never develops, and while this may create an anti-climax (as in *The Shrewsdale Exit*), the strategy does testify to a vision charged with pathos, sincerity, and truth. Joe Grant, after all his suffering and yearning for revenge, finds the truth about himself and his world. This is the only novel where Buell works towards a synthesis for his protagonist. Grant is given a solution which is trite in juxtaposition to his intense, personal agonies and because his is a story about the feeling of agony it loses some of its impact when that feeling becomes explanatory, discursive, or didactic. Nevertheless, it is a story that admits the truth about man's locked-in system and the compromises demanded for survival. So it retains a pathos for Grant while being sincere and truthful in its anti-climax. We are returned to the milieu which produces both good and evil in the solidly real course of life. We realize at the end that the humane attitude of the author is checked by the grim nature of reality. It is the milieu that survives — however much at the expense of the victims — and this confirms the inexorable reality of the course of life under dramatic observation.

review articles

EXTRAORDINARY GIRLS AND WOMEN

Audrey Thomas

ALICE MUNRO. *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You.* McGraw-Hill Ryerson. $7.95.

"MRS. PEEBLES SAID she couldn't make pie crust, the most amazing thing I ever heard a woman admit. I could, of course, and I could make light biscuits and a white cake and a dark cake, but they didn't want it, she said they watched their figures." So reflects the narrator of the story, "How I met my Husband". Reading and re-reading these stories I became aware of how often Alice Munro *isolates* her heroines (and with one notable exception the central characters in this book are all women) in some fashion so that their world-view is in conflict with, or at least juxtaposed upon, another. Edie, in "How I met my Husband", is isolated not only by her youth and inexperience:

> ("Listen to me. Listen. I'm wondering if you know what being intimate means. Now tell me. What did you think it means?" "Kissing," I howled.)

but by the fact that she is a genuine "farm girl" whose family actually works the farm. Her employers are a doctor and his wife, well-off, with inside running water and a constant supply of ice cubes. Mrs. Peebles has only two children and lies down in the afternoons. Edie, who is "new come from washing dishes in a dishpan with a rag-plugged hole on an oilcloth-covered table by the light of a coal-oil lamp," is fascinated by this new world and the newness of her situation enables her to observe and comment on the people around her with the curiosity and amazement of a tourist in a strange land. This device is used again and again — brilliantly and with variations — in these stories. One woman ("The Spanish Lady") is on a train westbound out of Calgary, one is in another city, a strange city, searching for some vital information about her dead ex-lover ("Tell Me Yes or No"). In "Winter Wind" a snowstorm isolates a young girl in the house of her grandmother and great aunt. When she arrives Aunt Madge is ironing — "they ironed everything, down to underwear and potholders" — and the grandmother

is "making a lovely carrot pudding for supper." "Lovely smells," the girl says, and then, "Compare this to the scene at home":

> The only warm room there was the kitchen. We had a wood stove. My brother brought in wood and left tracks of dirty snow on the linoleum; I swore at him. Dirt and chaos threatened all the time. My mother often had to lie down on the couch and tell her grievances. I argued with her whenever possible, and she said my heart would be broken when I had children of my own. We were selling eggs at this time, and everywhere there were baskets of eggs with bits of straw and feathers and hen-dirt stuck to them, waiting to be cleaned.

Order contrasted with chaos. It is also typical of a Munro heroine that the girl wants to go home early, return to the chaos because "comfort palls" and she has "more scope" for self-development (as well as role-playing) back in the disorder of her mother's house.

Munro heroines are true adventurers. Edie walks over to see the pilot; later she bakes him a crumb cake; the woman in "Tell Me Yes ..." decides to travel to the dead lover's town, and thus suffers a betrayal she would never have known about if she'd been able to leave well enough alone. She is given a brown paper bag by the dead man's wife:

> They are letters, not in their envelopes. This is what I knew I would find, I knew I would find my letters ... But then I notice the writing is not mine. I start to read. These letters are not mine, they were not written by me. I skip through every one of them in a panic and read the signature. *Patricia. Pat. P.*

These woman and girls can never leave well enough alone. They won't even settle down properly into comfortable old age. Dorothy, in "Marrakesh", remembers how as a child she had hated change "and clung to old things, old messy, rotten, picturesque things." In her seventh decade she finds this clinging to the past is gone and in its place (here she is unlike her companion and contemporary Viola) is "a strong curiosity". "There was in everything something to be discovered." For her there can be no "peaceful letting-go". And so, after she witnesses the violent coupling of her restless granddaughter with the man next door, she spends a few anxious minutes in terror and shock, afraid she might have a stroke — "here, in her nightclothes, and not even on her own property," she reflects:

> What if Viola had seen any of that? More than she could stand. Strength is necessary, as well as something like gratitude, if you are going to turn into a lady peeping Tom as the end of your life.

It's not that Munro heroines are unafraid to take risks — they are afraid, most of them have "soft centres" as the old chocolate ads used to say — but rather that they are compelled to take them. Something in their nature drives them to it. And so they are seeing things they shouldn't: the rat poison in the spice cupboard in "Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You", the animal-like sex of the young couple in the basement in "Walking on Water" (I include old Mr. Lougheed as a Munro "heroine" here — he would understand and not be displeased I think), the scene mentioned above in "Marrakesh", and so on. Or making connections better left unmade:

> "Florence! Where are Jimmy and Duval?" Robina with a swing of her one full arm caught me across the face, across the mouth ... ("Executioners".)

Even when ill with a terminal disease (the girl's mother in "Winter Wind") they lead lives of noisy desperation and paint, with hands that won't still their

awful trembling, the kitchen cupboards yellow. They are fierce, passionate, vulnerable *outsiders,* and their keen intelligence makes them realize that the best they can do is to seem to be like other people. As the narrator tells us in "Executioners":

> I believed that with luck and good management I could turn out to *seem* like anybody else.

And adds, "And this is in fact what I have done."

So, in the end, Munro records the lives of extraordinary girls and women, the misfits of any time and generation. (I should think this is one of the reasons for her extraordinary appeal to both men and women.) There is happiness in the book — or brief moments of it ("Tell Me Yes or No", "The Found Boat", "Material", "How I met my Husband"), but there is also a great deal of pain, both physical (mothers with cataracts or Parkinson's Disease, dead or alcoholic fathers, secondary characters with missing limbs) and of the heart. Yet one is left with an impression of laughter, of the comic necessity for, as well as vanity of, human wishes. Order is what we think we long for; chaos is what we choose. Or should. Munro seems to be saying we should. Who can settle for ironed sheets and carrot pudding, for "lovely smells", a safe marriage or a limited world-view when it is all out there waiting? I'll end with the voice of the narrator in "Tell Me Yes or No".

> We made a turn on to a freeway north of the city. As we came off the access road we faced west. The streaks of sky between the clouds were a fiery pink. The lights of the cars seemed to stream together, mile after mile. It was all like the kind of vision of the world — a fluid, peaceful vision, utterly reassuring — that I used to get when I was drunk. It said to me, "Why not?" It used me to have faith, to float upon the present, which might stretch out for ever.

HEART OF A STRANGER

R. T. Robertson

CLARA THOMAS, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence.* McClelland and Stewart. $10.00.

"THE MANAWAKA WORLD" was a phrase inevitable in talking about Margaret Laurence's work even before *The Diviners* appeared last year. But Clara Thomas's book begins with a Yoruba symbol and quotations about African literature (one from *Long Drums and Cannons*) as epigraphs. *This* is Manawaka, Manitoba? Yet she is right: the Manawaka world begins in Somaliland, just as Perry Miller, "disconsolate on the edge of a jungle of central Africa," found thrust upon him the mission of understanding the New England Puritans that resulted in his scholarly studies, among them that notable collection *Errand into the Wilderness.*

But we do not yet know the true dimensions of that world, or how Margaret Laurence composed it on her return from the wilderness. And that is why Clara Thomas's second book on Margaret Laurence will not be her last. The growth of the Laurence corpus since *Margaret Laurence* was published in 1969, especially the apparent completion of the

Manawaka cycle in *The Diviners*, has allowed a corresponding development of the understanding the scholar demonstrated in her first study. That greater understanding, although carefully articulated in the structure and demonstrated in the commentary of *The Manawaka World*, contains once again the promise of an even more complete presentation of the complex vision of this prime Canadian novelist. Or Afro-Canadian? Or Commonwealth?

The earlier study recognized the crux in calling Margaret Laurence a Canadian writer: in 1967 she had published more African than Canadian books, including her first four, all set in Africa and composing the first decade of her writing life. And while the African books were a mixed batch — translations of poetry, a travel book, a novel, and a collection of short stories — the two Canadian novels were firmly centred on Manawaka, Manitoba. The end of the second decade of publishing evens the balance only to make the discrepancy more obvious. We now have a conspectus of the ladies of Manawaka from young Vanessa McLeod and the two Cameron sisters to Mother Morag and Old Mother Shipley. The Africana is now even more mixed by adding a study of West African writers. Africa would seem to encourage the diversity of the writer's talents, Canada to concentrate them on Manawaka. And because it is easier to discuss the cycle than the mixed batch many critics prefer to ignore the African books. Yet one of them, *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, Margaret Laurence calls "the most difficult thing I ever wrote." In this she has gone further than any other Canadianist. It is part of Clara Thomas's achievement to tackle this crux and attempt to show how important that element is to the Manawaka world.

W. H. New found the theme of *The Stone Angel* in *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, "the strange glimpse of the self". For Clara Thomas that book, our only overt autobiography of Laurence, "provides a logical starting point for a consideration of all her work" because it contains the text that "could serve well as an epigraph" to everything she has written: "Ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." Laurence's first novel, *This Side Jordan*, is set in Ghana but, according to New, "by an oblique and probably unconscious route it brings us to understand something more of a comparable but not identical desire [for independence] in Margaret Laurence's native Canada." Comparable but not identical — what is the oblique route by which Africa becomes part of the Manawaka world?

Mostly the route still lies underground; from the structure of the book we see that Clara Thomas centres her *Manawaka World* in the five Canadian novels and *Jason's Quest*, and gives them more than half her space, ending with an extended and detailed analysis of *The Diviners*, the longest and the last novel. That chapter begins with the observation that in its structure the novel imitates the first short story, "The Drummer of All the World," published in 1956; and it ends by calling it a "homecoming novel . . . closing the Manawaka works." The chapter in part sums up those works, and the way in which Morag's past is encapsulated fore and aft in her present might have served as the model for Clara Thomas's own structure. But in the central chapters — the Manawaka world

proper — the African material is present generally only in the chapter epigraphs from Achebe and the West Indian poet, Edward Brathwaite. The African connection has gone underground between the early chapters entitled "The Ancestors" and "Departures" and the final chapter, a consideration of *Long Drums and Cannons* which locates Margaret Laurence firmly "among the writers of the emergent nations," an amplification and bolstering of W. H. New's suggestion about a possible affinity between Ghana at the moment of independence and Canada now.

The preliminary and closing chapters are not wholly at odds with the central group; the same careful analysis is given the first four African books as the Canadian novels, often affording insights, especially in the choice of quotation, that will have to be taken into consideration in future discussion of these works. That discussion would be helped by an index to the present study and a bibliography of the writer's work as detailed as in the earlier study, but we should all be properly grateful for the biographical information, the novelist's own statements (even when not footnoted), and the exhaustive checklist of secondary material. And for the penultimate chapter, "The Town — Our Tribe", which collates all the Manawaka cycle to focus a picture of the town, relate it to other small towns in Canadian literature, and hint in its title how African they all might be.

But the main interest for future discussion of that "oblique route" between the poles of Margaret Laurence's imagination lies in the way the structure of this study suggests metaphorically the real dimensions of the Manawaka world. These are, of course, the dimensions of Margaret Laurence's world and of ours, of the universe; the Preface to *Long Drums and Cannons* is Margaret Laurence's credo as a writer: Literature offers insights "into the human dilemma as a whole [and] it must be planted firmly in some soil."

This is no novel insight into the working of literature but it suggests that for Margaret Laurence Africa is more than the "catalyst", as Clara Thomas calls it, of her vision and her writing. Rather than the Britain Margaret Laurence knows well and uses as freely in her last novel as she can use Canada in that and others, Africa stands in her imagination as a reference point for the universe. She has firmly planted her writing in her own soil and converted that microcosm into her world by imagining it surrounded with Africa, her own intimate knowledge of the human dilemma focussed in her Africa which is the universal (and more diffused) dimension of her Manawaka.

We still do not know exactly how this imaginary universe works. The route is still a secret in the heart of this stranger of ours but she may well supply it eventually — by sending her Manawakans to Ghana? — as V. S. Naipaul has revealed his universe in *In a Free State*. Only when the route is revealed by its sole owner and proprietor (as William Faulkner used to describe his relationship to Yoknapatawha County) will Clara Thomas be able to trace it for us in steps more literal than metaphorical. When that happens we shall all applaud the laurels that crown the work — and name —of Margaret Laurence and the completion of the labours of her diviner, Clara Thomas.

VIOLATION OF THE BURIAL PLACES

Herbert Rosengarten

MATT COHEN, *Wooden Hunters*. McClelland & Stewart Limited. $8.95.

MATT COHEN has established himself very rapidly as an important Canadian writer, and *Wooden Hunters* confirms the earlier promise of *Columbus and the Fat Lady* and *The Disinherited*. Set on an island off the coast of B.C., the novel dramatizes the conflict between an aggressive and exploitative white society, and a decaying but tenacious Indian community, under as great a threat of extinction as the soggy rain-forest about to be plundered by loggers. The atmosphere is heavy with death, from the rotting mortuary poles of the abandoned Indian village, to the long black hearse driven round the island by "C.W.", the white hotel-owner from Montana. C.W. helps the logging company to open up new trails and log hitherto untouched areas, including the old Indian village; and, in the novel's violent and bloody climax, when the old burial-places are violated, C.W. pays for his moral blindness with his life.

Those readers who regard the novelist as primarily a social commentator will find much grist for their mill here, for at one level *Wooden Hunters* is an indictment of white rapaciousness and insensitivity, an attack on the traditional disregard by European culture of the rights and values of aboriginal societies. The Indians in the story — Johnny Tulip, piano-player in C.W.'s hotel, his blind, oracular mother, his battered sister Mary Gail — all are victims of the alien presence on the island, which seeks to destroy even their past. But Cohen goes beyond the relatively simple level of social criticism, to more complex issues: he is also concerned with the broader conflict between "civilized" and "natural" man, between reason and feeling, between words and experience. The division between white and Indian is more than political here, involving totally different responses to life itself. The Indians are part of the island, alive to its presences, intuitively understanding the language of nature; the whites, products of a society devoted to rational control of its environment, have lost that language, and can no longer respond freely to the claims of nature. C.W.'s father "often used to say that what made man different from the animals was his mind"; and it is the devoted cultivation of this faculty which makes the white man incapable of understanding the natural world.

Laurel Hobson, Johnny Tulip's white lover, is a refugee from the white world of reason and analysis; her sleep is constantly disturbed by images of her dead parents, calm, precise, unloving, whose

favourite pastime was the creation of maps which were more real to her father than the places they represented. Laurel drops out of university because the life of the mind cannot satisfy her needs; she returns to the island, to a place haunted by images of decay and death, which yet breeds new life within her, and which holds more meaning for her than the sterile centres of urban civilization like Vancouver. In this paradox Cohen has expressed a theme identified by Douglas Jones in *Butterfly on Rock* as characteristic of Canadian writing:

> The world is a wilderness; guilt, isolation, the menace of death are inherent in the human condition. Yet the problem of how to affirm such a world ... is resolved by accepting these conditions. That acceptance effects a real transformation: the alienation produced by attempts to exclude or destroy every menace is replaced by a larger communion.

Wooden Hunters is not a philosophical novel, and such issues are treated only indirectly; but Cohen's characters must face the reality of isolation and death, and come to terms with their own mortality.

There is material enough for three novels here: the themes of clashing cultures, of guilt and alienation, of puritanical repression and inhibition. Such themes call for epic treatment; but despite the breadth of Matt Cohen's imagination, he has not entirely succeeded in investing his story with the substantiality or largeness of outline that gives a novel like *The Stone Angel* its power and significance. The reader recognizes the importance of the novel's themes, yet is not wholly satisfied that the novelist has managed to give them adequate embodiment. Despite her centrality in the plot, and the detailed past with which she is bestowed, Laurel Hobson is for the most part a colourless figure, almost as indistinct in person as she is in personality. Her white lover Calvin, whose role is to objectify the uncertainty and confusion within Laurel herself as he struggles to understand their relationship, leaves even less of an impression on the reader's mind. Is he tall or short? fat or thin? Even if we are given such details, they fail to register: having little or no physical dimension, Calvin remains a faceless, inarticulate blur. Some of Cohen's characters seem too slight — intellectually or emotionally, as well as physically — to carry the weight of his themes.

This cannot be said of the Indians in *Wooden Hunters*; their physical presence is unmistakable, and vividly conveyed, from the heat of Mary Gail's body to the wooden eyeballs of Johnny Tulip's mother. Johnny Tulip himself is the best thing in the book. In him, Cohen has drawn a memorable image of the declining Indian, one that can stand comparison with the figures created by Duncan Campbell Scott. Dispossessed and broken by an alien culture, yet surging with hidden vitality, Johnny Tulip has the kind of craggy strength that makes him, dying as he is, seem ageless and immortal, a folk-hero confronting his fate with courage and dignity. Perhaps that is why the other characters seem so pale and insignificant in comparison: they have been conceived on a smaller scale, their fates are of importance only to themselves; they lack the representative quality which marks the best characters in the best fiction. Johnny Tulip, however, has that quality; and consequently *Wooden Hunters*, though flawed, is a novel of more than passing interest.

CRITICISM IN QUEBEC

Larry Shouldice

MAX DORSINVILLE, *Caliban Without Prospero*. Press Porcepic. ANDRE BROCHU, *L'instance critique*. Leméac. JEAN-CHARLES FALARDEAU, *Imaginaire social et littérature*. Hurtubise HMH.

IN THE YEARS since the turbulent sixties, the literary scene in Québec has changed from one of explosive creativity to one of rather quiet reassessment and consolidation. There are signs that a new period of cultural dynamism may be beginning, but only time will tell whether the current flickers of excitement and productivity will become the full flames of revolution or merely another brushfire. In any case, one area that has maintained the momentum and trends that emerged in the sixties is that of criticism. It is a field of increasing importance in Québec letters, as the forces of Marxism and structuralism collide or merge with the more traditional thematic and sociological approaches, leading to the growing diversity and specialization apparent in the three books of literary criticism discussed here.

Subtitled "An Essay on Québec and Black Literature", *Caliban Without Prospero* is an ambitious and often fascinating study. Using the Caliban-Prospero metaphor, Dorsinville attempts to illustrate not only the relationship between European and Post-European cultures (in which category he includes everything from American to Third-World writings) but also the whole complex of attitudes and reflexes within emergent literatures themselves. It is an analogy that works well enough in general terms, and particularly with Black literature, but its application to Québec literature becomes somewhat more tenuous; colonial domination and *The White Niggers of America* notwithstanding, to describe the relationship of Québec with either France or its English oppressors in Calibanic terms requires stretching the metaphor so widely that it becomes almost meaningless. Perhaps the author realizes this; references to Caliban are absent from large sections of the book dealing with Québec, and he insists on this aspect as little as possible in the concluding chapter. Nevertheless, one senses a slight incongruity.

Structuring his argument on a series of parallels in the origins, evolution and preoccupations of Black American and Québec literatures, Dorsinville establishes a number of fruitful areas of comparison. The study is nicely developed and on the whole well-balanced, the one exception being a chapter on religion and the Black that has no corresponding discussion of religion in Québec; whatever the reason for this — certainly there is no lack of material — it spoils the symmetry of an otherwise exemplary comparative method.

The literatures are examined in three basic stages of development: an initial

period of growing rebellion and revolt, and finally an emerging sense of communal identity and self-articulation. Perceiving the present period in both literatures as one of increasing maturity, self-confidence and reconciliation to life's pluralism, the author bases his optimism mainly on his interpretation of two recent novels — rather scanty evidence, as he himself admits.

A few quibbles. The book is strangely bound, printed in tiny type on rough paper that makes reading difficult, and illustrated with a bizarre series of photographs that have only a vague connection with the content. The prose too is disconcerting at times, a mixture of learned academic writing with more informal levels of language and frequently awkward phrasing.

These are minor flaws, however, in an interesting and highly original discussion. Basing his central argument on a perceptive comparison of the two literatures, Dorinville makes a convincing study that is well worth the attention of even general readers.

L'instance critique by André Brochu is a collection of articles and reviews published from 1961 to 1973 in various periodicals and journals. One of the bright young activists in Québec letters, Brochu emerged in the sixties as the chief literary analyst for *Parti-pris*, a review in which the socio-politico-intellectual debates of those turbulent times somehow found their focus. Since Brochu's concerns and attitudes are very much those of his time and place, perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the book is its reflection of the author's evolution from a rather naive — but deeply committed — young radical into a more measured and somewhat chastened literary figure. There is a tinge of sadness — and self-pity — in his discussions of the critic's function; one feels the disillusionment and bitterness as he increasingly realizes that the critic's role in any revolution is likely to be marginal at best. The honesty of his self-examination makes the whole process rather poignant, and he emerges, as they say, a sadder but a wiser man.

The book is divided into three parts, the first an approach to various questions of literary theory, a second and longer series of medium-length discussions of particular authors, and a final brief selection of reviews of individual books. Brochu's theoretical writings are a mixture of reflection, analysis, dogma and polemic. Rebelling against criticism based on extra-literary criteria, particularly moral or social considerations, he attempts to formulate his own conception of the "new" criticism, concentrating on the supremacy of the text, the need for comprehension rather than evaluation, and the importance of intrinsic patterns of images, themes and values. This, he suggests, may be complemented by other areas of humanistic study and will be eventually superseded by structural anthropology; but, he emphasizes, literary works must always first be considered in terms of their own context. Setting his goal as the rediscovery and reappropriation of a Québec identity, he stresses the need to examine Québec literature in the light of its own particular necessities, limits and frame of reference.

The test comes, of course, when we see these theses put into practice in his own critical articles which make up the second and third sections of the book. There is no doubt that Brochu is a perceptive and intelligent reader. His analyses are full of new insights and his arguments are gen-

erally convincing, especially with regard to nineteenth century novels and the work of Gabrielle Roy; with Thériault and Bessette, however, his interpretation seems somewhat laboured, and his commentary on Giguère's "Roses et ronces" — a concession perhaps to the pressures of structuralism — is extremely murky and confusing. One wonders too if the liberation of Québec hasn't become for Brochu the absolute *sine qua non* that religion, morality or sociology were for his predecessors; in assessing all Québec literature in view of its relevance to *l'indentité québécoise*, he runs the risk of injecting the very sort of extra-literary criteria he has so frequently attacked in other critics. In any case, the book as a whole is informative and enlightening, and will be a particularly useful tool to students of Québec literature.

Imaginaire social et littérature by Jean-Charles Falardeau is also a collection of essays that have in most instances been previously published. Considered the dean of sociological criticism in Québec, and deservedly esteemed for his 1967 study *Notre société et son roman*, Falardeau has this time produced a rather meagre and initially disappointing book. The first article, a general survey of criticism of the Québec novel, is little more than a listing of existing studies. Then follows an account of the evolution of the hero in Québec literature, an interesting study in itself but now rather dated by its lack of reference to contemporary novelists. One wonders, in fact, why this Québec section was included at all, since it bears little or no relationship to the parts that follow.

The core of the present volume, a four-part series entitled "Problématique d'une sociologie du roman", is a complex and ambitious attempt to develop the bases for a sociological approach to literature. Steeped in the preoccupations (and jargon) of contemporary French criticism, it is a highly theoretical examination of literary and sociological concepts, existing methodologies, the nature and role of imaginative processes, and finally, of course, the relationship between the novel and society. Falardeau's insistence on the social role of the imagination, and his particular linking of this to formal developments in the novel, are definitely the high points of the book, indicating, albeit abstractly, a variety of potentially rewarding methods and directions for the investigation of literary works.

If Falardeau's discussions are refreshingly free of dogma, they are also disappointingly inconclusive. His final chapter, for instance, a ten-page reflection on "le sens du merveilleux", is impressive in both its erudition and its lyricism, but one feels uneasy at its apparent aimlessness. And although again a number of possible fields of investigation are pointed out, there is very little connection with the rest of the book.

Imaginaire social et littérature is thus an uneven work, both in its lack of unity and in the quality of its analyses. The central section, together with an impressive bibliography at the end, stands out as a considerable contribution to sociologically oriented criticism, but the other articles are only of passing interest. What saves the book is Falardeau's underlying humanism; as Gilles Marcotte points out in a graceful introduction, Falardeau's work is infused with moderation, common sense and an openness of mind, which are finally more winning than the most elaborate and technical theories in his discussion.

PROBLEMS OF BIOGRAPHY

Anthony Appenzell

JOSEPH SCHULL, *Edward Blake: The Man of the Other Way, 1833-1881.* Macmillan, $13.95. *Mike: The Memoirs of Lester B. Pearson, Volume Three.* University of Toronto Press, $15.00. LOVAT DICKSON, *Radclyffe Hall at the Well of Loneliness.* Collins. $11.95.

CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY can be divided into two fairly well-defined categories. There is the immediate kind, in which a public figure — usually a politician — is subjected in mid-career to the glare of light which is as necessary to his kind as the sunlight to normal men. Trudeau, Diefenbaker, Stanfield, even defeated Walter Gordon have been submitted to that kind of examination, which is inevitably partisan, tending either towards panegyric, in which case it is quickly forgotten, or towards denunciation masked as honest exposure, in which case it is read, not to see the man whole, but to see the weaknesses that underlie his public strength. A living leader becomes, by the very necessities of public exposure, a humanoid image both larger and smaller than life, and his biographers will either genuflect before him or try to pull him down.

The other kind of Canadian biography — and it is undoubtedly the best kind — concerns itself with those who are dead. And, contrary to the old maxim, it is usually dead men who tell the most interesting tales, if only because they have necessarily withdrawn from the lists of power, and we can view them at the distance in which passion becomes compassion, feeling *with* rather than *about* a person.

But here is another trap, and it is one into which at least some of the writers here discussed seem to have fallen. In feeling *with*, we do not idolize our subject, but we do tend to identify with him, to make our own his hopes and struggles. Any practicing biographer knows how strong such a temptation can be, how at certain points the subject's thoughts become his own, and, even more strangely, how he may begin to suffer from the subject's psychomatic ailments and find himself drawn into personal predicaments startlingly similar to those in which the subject was involved.

I would not like to speculate on how far Joseph Schull, in writing the first volume of his life of Edward Blake, *Edward Blake: The Man of the Other Way*, found himself suffering from the tics and dolours of the morose and nervous man about whom he writes, but it is certain that he has lived himself remarkably well into the mind of a maverick nineteenth century Grit (a kind of mind entirely different in texture and temper from the marshmallow minds of late twentieth century Canadian Liberal politicians.) Moreover he has shown his power of distinguishing between kinds of nineteenth century Grit, for he has caught admirably the nuances of difference in background, personality and eventual outlook between Blake, a man so stern-principled that at times he found himself forced to deny a politically expedient action that stuck in his moral craw, and Laurier (subject of

another interesting Schull biography), whose sharp political instincts left him a far more ambivalent human being.

Not that Blake's efforts to remain the moral man and the politician at the same time kept him out of contradictory situations. He agreed, allowing his lawyer self to argue down his moral self, to the worst excesses of the anti-Riel campaign, and condoned incitement to kidnapping when the Ontario government offered a reward for the capture of Riel whom the federal government had deliberately let go. But — and Schull says nothing of this interesting incident though it falls within the period of this present volume of his Life — in 1875 when Blake was Minister for Justice and Gabriel Dumont had set up his local government in the little Métis republic of St. Laurent on the Saskatchewan, Blake defended Dumont and praised his public spirit, just as later he would denounce the ineptitude that led Sir John A. Macdonald and his associates into the situation where the North-west Rebellion became inevitable.

One has little fault to find with the understanding and generally sympathetic portrait of Blake that Schull presents. Blake has been neglected by our historians largely because they have not been willing to disentangle the obliquities of his nature, and he deserved a patient biographer, whom in Schull he has at last encountered. Yet there is a difference between understanding and partisanship, and Schull has allowed the strength of his sympathies to lead him too far in the latter direction. The point of view throughout his book is unrelievedly Grit, and Macdonald and the Tories are treated as figures of impossible burlesque, with Macdonald staggering on stage as the diabolically devious drunkard with a regularity that in the end becomes entirely tedious. After all — even leaving Blake's weaknesses out of account — George Brown was hardly the kind of man one would desire as a friend, and Alexander Mackenzie was somewhat more complex than the naive stonemason whom Schull periodically exhibits. Here is another temptation of the biographer: to become so immersed in his central character that all the rest are merely humours. Mr. Schull has fallen to the temptation, so that Blake, the admirable Anglo-Irish gentleman, is highlighted by the contrasting chorus of Scottish comics — Grit as well as Tory — who misunderstand and hamper him to the end.

The third volume of *Mike: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson*, poses a curious biographical problem. Ostensibly it is autobiography, completing the first two volumes of *Mike*, which were mainly in Pearson's own hand. But in fact this final volume of the Pearson memoirs, covering his time of active political leadership, from 1957 to 1968, is a skilful compilation by the editors, John A. Munro and Alex I. Inglis. The core — considerably less than half of the whole — is a body of first-person material whose completion was rendered impossible by Pearson's death. Using diaries, scripts of speeches, extracts from Hansard, the editors have fleshed this nucleus of original material into a book that is readable, historically informative and, as a portrait, moving. I found it the most impressive of all the three volumes of *Mike*, perhaps because Pearson did not have time here to continue shaping the image of himself as the archetypical simple Canadian that dominated the earlier volumes and made them tedious and unconvincing. Now, in this final

volume, we have Pearson in the midst of the struggle, fighting doggedly in the day-to-day battle of politics, hurrying to beat death, and a much more tense and terse and muscular being emerges, which after all must be nearer the real Pearson than the hero of Volumes One and Two, who seemed too nice and simple ever to have been a politician. The Pearson in Volume Three is still an appealing character, but much more credible, because much tougher.

Radclyffe Hall at the Well of Loneliness tells the life of a person in whose company both Edward Blake and Lester Pearson would have felt uneasy. There is no record that Radclyffe Hall ever fluttered the dovecotes of the Land That God Gave Cain, but her biographer, Lovat Dickson, is a Canadian who some years ago returned home after a career as a London publisher. Since then he has written a series of books — the most recent on H. G. Wells and Archie Belaney (alias Grey Owl) — which drew on his memories of writers about whom he had acquired a degree of special knowledge because of his professional association with them. There is more than a little of the Ancient Mariner about Mr. Dickson, for he has a strong urge to make his revelations before time runs out. Fortunately he writes with eloquence and wit, so that it is no uncomfortable burden to be his Wedding Guest.

As in the case of the recently preceding Dickson books, there is a personal tale to be told before we get deeply into *Radclyffe Hall and the Well of Loneliness.* After Radclyffe Hall's death, Una Troubridge, with whom she had lived devotedly for many years and who became her legatee, appointed Dickson her own executor, which meant that eventually the Radclyffe Hall copyrights come into his hands. She also wanted Dickson to write an authorized biography of Radclyffe Hall, but this at the time he declined to do, though he accepted the executorship, at a time when Radclyffe Hall's copyrights seemed worthless. Since then, with the growing permissiveness of the 1960's, Radclyffe Hall's books have once again come into print and have sold widely; the owner of them has been rewarded beyond his expectations, and it is from a sense of obligation as well as because he finds the tale of Radclyffe Hall interesting and in its own way admirable that Dickson has at last written the biography Una Troubridge wanted. Owing to the nature of the material mainly available to him — nineteen volumes of Una's diaries and a file of John's (Radclyffe Hall's) letters — it has become largely the story of one passionate love relationship plus a couple of public scandals which arose out of Radclyffe Hall's flamboyant but courageous attempt to make the world accept her as she saw and felt herself to be.

The better known of the Hall scandals was that associated with her novel, *The Well of Loneliness,* which was banned in 1928 by an English magistrate. *The Well of Loneliness* is in fact a rather dull novel written in a manner that even in the 1920's seemed old-fashioned, the manner of an Edwardian romance which varied from the norm by dealing with love between members of one sex rather than between members of both sexes. *The Well*'s honesty was its principal virtue. It was in no sense pornographic or obscene, but its frankness in talking about sex in unaccepted ways led to its condemnation. It shared, in fact, the same fate as books whose attitude to sex was aggressively

"normal", like *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, or aesthetically Rabelaisian, like *Ulysses*, and there is no reason to suppose that it was discriminated against specifically because of its Sapphic overtones, though this is what Dickson suggests. It was the victim of a puritanism that sought to suppress any overt and frank discussion of sexuality.

The whole question of Radclyffe Hall's bold proclamation of her lesbianism is in fact somewhat more difficult to assess than Dickson appears to think. The difficulty is symbolically emphasized by the strange coincidence that Radclyffe Hall brought a libel action very similar to that which Oscar Wilde rashly brought against the Marquess of Queensbury, and that the defendant happened to be Queensbury's son-in-law. Wilde lost his case and slipped into disaster; Hall won a nominal victory which was wiped out when the case was appealed. The essential point of comparison, I suggest, is that unlike Wilde she never at any point risked imprisonment and the total destruction of her social and personal life; she did not have to die beyond her means.

In fact, Dickson is another biographer who has become so involved with his leading character that he no longer sees her situation in a balanced way. Consider, for example, the following passage near the end of his book: he is talking in the historic present about Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge.

> . . . What continually surprises is the solemn conviction these women have that a great social wrong exists which must be righted. In this woman homosexuals have been much more militant than men, understandably enough as they had to fight on two fronts, the sexual and the domestic, desiring equality in both.

With due respect to the undoubted courage of Radclyffe Hall and her associates, the fact is that in their day women homosexuals could afford to be more militant since they risked far less than male homosexuals. The Victorians had found themselves quite incapable of admitting that their womenfolk might be capable of Sapphic practices, and there were no laws penalizing lesbians in the way male homosexuals were penalized until long after Radclyffe Hall was dead; I knew several men in the London Bohemia as late as the 1940's — but no women — who had been imprisoned for homosexual acts between, to use the customary phrase, "consenting adults". Lesbians, of course, risked social ostracism, though it was surprisingly unevenly applied, but they did not risk the sanctions of criminal law. It was much more a matter of negative than of positive persecution, of their being denied the opportunity to describe their emotions publicly, of their loves being refused a standing equal to heterosexual love, and being — wherever possible — tactfully ignored. These, indeed, were disabilities that demanded attention because they implied contempt, but there seems no point in exaggerating the perils in which, in comparison with men like Oscar Wilde, women like Ralclyffe Hall lived their lives. Nor should we allow Radclyffe Hall's splendours and miseries as a personality and a symbol of sexual liberation to blind us to her manifest inferiority as a writer. Her techniques never rose above those of the best-selling novelists who served the vanished circulating library public of the 1920's. It was only because she wrote about the "love that dares not speak its name" that she did not become the darling of Mudie's and the Times Book Club.

books in review

WHERE THE MYTH TOUCHES US

HUGH HOOD, *The Swing in the Garden.* Oberon Press.

HUGH HOOD has done for Summerhill Avenue, Toronto, what Mordecai Richler has done for St. Urbain Street, Montreal. I grew up at the corner of Summerhill and Jean, half a block away from the home of Hood and of his fictional narrator Matt Goderich. In "The Governor's Bridge is Closed," Hood has written of the network of ravines which crisscross the Rosedale area and shape its character. The ravines do not come into this novel. But MacLennan Hill is there, along with the Bridle Path, "Merrill's" Drugstore, and the red and yellow Rosedale buses (complete with rubber mudguards and books of transfer stubs, their colours vivid in the mind's eye); the two schools, Whitney and Our Lady of Perpetual Help; "mysterious Saint Andrew's Gardens, trackless and inviolate"; and the rails of the CPR main line which run immediately behind the narrator's backyard along the hillside separating North Rosedale from Moore Park.

It is a joy to find one's personal *terra cognita* turned into myth. Many residents of Joyce's Dublin must have felt this sense of familiar strangeness, and the tension between fact and myth. I had a curious feeling, as I laid down the novel, that I had just relived the first decade of my own life, which happens to be roughly coincident with that of Hood's narrator Matt (b. 1930) and with Hood himself (b. 1928). Although Matt's experiences were not mine (I had, for example, no interest in cars, trains, or ships), they made mine more meaningful. Hood's artistry creates a framework in which memories move. This is an aspect of one of the basic founctions of art, its ability to give universal meaning to particulars. In a similar vein, nine-year-old Matt Goderich, moved by his father's identification with the people who will suffer in a European war, understands how "a single man's life may stand for the lives of many, perhaps in the end for universal life."

The Swing in the Garden is the first of a projected series of twelve novels, a *roman fleuve* in the manner of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past.* Proustian references recur, sometimes rather self-consciously. In the Goderich family, Sunday drives in the country alternate with trips to the docks. Matt is reminded of Proust's narrator and of his weekend choice of excursions from Combray along the Guermantes' path, or along the way to Swann's house. Proust's narrator discovered much later in life that the two ways united to form a single meaning:

> I see as in a moral vision that our weekend excursions had the same range of implication. "Down to the docks" led deeper and deeper into city life, into the essential Toronto of pickup and delivery and redistribution of wealth into parcelled-out units in small tankers. "Into the country" uncovered our supportive hinterland, the recoverable past of Upper Canada.... The ways of Guermantes and Swann, imaginatively recast in Ontarian terms, are the ways "into the country" "down by the docks."

The handling of time is deceptively simple. The mind of the adult narrator, a sophisticated art-historian, is set along-

side the experiences of himself as a child, rather like parallel tracks. Didactic passages for example, the nature of time and change, are validated by the narrator's scholarly interests or those of his father, a professional philosopher. As a child, Matt is vaguely aware of the elasticity of chronological time in conjunction with emotional experience:

> Why should time passed on Cornish Road seem to have from three to four times the value, so to speak, of Summerhill time? Was it simply that earlier time seemed truncated or somehow foreshortened, telescoped as it receded into memory? . . . Time is involved with value in some way, a point I ought to have made to my father. That period is an instance of double-chronology, psychological "felt" time and that of the calendar.

Hood's models, besides Proust, are novelists such as George Eliot and Balzac. He obviously aspires to catch the entire social fabric in his net. His feeling for social nuance, for the ambiance of class feeling "in the by no means democratic society of English-speaking Canada in the twenties and thirties," is excellent. Matt, delivering magazines, knows the distance that separates him from classmate Bea Skaithe who lives on Highland Avenue. The curving path, the shrubbery, the heavy door with brass knocker, induce inferiority feelings of a specific flavour. Class barriers are flexible but nevertheless real:

> Our sense of social relationship is just like that, full of personal fantasies compounded of pride or shame and simple feelings of security and belonging. . . . Status was involved in all kinds of behaviour, your diet, your choice of color in clothes.

In style, *The Swing in the Garden* is reminiscent of *Around the Mountain*, twelve essays ambiguously described on the dust jacket as "scenes, sketches, stories, pieces, incidents, evocation (call them what you will)." Hood himself calls them fiction. It took two readings before I was willing to agree with this definition, but I came to it. There are many passages in *Swing* which will strike the reader as prose *verité* or documentary journalism covering a multitude of topics from Toronto shipping to the finer points of running a restaurant. This type of fiction follows from Hood's feeling for "the holy in the daily," and artistic metaphysic which is also expressed in his 1971 essay, "Sober Coloring: The Ontology of Super-Realism." No ideas but in things. Hood calls himself a moral realist, one who points to the transcendental element in natural objects. In the novel, Matt speaks of art uniting men of different cultures and epochs: "Objects tie the interior worlds of multitudes together."

Hood's pace is leisurely. (Why hurry, in a *roman fleuve?*) The five parts of *Swing* take Matt Goderich from infancy to the age of nine, while Canada moves through the Depression to the brink of World War Two. His panorama takes in Spain, Maritain, Woodsworth, Sir Joseph Flavelle, Mackenzie King, and the academic socialists who could not believe that Stalin would ever co-operate with Adolph Hitler. The Goderich family move from relative affluence to poverty, when the father's radical principles drive him out of his university job, and bad weather sabotages his summer venture into the restaurant business. At the end of the novel, Canada is moving into the tragedy of war and Matt, into intimations of adolescence.

There are some memorable comic scenes. One concerns Saturday matinées at the Beverly, a neighbourhood theatre

featuring a double bill for ten cents. Pandemonium is an added attraction:

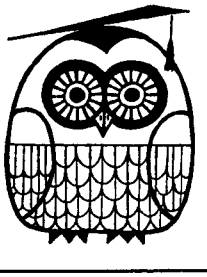
> It sounded like Gehenna or Armageddon, or the awakening of the Divine Beast in the Revelation to Saint John on Patmos. We would whiz up and down the aisles, allowing the less nimble ushers almost to catch us, then turning on the afterburners, spurring away and evading them by slipping along a row of our buddies from school, whose legs and elbows would impede the usher as he snatched at our windbreakers.

Another scene describes a policeman on a bicycle chasing an ancient Ford across Toronto Island, where cars were forbidden. (It had been driven across the ice in winter.) A night raid on Hanlan's Island privy coveted as a prospective clubhouse ends in failure when both privy and rowboat sink in Long Pond.

Despite Hood's flair for slapstick, the comic tone is frequently subtle. A remark of Matt's father, "What we have is a six room house," may not sound hilarious to the average reader but it is one of Andrew Goderich's small turns of phrase which his family love to parody, "with almost antiphonal repetition." Matt describes his father's kind of humour as "almost impossible to explain or defend before people with no ear for it." The phrase describes much of Hood's own wry sense of fun.

Hood's first four novels demonstrate a remarkable variety in technique. *White Figure, White Ground* is relatively traditional in form. Its protagonist is a painter in search of his roots. The narrative functions as metaphor. (Hood has said more than once he considers narrative to be an important element of fiction.) *The Camera Always Lies* is a romance, a witty parody of Hollywood films, and a rollicking satire of *American* moeurs. Many reviewers seemed to miss the parody and panned it severely. In *A Game of Touch*, Hood uses the game as "a microcosm of middle-class eastern Canada" (George Woodcock's phrase). The novel is both a modern example of the picaresque form, where the interest centres in the structure of society, and an informal *kunstlerroman* with political cartoonist Jake Price as the artist-to-be-educated. *You Can't Get There From Here* is an anti-utopia, a brilliant parody of human folly and unrealistic social aspirations, set in the mythical state of Leofrica.

With nine books to his credit (ten, counting the Béliveau biography), Hood



seems to be moving into a comfortable high gear and settling down for the long haul. First of twelve: the idea might intimidate some writers. *The Swing in the Garden* is marked by the social concerns which have always been prominent in Hood's fiction, and the conscious regard for craftsmanship or *métier*, his watchword. Matt Goderich observes that there is a kind of mind among some writers of fiction which feeds, almost compulsively, upon facts; and another which lies "not in the facts themselves but in the exactions of the a priori form into which they had to be made to fit.... This alliance of doubled realities may, often does, issue in art of extraordinary richness." Where do we place Hood's work? I opt for the double reality. Facts transformed.

PATRICIA MORLEY

JOSEPH HOWE THE WRITER

JOSEPH HOWE, *Poems and Essays*, edited by M. G. Parks. University of Toronto Press. $4.95.

JOSEPH HOWE, *Western and Eastern Rambles: Travel Sketches of Nova Scotia*, edited by M. G. Parks. University of Toronto Press. $3.50.

JOSEPH HOWE, the writer — journalist, essayist, poet and orator — is one I continue to wish will be better than he is. Knowing something of his career as a public man and particularly of that heroic stand he made for the press in 1835, I expect to find more of the man's force in his writing than I do. Once that disappointment is by, I can read him without pain and some of him with considerable enjoyment — but always with the expectation that his independence of mind and his physical vitality will charge his words — and sometimes they do.

Outside of anthology pieces, Howe's work has not been readily available to the modern reader. William Annand's edition of *The Speeches and Public Letters* and the 1874 edition of *Poems and Essays* have been long out of print, and compendia like D. C. Harvey's *The Heart of Howe* and J. Murray Beck's *Joseph Howe: Voice of Nova Scotia*, though useful, hardly serve the needs of the literary student. Professor Parks and the University of Toronto Press in reprinting *Poems and Essays* and in collecting the *Travel Sketches* have done us a great service. A good deal of the enjoyment I get from these volumes comes from the excellent introductions Professor Parks has provided. Not least of the services he renders in these is drawing attention to what remains to be done:

> For the *Novascotian* he wrote numerous editorials, essays, and reviews, many of which reveal his wide interests outside of politics. In his own and other newspapers also appeared much of his verse, including the many satires and humorous pieces not selected for the 1874 collection. Still in manuscript among his voluminous papers are several travel diaries written with more regard for literary craftsmanship than most productions of this kind.
>
> (*Poems and Essays*, p. ix)

In the poems and essays, including the travel sketches, Howe appears not so much a slavish adherent to conventions as one so thoroughly comfortable with them that he has no need or inclination to break with them. His decorum is not self-conscious; in fact, his apparent relish of the forms he uses is itself enough to keep them from stifling. The impulse and the form are at home with each other, and such faults as there are point

to the limits of an imagination rather than of a form or convention. His greatest ease is perhaps in the formal addresses, where phrase and period must reflect most closely the man's voice and physical bearing.

Howe's poems are minor. Apart from "Acadia", as Professor Parks observes, his "mature attempts to turn provincial scenes into poetry are respectable examples of their *genres*." "Acadia" is another matter, a poem that for all its shortcomings manages to convey ambivalent attitudes toward colonial enterprise, the Indians, ties to the motherland, and local loyalties. Other poems in the collection echo these concerns — but faintly. From the sample Professor Parks gives of Howe's lighter verse, the lump could well have done with their leavening, witness these stanzas addressed to Anna Swan, the Nova Scotia giantess:

> Your heart is safe, it beats so high
> No lover in the Nation
> Could ever hope to waft a sigh
> To such an elevation.
>
> I'd try the motion of those rolling pillows
> That through thy Kerchief show
> Catching the breath that might awake the billows
> Or — Boston's organ blow.

Howe is a man of our history. The interest we have in his writing is bound to our interest in him as a man, and so the desire for a fully rounded figure. In a writer as conventional as Howe, each genre serves to illuminate and comment on the others; none by itself contains the whole man. As Professor Parks indicates, what we may look for and miss in the published work may show up in the yet unpublished:

> From the published sketches, or, as Howe called them, the *Rambles*, we learn something of his actual life on the road. They have other purposes, however, than the recital of his day-to-day experiences in journal fashion. For that factual history of his life as a traveller with exacting business to transact, one may turn to a series of personal letters written to his young wife . . . during and after the period when the sketches were being published in the *Novascotian*.
>
> (*Western and Eastern Rambles*)

The *Rambles* use travel mostly as an organizing principle. Rambling is for Howe, as for others who have worked in this genre, a movement within a space rather than one through it. The best travel essayists, though, do manage to give more distinct impressions of persons, places, or things encountered than Howe does. Haliburton's *Clockmaker* sketches, though they blow out in the swells of S. Slick's rhetoric, nevertheless create the illusion of passing from one distinct and fully observed place to another. Howe gets little directly from his linear journeys but a largely sublime landscape and a generalized social climate. The rambling that counts is through Howe's capacious mind. The discoveries we make are not individual finds but fascinating mixes like this:

> As we retrace a part of the road we came, we have an opportunity of surveying the College and Academy, and to mark more particularly the figure of the village, and the rural cottages by which it is surrounded; but we must restrain our ramblings, and make more rapid progress, or the end of our journey will be like the end of Don Juan and Tristram Shandy, a pretty considerable distance off.

The passage is representative in what it tells of Windsor, in the impulse it acknowledges, and in the curb exercised or to-be-exercised. Howe is expressing here, one might argue, a need for a more fully and freely compendious form than he has found. Generally, though, he

manages to make ample room for himself, even in the confines of a sentence.

> There is also in the neighbourhood, what Shakespeare would call 'a good portly man, i'faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage, and, as I think, his age, some fifty' — and let him but get the flat of his generous palm upon your back, and may old Nick eat me for a sandwich if you get out of his clutches in a hurry — stories will he tell you and jokes will he crack, and if the bottle, when kept in motion by his good humour, does not travel as far or as fast as the sun (to which Sheridan once compared it) it flies round its orbit much quicker.

This is Howe the rambler at his best, letting his literary stock soak his observations and absorb them into an almost purely verbal, imaginative broth, which is no less strong for that. The man he must have appeared to others and the man he seemed to himself find as complete an expression here as anywhere. The form he adopts and the cast he gives to it are enough his to have genuine distinction.

Professor Parks introduces the *Rambles* with all that one might reasonably ask for and more about Howe's career, the province, the history of travel in Nova Scotia, and the literary qualities of the sketches. Like that to *Poems and Essays*, this introduction is ample, scholarly and interesting in itself. All together, these two volumes of what one hopes will be a larger series are most satisfying.

ROBERT GIBBS

ENDURING ESSENTIALS

THE FAROE ISLANDERS SAGA, translated by George Johnston. Oberon.

IT BEGINS with murder. Two Faroese brothers, Brestir and Beinir, are killed by one Hafgrim and his men, assisted by Thrand for reasons of profit. Sigmund and Thorir, sons of the two brothers, witness the killing. After it Thrand pays a ship's captain to take Sigmund and Thorir so far away they will never return to the Faroe Islands for revenge on reaching manhood. The two boys arrive in Norway far northeast, are given haven by an outlaw, Thorkell Dryfrost. Thorkell schools the two orphan cousins in all the Norse warlike arts, treats them as if they were his own sons. The outlaw's daughter, Thurid, falls in love with the heroic Sigmund, and is pregnant by him when the two young men depart from Thorkell's mountain hideout for the court of Earl Hakon.

At this point, which is really only a prelude, it's plain what is about to happen. Sigmund and Thorir will become mighty men, sea raiders in the service of Earl Hakon and later King Olaf Tryggvason. They will then seek 'father-atonement' from Thrand, who by that time has become the most prominent man in the Faroes. Earl Hakon has made judgment against Thrand, demanding sovereignty and tribute from the Faroes. Later the Norse King Olaf Tryggvason also requires that the Faroese forsake their heathen ways and become Christians. All this is said to have happened a thousand years ago.

But Thrand is a fox in other ways than his red hair. He does not welome Christianity, nor do the independence-minded Faroese have any desire to be subjects of Norway's King Olaf. Thrand equivocates and delays payment of the 'father-atonement' judgment. Eventually he is responsible for the deaths of both Sigmund and Thorir. The two cousins are forced to swim for their lives to escape Thrand's men, reaching another island where a

sea-weakened Sigmund is murdered for his gold ring.

The Saga has several other sub-plots, but the Sigmund and Thorir 'father-atonement' battle with cunning Thrand, anti-Christian and Faroese nationalist, remains central. The two cousins are conventional stock figures in the Saga, but attractive since sympathy generally runs toward such desperate survivors of their fathers' murder. And yet Thrand is a nationalist, apparently wants the Faroe Islands to remain independent. He is also anti-Christian. And these are two qualities with which I feel some kinship *myself*. But Thrand's nationalism and anti-Christianism are suspect by reason of self-interest: he is reluctant to part with father-atonement money or relinquish his own high position in the islands. And the death of Sigmund, his head cut off by Thorgrim the Bad for the sake of a gold ring — that is incongruously reminiscent of Christopher Marlowe being murdered with a three-penny knife.

We learn from George Johnston in his introduction that the Faroe Saga is fiction, despite inclusion of definitely historic characters like Earl Hakon and King Olaf Tryggvason. It may have been written by an Icelander, but was not a dramatic version of history, such as the Icelandic settlement of Greenland by Eirik the Red and Leif the Lucky's Vinland discoveries. Says Johnston: "It must now be found only as a series of interpolations in other sagas."

The Saga's fictional character and other inaccuracies come as a considerable letdown for me; but I console myself with its apparent authenticity, murder, blood feud and revenge. Those last things run through all the Icelandic sagas, in fact through all human history. But as a definite romantic, I sympathize more with Sigmund and Thorir than fox-like Thrand, differing in this feeling from the translator himself.

The Faroe Saga, in George Johnston's version, seems both modern and archaic. There are abrupt shifts of tense from present to past in the same paragraph. And we get lovely archaic-modern language like, "The bigger mare's cunt you if you can't bring down two men with two dozen . . ." I can hear George Johnston's own chuckle behind the phrase.

All this gives the saga an odd feeling for the reader, as if it were an experimental short novel surfacing in another time continuum. There are no heroic posturings or speeches; nobody stands in a Norse great hall thundering and thirsting for revenge. All the more chilling then, when Sigmund says to Thorir after watching their fathers' murder: "Let us not cry cousin, and remember all the longer."

Unless you're a scholar or immortal Viking, you cannot know the ancient Norse language, and must compare one translated saga with another to make any judgment as to accuracy of translation and literary excellence. I did read some of the Icelandic sagas a few years ago, and my memory of them is that they were more orotund, complicated in plot, generally less readable than the Faroe Saga. Now that may be because of differences in general character of the other sagas, perhaps less expert translators. I don't know. But whatever the reasons, this Faroe Islanders Saga seems to me remarkably interesting.

It moves. There is scarcely any extraneous material; everything is functional. One passage describes sea-raider Sigmund's discovering enemy Norse ships

in harbour: "the fifth of these was a dragon ship." Reading that I stiffened for some reason, thinking of the Gokstad Ship, and Coleridge's "There was a ship, quoth he." And while the Saga may be fictional, it does translate one back to that thousand-year-old era, scarcely less violent and bloodthirsty than now.

Few people reading the Faroe Saga or this review are likely to know where the Faroe Islands are located. I did not myself, had barely heard of them. Therefore: The Faroes are between Shetland and Iceland, "a small archipelago in the North Atlantic." There are eighteen islands of different areas, and no trees grow there except those planted by the people themselves. The fifty thousand islanders live by fishing, are now under Danish rule, and their language is Norn, a variant of the old Norwegian. Modern novels and poems have been written in this survival-language from the past; it is the language of learning in Faroese schools.

But back to the Saga itself. The characters in it, those Norse who later became Faroese, strike me as supra-human, much larger than life. And I suppose the reason for that impression is the Saga-writer's method and art: stripped of all but things he regarded as essentials. Among those were loyalty, honour, friendship, love, endurance, treachery and courage — things that have endured since time's beginning.

AL PURDY

PLAYS IN DISGUISE

LAWRENCE RUSSELL, *Penetration.* Sono Nis, $6.95.

MYSTIFICATION and specialization seem to be the main thrust and sole rationale of contemporary academicism. Lawrence Russell should know about that; for the past few years he has been teaching at the University of Victoria. He knows about it and he obviously tries to play it down. The back jacket blurb of this book tries to capture his down-to-earth, folksy manner, by quoting him: "These days I am more into multi-media, particularly DNA, which is a 'magazine' issued on stereophonic tape, particularly my electric guitar, which takes me places I have never been to before . . . " You would hardly dare accuse such a guy of teaching Creative Writing at an institute of higher learning, you know, like a university.

I first came across some of these five playlets some years ago when I was working as dramaturge for the Vancouver Playhouse. They had only been given amateur productions, mainly by an able high school teacher in Chilliwack, Ray Logie. I tried to interest the Playhouse, which at that time still had a studio stage, supposedly for experimental work. In those days it was even harder than now to sell a Canadian theatre on Canadian plays, especially very short one-acters. A little later, or perhaps at the same time, Lawrence Russell sent me an essay of his, entitled "Theatre of the Invisible". which was supposed to help me understand his plays. It was full of arcane phrases, like "inscape" and "audience fragmentation". I frankly confessed to being confused by all this, while still professing a partiality for the little plays themselves, simply for what they are: well-written, good, suspenseful, economic theatre. Three of the plays were produced finally by the Factory Lab in Toronto, and I am glad. But now I find a learned gentleman, also from the University of

Victoria, has written an introduction to this volume, freely quoting from the Theatre of the Invisible as part of the 'intellectual framework' for the plays. The aim, one reads, is to enlighten; yet I still find this whole business as so much academic claptrap (for want of a more folksy expression.)

No amount of mystification will disguise the fact that four out of these five plays are straightforward one-acters, well written in the semi-absurdist style of the Sixties, somewhat reminiscent of Pinter's short plays and even more of Ray Bradbury's short stories, and none the worse for that. The fifth piece, which is introduced by the author under the aegis of "total theatre" because it is meant to be tape-recorded and heard in the dark, could just as easily be described as "words for tape", or a "radio piece" or some other intelligible term. But calling a spade a spade might not have prompted yet another academic from the University of Manitoba (also quoted on the back jacket) to opine that "Russell is the heaviest avant-garde playwright in the country." Well, I respectfully beg to differ. For one thing, there does not seem to be much of an avant-garde in this country, "heavy" or otherwise, and on the whole, one is thankful. Lawrence Russell has hit upon a formula which has served him well in turning out a number of clever shorts with considerable promise. Now one wants to see if he is going to write some full-length plays, where characters have to be fully developed, relationships and sentiments portrayed, ideas argued, questions answered, and blackouts followed by another scene. The profession of writing plays is a time-honoured one and distinct from putting out "magazines" called DNA on tape and playing an electric guitar.

Penetration is a beautifully produced volume but it is not worth $6.95. Playscripts are a commodity, trade tools, and it would have been more useful to publish the playlets separately in fifty cents pamphlets, to aid production by small theatre groups, at universities, or in the community. As it is, the book is most likely to be bought by collectors and academics, as if it were poetry or fugitive prose pieces. And when you are in the business of theatre, this distinction is not purely academic: it makes a deadly difference.

PETER HAY

GRIT IN THE OYSTER

FLORENCE MC NEILL, *Ghost Towns*. McClelland and Stewart. Paper, $3.95.

POETRY communicates pain much more readily than joy. Why this should be, I am not foolhardy enough to pronounce upon. I suspect it has something to do with the oyster's irritant becoming the pearl. And perhaps only mystics like Hopkins know how to create the experience of joy's transport, love's escstacy as well as of the soul's dark night? Satirists cannot come near it — else they tumble into sentimentality.

Florence McNeil is steering her boat through these conflicting waters. Her fine, ironic commentaries are placed at the beginning of the book. Although she is a native of British Columbia the title "Ghost Towns" will not lead you to the abandoned gold mines of the hinterland. Her ghosts are nostalgic, called up from the past of celluloid. She is writing about

childhood, the childhood of our century in North America, with its Victorian hangovers. Her tidy, appraising eye records, in vivid metaphor, the way the past looks to us now, from its photographs, films, newspaper descriptions, family albums.

This has been done before, of course, and Atwood's use of the device in her earlier books of poetry would seem to be un-reproducible. But McNeil has her own voice, her own irony and coolness. In the best poems she achieves an objectivity that makes her human rather than feminine (in the latter role she has no axe to grind). Here Florence is Alice and the Wonderland is the world of after-knowledge:

> Your are out of place with your prim head
> that tidy curtsey
> that great accusing face
> a child from a nightmare
> that disturbed Carroll and Tenniel
> and told us their Victorian rest
> was only temporary
>
> who put you on a train
>
> and wheeled you into our untidy times
> . . .
> but here you are passing through our lives
> threatening us with your propriety
> . . .
> Saunter through your own underworld
> Alice
> or jump across your sunny oxford brooks
> and leave us to think there are no
> machines that bind you to this age
> give us permission to take you off the train
>
> — *Alice on the Train*

The poem "Old Movies" has two sections: Queen Victoria's Funeral and "The Boer War". The strong first stanza is characteristic of McNeil's poetic formula (and sometimes it is close to being a formula, a scientific model from which she works):

> Has the old Queen lived so long
> ruled as a stamping girl
> as lacy dark burden
> on a throne grown increasingly larger
> seen Dickens turn London into chapters
> presided over Darwin
> and the frenzy of jungle structures
> above and below the cities
> colored the globe red with English ink
> spilled the blood
> from her girlish pen

The final stanza is always a commentary on the items presented:

> Better to let the fable be
> record her death in dignity in print
> . . .
> and bury this black and white record
> . . .
> the vicious faces of nations
> passing like puppets with tangled strings
> leading grey processions
> which blend with one hopeless frenzy
> into the twentieth century

A powerful series of metaphors, but weakened, attenuated by so many adjectives. The same might be said for the Boer War section:

> leaving only the silent moviemakers
> cranking out negative reoorts
> to wonder
> about the disorderly columns
> retreating unedited
> into the future

For me, the poem should end there. But McNeil is relentless in hammering her point home. She adds:

> but there is no definition yet
> for what they are doing
> and a show without words
> can never be cited
> as dangerous

In a number of strong poems from this collection of seventy-five the poet's method works: as in "Montgolfier's Balloon", "Lillienthal's Glider", "1915 Fighting Planes" where the pilot "forever out of focus" is "captain of a skeletal triangle", "defender of a cloud".

The method certainly captures something we have all experienced, especially in a shorter, more concise poem like "Newsreel." But because the pattern in many of the poems is so consistently formal, and so insistent on extended metaphors, the sameness can become tedious. One is led to expect that each poem will end with its aphoristic commentary and the reader is left with no chance at all to leap, to jump at *his* commentary. Prose should tell all, but poetry should tell half.

McNeil's personal reminiscences of childhood appear intermittently as the book proceeds. The same irony comes through vividly in "Saturday Matinee", "When I Was Down Beside the Sea", "Domestic Alice", "West Coast Christmas", "First Dive" — poems that are delightfully worth having. Here is a part of one beautiful portrait, "A Grandfather":

When I visited my grandfather
as a child
he was constantly mending
...
it was the sails that fascinated me
watching him by the hour
welding old canvas into mythical voyages
I asked to come along
though the rain fell continuously on our plans
and his old boat rotted like a wooden tombstone
in the backyard
his hands deftly melting needle and twine
into yielding oceans
were awkward with grandchildren
looking up from his sewing
he'd grope frantically for names
exorcising evil spirits
by patting assorted unrecognized heads
and seeing that we did not stir
flounder in his pockets
for pennies

All in all, *Ghost Towns* provides very solid fare. Perhaps there are too many poems in the book, in these days of one-course meals. One tires, especially towards the end where, as I hinted at the beginning of this review, there is a flagging quality to the dozen or so love poems. Beside true love, satire cannot breathe! And I contend that McNeil's true contribution, and a very real one for Canadian poetry, is in its relationship to the tradition of Birney, F. R. Scott, Purdy: an ironic self-mockery that includes us all.

DOROTHY LIVESAY

REALISM, PICARESQUE PSEUDO-CONFESSION

CLAUDE JASMIN, *Ethel and the Terrorist*. Translated by David S. Walker. Harvest House. $2.25. MARIE-CLAIRE BLAIS, *St. Lawrence Blues*. Translated by Ralph Manheim. Doubleday. $8.95. HUBERT AQUIN, *Blackout*. Translated by Alan Brown. House of Anansi. $3.50 (paper), $8.50 (cloth).

THESE THREE translations of Québecois novels have a peculiar thematic similarity in that each finds the political and social issues centring around separatism secondary and in some cases almost irrelevant, and concludes that personal, usually love, relationships are paramount. But the artistic traditions the three grow out of make them very different books: *Ethel and the Terrorist* is a quite straightforward, realistic narrative, *St. Lawrence Blues* is something like a French Canadian version of picaresque, and *Blackout* is largely concerned with playing tricky, sophisticated games with artistic conventions and the reader's expectations.

Ethel and the Terrorist by Claude Jasmin concerns a conflict in the loyalties of Paul, the protagonist, and contrasts the

emotions and values those loyalties come to represent. Although he is very much involved in the terrorist activities of the separatist "Movement" (he plants a bomb which kills a night watchman), he is building a love relationship with non-French Canadian, Jewish, Ethel, with whom he flees to New York City. During the trip to New York, and in the subsequent time spent there, Paul begins to reflect upon the hate which has begun to surface in the "Movement", and contrasts this with the race-obscuring love he feels for Ethel.

The choice of Ethel over the "Movement", of love over hate, is quite simple until Paul is caught between federal police from Ottawa, who offer him freedom in return for acting as a stool pigeon from within the terrorist organization, and French Canadian terrorists, who insist that he terminates his relationship with the Jewess. The ensuing decision introduces the full complexities of the issues involved, but the ending is somewhat ambiguous and leaves the reader uncertain of how Paul resolves the ethics of his conflict. Although the strength of his love for Ethel convinces the leaders of the "Movement" to ease their racist stance, it is unfortunately unclear how he intends to redirect a political group which has moved from a positive to a destructive stage, or what value, if any, this kind of destructive, murderous activity might have. It also seems regrettable that these important complexities are approached only at the end of the novel, where the difficulties in making such an impossible choice can be only briefly portrayed.

In *St. Lawrence Blues* Marie-Claire Blais takes a more comprehensive, though more purely descriptive, view of French Canadian life and the role of organized political activity within it. A simple episodic plot is used to present an almost exhaustive number of two-dimensional "type" characters in this stylized version of Québecoise low-life. The novel is narrated by Ti-Pit, whose name means "little-nothing", and who tells us almost as much about the other characters as he does about himself. His friends and acquaintances include: Mère Fontaine, the motherly proprietor of the shabby rooming house in which Ti-Pit lives; Mimi, a homosexual drag queen; Ti-Cul, a childhood friend from the orphanage who escapes from prison in order to commit a hideous, vengeful murder; Papillon, a radical separatist and a poet trying to write in perfect Joual; Papineau, a hypocritical, materialistic, communist; Mrs. Papineau, who becomes a radical feminist; a lawyer from Québec City who earns $25,000 per year fixing parking tickets, and who decides to write a pornographic novel; Baptiste, Ti-Pit's friend from the rubber factory who is laid off so the company will not have to pay him a pension; Baptiste's son, Ti-Guy, a heroin addict; Vincent, a not very religious priest who devotes himself to helping criminals and drug addicts, and an ambulance driver who seems indifferent to all deaths and potential deaths.

Seen against the backdrop of this array of characters is a Christmas-Eve general strike of all French Canadian workers, most of whom seem only out for a lark. Violence eventually errupts and a student is killed by police. The public mourning over the death of this "martyr" is contrasted with the lonely, suicidal, poison death of Ti-Guy, who, on his death bed, is comforted only by his girlfriend, Ti-Pit, and Vincent. Ti-Guy's dying words under-

cut the possible positive political value inherent in such a massive protest: "... if someone takes me in his arms ... I think ... I think I'll live ..."

The novel ends with a dream in which Ti-Pit rejects his nickname and its meaning, presumably developing a sense of self-respect or self-love which might begin to counteract emptiness, brutality, and loneliness; but as Ti-Pit realizes, it is only a dream.

Although the novel's concern for individuals and their need for love is clear, surprisingly, it is not a powerful emotional novel. The thin characters do not evoke the sympathy necessary to make this kind of theme completely effective, and although these characters provide a kind of description of "Joualonie", there is little evaluation of this society.

A book very different in nature from these first two is *Blackout* by Hubert Aquin. It begins with a letter from Olympe Ghezzo-Quénum, a Black, politically radical, Ivory Coast pharmacist, to P. X. Magnant, pharmacist, and leader of Québecois separatists. P. X. Magnant then narrates an obsessional, partially drug influenced, confession of the murder of his lover, Joan. This is edited by a "friend" of Magnant's, with occasional additional editorial notes from R.R. R.R. takes an increasingly active role, altering and adding to Magnant's text, until the latter half of the novel is narrated by the "editor", R.R., and the diary of Ghezzo-Quénum.

The novel is oftentimes confusing but always challenging as Aquin plays his intricate literary games. The first of many false scents is the appearance that the novel will have an epistolary form with Olympe Ghezzo-Quénum a major character, but after his letter, the only one in the novel, he is not mentioned again for almost one hundred pages. Similarly, one expects P. X. Magnant to defend his crime with his politics, but he admits that separatism is no justification. When the identity of R.R., the mysterious second editor, is finally "revealed" in the middle of the novel, she misrepresents herself, leading both the editor and the reader astray. Several commonplace literary motifs are evoked only to be parodied or metamorphosed: the obsessional character "confessing" is finally appreciated not because he removes the moral grounds for condemnation, but because his remorse develops into real love and a painful sense of loss; instead of one "editor" there are two; and several apparent dopplegängers become false ones, while a hidden one finally emerges.

The ideas of art as artifice and as artifact seem to fascinate Aquin. Each segment of the novel is a text written by one of the characters, and read, revised, and/or edited by one or more of the other characters. The activities of reading and writing are part of the action of the novel, and characters develop as a result of what they have written and read. P. X. Magnant's feeling for Joan grows into love as he writes, and he consciously tries to make a metaphor for Joan's body with his bloodstained manuscript. R.R.'s false self-identification is designed to confuse the editor and thus alter their interaction not only as competitive editors, but as characters as well. R.R.'s final happy relaxed feeling is largely a result of reading the novel *Blackout*. But on another level all of the novel's documents form the constructed artifice for Aquin's challenge to the reader to understand exactly what is happening.

Thematically, the similar radical politi-

cal views of Ghezzo-Quénum and Magnant lead the reader to believe social or political concerns will be foremost, but these interests slowly fade, and through each of the bizarre, subjective narrations is seen a desperate, almost obsessional, desire of fulfilling human love.

GARY WERDEN

COUREUR DE BOIS

NORMAND LAFLEUR, *La vie traditionnelle du Coureur de bois aux XIX^e^ et XX^e^ sielces.* Editions Leméac.

THIS ETHNOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION of a folk type is of immediate interest to readers of Canadian literature, because literature and legend have made so much of the *coureur de bois*. Lafleur concentrates on three specific regions, mentioning other parts of Québec and Ontario. If you want colourful first-hand descriptions of what went on in the lumber camp, or how a man used to catch a moose and take it home to the family for butchering, you will find them here, complete with diagrams, in careful transcriptions of conversations with men who remember. Their language has been lovingly preserved, but sufficiently annotated for the city reader to whom the book is addressed.

The underlying thesis is in the tradition of F. A. Savard. The bushman is living proof of an adaptation to the land, far deeper than that of the farmer, and going back through time in a way that makes French Canadians into partial continuers of the seventeenth-century Indians. The book was originally a D.E.S. thesis, and aims at objective recording, but man's links with nature and history have an easily recognized emotional significance.

There are moments when Lafleur does not clearly relate his emotional overtones to the type of evidence he is using. A few references to the *coureur de bois*'s love of freedom have no visible origin in the catalogue of techniques for trapping and fishing, nor in the collection of backwoods aphorisms. This side of the *coureur de bois* tradition has survived in the myth which has grown around the folk type, and has its own history, especially in literature. With Lafleur's work as a new point of departure, we should be able to make more exact cross-references between literature, folk myth and social history.

The term "coureur de bois" survives in modern speech more vigorously than might have been expected. Lafleur's introduction connects it with the usage we know from our history books. This part is very uneven. It raises much interesting evidence but does not solve the difficult problem of how the word was being used in the middle period (Lafleur seems to avoid the vexed question of distinguishing between *coureur de bois* and *voyageur*). The most valuable contribution of the work is the fuller documentation of the convergence of different forest types in the nineteenth century, and the survival into our own time of real contact with the forest. Lafleur rightly disclaims all sociological theory in his portrait of the last representatives of a long and often neglected tradition which has played a positive role in the cultural and economic development of Canada.

JACK WARWICK

ON THE VERGE

***** MARGARET PRANG, *N. W. Rowell: Ontario Nationalist.* University of Toronto Press. $25.00. To write the life of a might-have-been is perhaps the most difficult task a biographer can set herself. And Margaret Prang's subject, N. W. Rowell — whose name is now hardly remembered even by historically minded Canadians — was a man who had great potentialities and never realized them. He might, had he wished, have succeeded Laurier as leader of the Liberal Party, instead of Mackenzie King, but he was too stiffly Ontarian, too rigidly principled, to be able to make the necessary accommodations. Today we remember Rowell — if at all — as partially responsible for the Rowell-Sirois Report which did so much to define the hitherto dubious confines of federal and provincial powers, but he was also a notable Methodist, a notable Liberal leader in provincial and dominion politics, and perhaps the most knowledgeable constitutional lawyer of his time. Above all, he was an archetypical WASP, doggedly Protestant, doggedly monolingual, doggedly teetotal, doggedly suspicious of Quebec politics and politicians, and under his democratic guise a thorough authoritarian, for he elevated his own will into a principle and then sought to make others into moral men by imposing it on them: hence the fervent insistence on prohibition and conscription that in the end destroyed him as a politician. It would have been easy to write a partisan study of Rowell, and the temptation would have been to condemn. Margaret Prang has avoided that temptation, and as a result she has written a remarkable biography. She explored with understanding Rowell's actions and captured what little of his inner life he allowed to escape from an elaborate concealment; she is clearly a devotee of the window-pane school of writing, and through her careful, unbiassed prose, the image of Rowell shines clear, in all its honesty, its rigour, its intolerance. "How unpleasant to meet Mr. Rowell!" one is often tempted to intone, yet, as Dr. Prang displays, he was often in fact very pleasant company and capable of deep compassion. Like all of us, he was moved by a mixture of feeling and principle. Too often, principle ran wild and distorted his actions, and this was the cause of his failure.

**** DONALD CREIGHTON, *Canada: The Heroic Beginnings.* Macmillan. There are authors who establish by sheer talent and industry such credits in the bank of achievement that even their lesser works command attention. It is this quality that distinguishes the true man of letters from the hack; for the first makes something interesting and craftsmanly out of the most menial literary task, whereas the second stamps mediocrity on his most ambitious efforts. Donald Creighton is of the first kind; despite all his academic affiliations, he stands in his books as a true man of letters. And in *Canada: The Heroic Beginnings*, though he is saying very little that has not been said in his early books, and though he is — as it were — repeating himself on commission (since the book is meant to celebrate the achievements of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board), he still produces a sound and readable review of the Canadian past. And if his book ends in something of a dying fall, with the small if gallant incident of the voyage of the *Saint Roch*, this merely shows us Donald Creighton in the unfamiliar role of master of the anti-climax!

**** ELIZABETH BAIRD, *Classic Canadian Cooking.* James Lorimer, $9.95. BLANCHE POWNALL GARRETT, *Canadian Country Preserves & Wines.* James Lorimer, $9.95. The best books on food are those that can be both used with profit and read with enjoyment, that not only give sound recipes, but also transmit a sense of passion in the search for them and a pride in the art of preparing good food. These two books, which admirably complement each other, fulfil both functions superbly. *Classic Canadian Cooking* not only reminds us of half-forgotten culinary delights of our youth, but also introduces other possibilities of which most of us were unaware, and does it not only with knowledgeable introductions that impress on us the role of food in our national heritage, but also with the kind of wit that juxtaposes — for example — Scripture Cake and Delicious Devil's Food. *Canadian Country Preserves and Wines* dips deeper not only into the landscape — for many of its recipes are based on wild gleanings — but also into the pioneer tradition with its old kitchen gardens and its folklore of making do and making well. Both authors are proudly conscious of the historical resonances of their subjects, and in each case the design of the book is excellent — readable type for those with practical things on their minds, pleasant wood engraving illustrations from the days when cooking first proved itself as an art, and a book light to handle and falling easily open for use.

**** J. L. GRANATSTEIN, *Canada's War: The Politics of Mackenzie King's Government, 1939-1945*. Oxford University Press. $18.95. The true images of public men are often slow in crystallizing. Only now, without diminishing our varying esteems for Macdonald and Laurier, do we realize that a trinity of great political Canadians cannot do other than include — reluctant though we may be to assert it — that unattractive man and superb leader, William Lyon Mackenzie King. King's paraded mediocrity, his secretiveness, his superstitions, his obsession with national unity, his sense of being not merely conspired against by his fellow citizens but also the personification of a young nation threatened by enemies, bound him to Canadian people of both languages by the veins of affinity, by the subtle capillaries of identification. It is not accidental that the longest years of real Liberal ascendancy were those enjoyed under King. And of all King's Years, the most significant and evidently the most satisfying to this smug and uncertain being were those in which he manoeuvred the *canot de mâitre* of Canadian state through the rapids of racial tension during World War II, between the Scylla of British imperial arrogance and the Charybdis of American neo-imperial power hunger into the post-war lake where Canada for a blessed period sustained the illusion of being the most important of the world's middle powers. In *Canada's War*, J. L. Granatstein gives us the best political history we have yet had of that recent but already strange period from which the actors have almost passed away; he also helps to indicate how King's manoeuvres in extricating himself and his country from its early difficulties in becoming a true nation have contributed to the problems of American economic and political domination we are today so desperately attempting to mitigate. But King, the Prince of Denmark in this play of power, remains as elusive as ever; the fascinating book that will be his true biography remains to be written, and when it is given to us its best passages may well consist of eloquently evasive silences.

**** *The Bloomsbury Group*, edited by S. P. Rosenbaum. University of Toronto Press, $10.00 paperback, $25.00 cloth. During the present century Bloomsbury has been a potent and evocative word in English literary circles. By the time I first heard it at the end of the 1920's, it had already taken on a generalized air; it tended to mean modernism gone mandarin, that slightly mysterious world of older and successful writers who held the passes through which younger writers were trying to enter. All kinds of writers who never in fact had much connection with the Bloomsbury Group were included in this wider definition: certainly Eliot though not Huxley, and equally certainly Eliot's publishing house of Faber & Faber, which operated from the very geographical heart of Bloomsbury. Historically, however, the Bloomsbury Group was that circle of painters and writers which found its most visible centre in the family of Leslie Stephen, and most notably in his daughters, Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell. There was Lytton Strachey but not his devoted Carrington, there were those two noted fuglemen of modernist art, Clive Bell and Roger Fry, there was — linked to the writers and painters mainly by a shared devotion to G. E. Moore's philosophy — the economist Maynard Keynes, and, elusively and intermittently, there was E. M. Forster. Class, education and tastes united the Group, which in recent years, and especially since Michael Holroyd's monumental book on Lytton Strachey, has been arousing a renewed public interest, as well as a revival of the controversy regarding what the Group really was. *The Bloomsbury Group*, a fascinating collection of documentary writings by members and onlookers (some of them hitherto unpublished), presents an unusually intimate glimpse into one of the most influential and interesting conjunctions of talent in the English literary tradition. Professor Rosenbaum is planning to write a literary history of the Bloomsbury Group; the present volume serves as an admirable prelude to such a venture.

*** R. B. NEVITT, *A Winter at Fort MacLeod*. McClelland & Stewart, $7.95. This is one of the documents of western Canadian history which the Glenbow Foundation is Calgary is now releasing in collaboration with McClelland & Stewart. Nevitt went on the celebrated western drive of the NWMP as Assistant Surgeon, and in this role spent a winter at Fort MacLeod, filling his spare time by writing a diary in the form of letters to his fiancée. He was also one of those talented, untrained artists who went to the West in surprising numbers during the later years of the nineteenth century, and apart from the interest of his written chronicle of everyday life in an early Mountie post, the illustrations present some extraordinary vivid visual glimpses of Indians, police posts, métis encampments, and other aspects of existence in the first years when Canada dominated the great plains.

*** JAMES H. GRAY, *The Roar of the Twenties*. Macmillan, $12.95. James Gray emerged as a writer of books — after a long journalistic career — with that splendid recollective documentary on the Depression, *The Winter Years*. He has since followed it with a series of works dealing with various aspects of prairie life before World War II, and *The Roar of the Twenties* is another in the same vein, a rather breezy portrait of a decade, with some interesting documentation on hitherto rather obscure aspects of the time, such, for example, as the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan in Canada. It is a piece of good popular history, worth adding to one's shelf of prairie writing, but, despite Gray's efforts, it lacks the sense of profound personal involvement one experienced on reading *The Winter Years*, the quality distinguishing that classic of Canadian autobiography from everything Gray has written since.

*** LEWIS C. WALMSLEY, *Bishop in Honan. Mission and Museum in the Life of William C. White*. University of Toronto Press. $10.00. Despite his long career as an Anglican missionary in China, William C. White's highest claim to our gratitude is the great collection of Chinese artifacts — the best outside the People's Republic of China — that he assembled for the Royal Ontario Museum. White began his career as a literalist, evangelizing Christian of a peculiarly Victorian kind very difficult to reconcile with the connoisseur and scholar, deeply conscious of the values and value of Chinese civilization, that he later became, and certainly the most fascinating aspect of Walmsley's biography of the Sinophile bishop is the painstaking way he reconstructs, from White's own words in journals, letters and other writings, the course of this metamorphosis.

FOR POST CATACLYSMIC NEW ZEALANDERS

IF ALL OUR history books were destroyed, the post-cataclysmic explorer from New Zealand, so beloved of futurist writers, would still gain an astonishingly vivid and on the whole an astonishingly accurate picture of what our past was like if a collection of Canadian fiction somehow managed to escape a future holocaust. For English Canadian novelists — as distinct from our poets and even our short story writers — have been notably concerned with the social landscape, both in its great national sweeps and its local intimacies. Occasionally, by the accidents of a season's publishing, this preoccupation is strikingly emphasized.

It is so emphasized in the latest batch of fiction to appear in the New Canadian Library, a group of novels that incidentally brings the list of the series, not counting special volumes, up to 120 titles. With the exception of Rudy Wiebe's *The Blue Mountains of China* and, somewhat more doubtfully, of Grove's *Our Daily Bread*, none of the eight books can be classed as major fiction, either in a world sense or a Canadian sense. But, taken together, they illuminate a surprisingly broad area of our collective experience.

Frederick Niven's *bildungsroman, The Flying Years*, traces the youth, life and old age of a Scot evicted from the Highlands, who emigrates to Canada; in the process the whole development of the west is delineated from the age of the fur traders to the high days of the railway culture, so that really we have the story of a society's growth as well as a man's growth. *Our Daily Bread*, Grove's vast, dull and immensely awkward sketch of a masterpiece, takes a fragment of the same tapestry, and shows the pioneer generation on the prairies succumbing to the pressures and temptations of commercial exploitation in a land drained of its fertility; in odd ways it goes beyond a document of Grove's times and becomes a curious, fumbling prophecy of our own age of technological rapine and vanishing resources.

Roger Lemelin's *The Plouffe Family* is of course one of the pioneer works on urban as distinct from rural Quebec. Competition has robbed it of novelty and time has dulled its edge, so that Lemelin begins to emerge in one's view as a kind of Québecois Grove, splendid in intent and industry, but grandiose rather than great. Gabrielle Roy's *Windflower*, intrinsically a far better book, takes one to the very edge of the Québecois world, in Ungava, where English Canada and French Canada come together in competition for the soul of a third culture, as ancient and fragile as the Arctic flowers, that of the Eskimo. In its sad story of the breaking of the girl Elsa through her contacts with the invading modern world, it draws a mordant picture of what history seems to have written as inevitable tragedy; the encounter of a highly specialized primitive people and an industrial civilization.

Two obstinately surviving Canadian minori-

ties are personified in the families which — rather more than individuals — fulfil the heroic roles in Wiebe's *The Blue Mountains of China* and in Laura Goodman Salverson's *The Viking Heart*. *The Blue Mountains of China* is the third, the most intense, and the broadest in its grasp, of Rudy Wiebe's novels of Mennonite setting. Though Canada forms the uniting knot of this fascinating work, it is the universal Mennonite experience that emerges; in all its deep faith and rebellious faithlessness, in its contrasts of greed and self-sacrifice, of bigotry and universal compassion, the story is carried over all the pathways of the world where modern Mennonites have wandered, in Russia and in China, in Paraguay and in Canada. *The Viking Heart*, of course, is the classic novel of the Canadian Icelandic community, or, to be more accurate, the classic novel in English, since Canadian Icelanders have a considerable literature in their own language. Despite its conventionality of writing and sentiment, and its clumsiness of construction and psychological insight, *The Viking Heart* still moves one at times with its descriptions of the experiences of one highly conscious group of immigrants who adjusted to Canadian society without in any way abandoning loyalty to their own historic culture.

Earle Birney's *Down the Long Table* and Edward McCourt's *The Wooden Sword* take us into an area of the Canadian collective consciousness that is especially near the novelist's bone, given that most Canadian writers in recent years have doubled as academics. In each novel the central figure is a professor of English facing a past that has been dramatically unacademic, a past in the real world that lies outside the suburbanities of the modern campus. Birney's Gordon Saunders, hauled before one of the obscene Red-hunting committees of the American 1950's, sees opening before him under the glistening varnish of the long table a memoried vision of his radical life in the 1930's, the "real life" of left-wing factional infighting which in satiric recollection turns out to have been as insubstantial — confronted by the hard facts of power — as any other romanticism. Edward McCourt's protagonist in *The Wooden Sword* (a novel whose undramatic ironies have never been sufficiently recognized) is plagued by recurrent nightmares that are ruining his marriage and undermining his career. It is only when he forces himself to remember the wartime experiences buried by a guilty memory that he is able to accept his own weakness and, even more appalling, his own ordinariness. Rarely, in Canadian fiction, have we had an anti-hero so closely reflecting the evasions and tribulations of our national psyche as Ed McCourt's Steven Venner, whose identity, when at last he so Canadianly succeeds in grasping it, turns out to be symbolized, not by a wooden horse, but by a wooden sword.

A Canadian now seeking his original ambiance, or that curious future New Zealander finding orientation within the approximate reality of our past, might easily find himself equipped with a less adequate guide than these eight novels, newly reprinted and variously priced between $1.95 and $2.95.

L.T.C.

SMALL PRESSES

GRACE TRATT'S *Check List of Canadian Small Presses: English Language*, published by the Dalhousie University Libraries ($2.50) is an indispensable handbook for anyone interested in Canadian publishing during the past decade. Small presses have been so numerous, and in many cases so ephemeral, that it is difficult for any enquirer to trace all of them, and one knows of presses that Ms. Tratt does not record. But she lists far more that are unfamiliar, and it is the fact that her list is so much more comprehensive than anything else existing that makes this 152 page mimeographed account of some 234 English language little presses, together with their main publications, such a valuable accomplishment.

G.W.

ERRATUM

WE DEEPLY REGRET that owing to typographical errors which slipped past the editorial eye, the names of two of the contributors to the feature on women poets in *Canadian Literature* 66 were given wrongly. *Anne Corbett* should read *Anne Corkett*, and *Audrey Conrad* should read *Audrey Conard*. Both these contributors have accepted our apologies with the greatest forbearance and good-nature, but a public correction of our error is still necessary.

G.W.

opinions and notes

SOURCES OF POETRY

SIR,

Upon reading Linda Rogers' review of Fraser Sutherland's *In the Wake of* . . . (*Can. Lit.* No. 65), one is amazed at her ignorance. Literary tradition has always included translation with many great poets, and lesser ones, including translation as a part of their repertoire. Surely Ms. Rogers would not be so flippant in her dismissal of this art form if she were reviewing Pound's translations, or even Robert Lowell's *Imitations*. One also ponders whether she has read Auden's poems inspired by paintings, one of his most famous being "Musée des Beaux Arts." Her general condemnation of poetry inspired either by poems or paintings indicates a large gap in her understanding of sources for poetry, which appear to be limited by her to "human and geographical landscape." A very parochial attitude.

The inclusion of Sutherland's Auden poem in the list of imitations or "guided tour(s)" is misleading in the extreme as the poem is one in which Auden's "human landscape" is most excellently explored. The poem is neither imitation nor translation.

LUCILLE KING-EDWARDS

MACLENNAN BIOGRAPHY

ANY CORRESPONDENCE or reminiscences concerning Hugh MacLennan which your readers may have to offer will be of great assistance to me as his prospective biographer. If you have such information or material, please contact me:

E. Cameron,
Assistant Professor,
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Concordia University,
Loyola Campus,
7141 Sherbrooke St. W.,
Montreal H4B 1R6.

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