

CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 72

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LITERATURE

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ANTOINE SIROIS, MARIA TIPPETT, KENNETH C. RUSSELL

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PLAYING FAVOURITES

IT HAPPENS sometimes — and recently it has happened quite often — that there are Canadian-published books which appeal to the editor of *Canadian Literature*; which should be brought to the attention of readers; but which for some reason (because they are reprints, because they are on the frontiers of literature proper, because they are translations of foreign texts having some bearing on Canada) cannot find a place in our beleaguered review columns yet really deserve more than a tiny mention in the back pages of the journal. So, for once — and doubtless it will not be the only time — the editorial is being devoted to a group of such books that caught our eye and fancy.

Of foreign texts with a bearing on Canada, undoubtedly the most venerable are the Icelandic sagas which tell of the first European discovery of Newfoundland. A translation of these sagas was published in England by Penguins in 1965, under the title of *The Vinland Sagas*, but now George Johnston — whose other self is the splendid poetic ironist — has added to his renderings from the Icelandic a version of *The Greenlanders' Saga* (Oberon, \$7.95), done with appropriate starkness and accompanied by a good brief introduction which discusses the background to the saga and the historical problems it arouses.

Among reprints one is of special interest to *Canadian Literature*. Faithful readers will remember the fine series of cuts which George Kuthan made to decorate this journal from our beginnings in 1959 to his death in 1966. Now Hurtig Publishers has reprinted his erotic sequence, *Aphrodite's Cup* which he himself published privately in 1964) in a handsome limited edition of 1,000 copies at \$35.00. There is an introduction by William McConnell, who has not done his research well, for he fails to record Kuthan's work for *Canadian Literature*, which produced the longest and most versatile of all his series of designs, undoubtedly one of the major tasks of his last decade.

Talk of erotica leads one to another reprint of a book with a long underground and (in this case) pseudonymous existence. In 1960 Olympia Press in Paris published a sado-masochistic novel entitled *The English Governess*, by a certain Miles Underwood. Underwood's real identity has long been known; he was John Glassco, who once proudly remarked that he was as much a "pornographer" as a poet. Now, as *Harriet Marwood, Governess*, the book surfaces — after curious vicissitudes of underground and pirated publication — into the Canadian paperback market (General Publishing, \$2.95). Elegant it is, a high product of the late decadence, written in accurate, ironic prose. But pornography, one realizes, is a relative question, and aphrodisiac though *Harriet Marwood, Governess* may have been to the generation that first enjoyed it, it is likely to register low on the 1970's porn-scale. But hold on to your copy. The 1980's are coming. And in the meantime enjoy another facet of our most versatile classicist, John Glassco.

A reprint of a vastly different kind is Charles Heavysege's *Saul and Selected Poems* (University of Toronto Press, paper \$7.95, cloth \$19.50), published in the Literature of Canada reprint series and introduced by Sandra Djwa. Heavysege is a kind of super-Grove in poetry, endowed with a rough power, but so lacking in a real sense of craft that almost everything he does is fumbled and intolerably prolix. This is why his narrative poem *Jezebel*, which occupies only 30 pages out of the 373 in this volume is — in my view — by far his most successful work, maintaining its intensity almost the whole way through, and marked by an urgency which may have been no more than the knowledge that the *New Dominion Monthly*, where it was published, would not take a longer poem. Unfortunately — I emphasize the adverb — 328 pages of this Heavysege collection are taken up by the sprawling mass of *Saul*, surely the most wordy play ever written, full of anachronisms and comic infelicities, and defeating itself dramatically by the tedious complexities of its action. There is indeed a core of true drama in *Saul*, and this was discovered by Peter Haworth, who rendered it down into a two-hour radio script (about a quarter of its present length) and came out with a play that might not have been stageable, but which — like many other closet tragedies — worked well in sound alone, under Norman Newton's CBC direction.

It is a pity that Peter Howarth's condensation of *Saul* has not been published, for I suspect we treat our early Canadian writers with a mawkish excess of reverence. (How patently absurd it is, for instance, of Sandra Djwa to talk of *Saul* as a "major" play!) Poor old Heavysege, after all, never had the advantage of sound advice, never encountered a good editor, never found a sympathetic but critical audience, never met anyone to teach him the dramatic craft, never had a producer willing to put his play on (as Norman Newton eventually did) provided it was licked into shape and proportion. If he had made such encounters, doubtless we would now be reading a very different *Saul*, so why not give him posthumously the advantages he never enjoyed when he was alive? This is not

really a protest against the present volume, which should exist, as it is, for the few students of Canadian writing who wish to see the text of *Saul* in all its enormity. But I hope that one day Heavyside's obvious qualities — exemplified in the thin poet who lived within the fat poetaster we encounter in this volume — will be brought to a wider and a less patient public than the academic one, through the publication of Peter Haworth's excellent condensations of *Saul* and *Count Filippo*. Some such academically irreverent treatment of a few other early Canadian writers could show us at least their potential virtues, what they might have been if only they had lived in a real literary world instead of a remote cultural colony.

Out on the ultimate verge of literary interest, since it is no piece of fine writing and does not pretend to the authority of history, is *René* by Peter Desbarats (McClelland & Stewart, \$10.00), a current study of Lévesque and his role in Québec politics; its interest for us lies in the light it throws on the political and intellectual background that produced not only Québec's (and perhaps Canada's) Man of Destiny but also a great deal of recent Canadian poetry and fiction in the French language. With luck, we shall be able to call it Canadian for a long time.

Finally I come to a very special class of books for which the only appropriate title is *Colombiana*. John Robert Colombo has shown his virtuosity as a poet, as an editor, as a translator from languages he does not always speak. But all these not inconsiderable achievements now fade before the image of Colombo as the industrious collector and arranger of facts. We already had, two years ago, *Colombo's Canadian Quotations*. It is now followed by *Colombo's Concise Canadian Quotations* (Hurtig, \$4.95), which is not merely a condensation of the original volume, since a quarter of the quotations are quite new, garnered since the appearance of *Canadian Quotations*; the main advantage of the new volume is the portability conferred by its smaller size. At the same time, from Oxford University Press there appears a much more massive reference volume, *Colombo's Canadian References* (\$14.95), which is really a small Canadian encyclopedia. I once described Colombo as an "assiduous impresario of novelty", and that aspect of him comes out in the *Canadian References*, as it does in both forms of the *Canadian Quotations*, which are marked though not marred by the idiosyncracies of his personal interests and tastes. But then, all the great reference books have been idiosyncratic, from Johnson's dictionary down to the celebrated 11th edition of the *Britannica*. And as a desk text for convenient dipping, *Colombo's Canadian References* holds a serviceable finger in the dam of information until such time as Hurtig's too-long delayed Canadian encyclopedia is funded by the Canada Council, which has been incomprehensibly punctilious and dilatory in supporting such a greatly needed compendium of Canadian information.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LITERATURE

Louis Dudek

(Paper delivered before the Canadian Council of Teachers of English, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, August 21, 1974, slightly revised for publication.)

THE PSYCHOLOGY of literature, as a topic, includes almost everything we want to know about literature because literature is a product of the mind, a peculiar by-product of the human psychological make-up. To find out what literature is, all you have to do is find out what life is all about and how we fit into it. Naturally this is an area fraught with controversy and large differences of opinion. Nevertheless, psychology is a half-science, and we may get further with it than if we were to approach the problem through philosophy or theology, which don't seem to have much in the way of new insights to contribute to the enlightened modern mind.

Using psychology to understand literature, we would first have to know how the mind works. The magnificent self-assurance of Professor Northrop Frye, for example, derives from the fact that he believes he has discovered exactly how the mind (or imagination) works, and therefore he can explain everything in literature. I mean no disrespect to Professor Frye. He is probably the greatest critic of the century, the most profound, systematic, comprehensive theorist of literature in a very long time — I believe Lionel Trilling has said the most original since Aristotle — and he is a writer we all read avidly over and over again, with ever-repeated pleasure, and with ever-increasing irritation. In fact, it is impossible to speak or to think of “The Psychology of Literature” without coming up against Northrop Frye’s ideas, and having to thrash them out again, and having to dispose of them again, before we can go a little on our own way.

Professor Frye claims he has discovered how the mind, or imagination, works. He says it thinks in archetypal patterns. All new thoughts — all new works of literature — are variations upon the relatively few archetypal patterns outlined in the *Anatomy of Criticism*. Actually, the main scheme, or pattern, is the cycle of the seasons, the curve of rise and decline from spring through summer to fall and winter; all imaginative literature and all genres derive from phases of this pattern.

Aristotle in the *Poetics*, wanting to illustrate what a metaphor is, compared the life of man to a day: old age is the evening of life. Northrop Frye has taken up this simple commonplace and built the central mythology of literature around it: man's life from birth to death is equated with the day, from dawn to darkness; which in turn is equated with the seasons, from spring to winter; and this in turn is equated to the literary genres, from romance (spring) through comedy (summer) to tragedy (autumn) and satire (winter). All the other major archetypes, for example heaven and hell, are simply derivatives from this, heaven being the ultimately desirable good things of spring and summer, youth and morning, and hell being the unwanted evils of autumn and winter, or the darkness of old age and death. So too, the ur-myth of all literature, according to Frye, the quest myth is derived also from this cycle of life and the seasons, since the quest is the pursuit of the humanly desirable, the ultimate good, which is lost in that rise and fall, or descent into darkness. To think imaginatively, for Frye, is to think within this cycle, chained to the eternal wheel of mythology, because that, without possible exception, is how the truly imaginative mind works.

I am not sure whether, in Frye, the psychological operations behind all this are explained by heredity or by environment. Professor Frye is not a metaphysician, he is a literary scholar; so that, unlike the philosophers Hegel or Kant, he does not provide a work of metaphysics to support his mythopoeic theory. Therefore we do not know whether the myth patterns occur because the human mind works that way from its inherent constitution — and what, therefore, this would imply about the nature of the universe in which such a mind was made to think that way — or whether the mythologies have come together by gradual accretion and boiling down, Professor Frye's being only the final distillation, or elixir, of a historical product. There is a third possible alternative: that they are constructions which result from a logical necessity, like mathematics, or perhaps the structure of atoms, things being what they are because they could logically not be otherwise without self-contradiction. Whatever the answer may be — and Professor Frye will no doubt eventually tell us — or maybe I have not read deeply enough to realize that it is already there — we have the archetypes as the key to how the imaginative mind thinks.

Clearly it's a very odd psychology. To get at these archetypes in any work of literature, says Professor Frye, you have to be a "literary psychologist".¹ This is a very strange expression. There is one human mind, and only one kind of psychologist, the psychologist of the human mind. If there is a special kind of *psychologist of literature* — or a special *mind of literature* — then we want to know what that is: it must be a new creation. Otherwise, let's get back to humanity, and the real sort of mind that general mankind is endowed with; let's not reserve a special kind of mind for the literary types.

Professor Frye, however, is on the side of the "specialists". He says: "The critic takes over where the poet leaves off, and criticism can hardly do without *a kind of literary psychology* connecting the poet with the poem."² [My underlining] Elsewhere he even supposes a special kind of unconscious as a storage-place for the archetypes. After all, the contents of the human mind that Professor Frye claims to have discovered do not correspond with those that Freud was so certain *he* had discovered — "scientifically", as Freud so often maintained — and they do not correspond with the multitudes of things that C. G. Jung claimed to have discovered in the collective unconscious. Freud has the Oedipus Complex, the Ego and the Id, the Superego and the Libido; Jung has the Anima, the Shadow, the Animus, Eros and Logos, the earth spirit Baubo, the mother imago and "the immemorial and most sacred archetype of the marriage of mother and son."³ Northrop Frye, however, has the cycle of the seasons and the genres, the quest myth, and the poles of paradise and hell. Every researcher who returns from that undiscovered country seems to bring back a different bag of tricks. And like the gold of El Dorado, the treasure turns to common rock as soon as the air of our prosaic world touches it. What they say about the unconscious is their own mythology, pure poetry; the secret life of the imagination is not so easy to put into a cage.

We should be clear where all these archetypes come from. Their origin is in Platonic philosophy, and their first appearance is recorded in Hermetic and Neo-Platonic writers, weird names like Philo Judaeus, Irenaeus, Hermes Trismegistus and Dionysius the Areopagite.⁴ The OED tells us that "In Platonic philosophy, archetypal is applied to ideas or forms of natural objects, held to have been present in the divine mind prior to creation, and still to exist, as cognizable by the intellect, independently of the reality or *ectypal* form." The OED quotes Francis Bacon as among the earliest English uses: "Let us seek the dignitie of knowledge in the Arch-tipe or first plat-forme, which is the attributes and acts of God." As Jung says, "'Archetype' is an explanatory paraphrase of the Platonic ."⁵ In other words, the archetype, like the Platonic idea and Kant's *Ding an Sich*, is an unknowable absolute posited by the theorist. Actual dreams, myths, poems, novels, are supposed to be derived from it, just as phenomena are derived from the *Ding and Sich* or from the absolute idea.

The archetype in itself is unknowable. But as we are well aware, modern man doesn't like transcendental absolutes. Only the known and the knowable is real for the modern. Therefore the archetypal philosophy must be made empirical and realistic. That is, the archetypes must be known by their appearances, not in their essence. This is so in both Jung and Frye. In Jung, the archetypes are only known by their conscious manifestations: "The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived . . ."⁶ In Frye, too, the archetype in itself is unknowable, it is a hidden

reality which is, so to speak, “reconstructed” by the critic: “Each event or incident . . . is a manifestation of some underlying unity, a unity that it both conceals and reveals . . .”⁷ “No rendering of any myth into conceptual language can serve as a full equivalent of its meaning.”⁸ And most important for literature, Frye makes the astonishing statement: “One essential principle of archetypal criticism is that the individual and the universal forms of an image are identical. . . .”⁹

In other words, the form in which you find them in poems, plays, short-stories and novels is identical with the archetypal form. In fact you can never get any nearer to the archetype than by reading *Paradise Lost*, and *The Tempest*, and “Tintern Abbey”, and Eliot’s “Ash Wednesday”. Actual works of literature are archetypes, and the archetypes are completely unrepresented by actual works of literature. (At least that’s what I understand from this, if Frye means what he says.)

WELL, NOW WE SEE the general area of philosophical thinking into which the archetypal psychology falls, and we see that it’s an empirical or secular form of the transcendental. Immanuel Kant is the Plato of modern philosophers; he told the scientific age that we know only appearances in the only way that the human mind knows appearances — through the categories of the understanding — but that behind what we know, the visible world, there is the noumenal or transcendental world we cannot know. The world is a great Christmas package, containing a secret, which you must not open until the great day arrives, that is, the Day of Judgment. After Kant, right up to our own time, poets and philosophers have tried to open that package, and get somehow, by trick or by cunning, at the noumenal reality hidden within. In trying to do this, most of them have used reality as the symbol or signature of the noumenal. For example, in the Romantic period, Nature became the key to the noumenal world. Schelling told Coleridge, and Coleridge told Wordsworth to look into Nature for “A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things. . . .” There’s no need to go into the whole history of romantic poetry. But as the nineteenth century wore on, the scientists were at work undermining the romantic theory of nature. They turned nature into dead inanimate matter — “an indifferent nature”, a vast empty “mindless hostility”, as Northrop Frye calls it — a mechanical monster described as the Grand Panjandrum in E. J. Pratt’s poem “The Truant”. I. A. Richards has called this scientific reductive idea “the neutralization of nature”: it seemed to put an end to the hope of finding the noumenon in the West Wind, or “the round ocean and the living air”.

So, if not the West Wind then perhaps the East Wind. No one has written an Ode to the East Wind. It’s high time that someone did; though by now it would not be “the trumpet of a prophecy” but the summary of a *fait accompli*. If the

external world of nature is not the source of revelation, then perhaps the opposite direction, the interior world of the mind may be that source. Here we come to the centre of Professor Frye's position. He derives the germ of his ideas from William Blake, a visionary poet for whom "All deities reside in the human breast"; who has uttered the shameful blasphemy, "Where man is not, nature is barren". Blake looked within himself for the source of all that the "Poetic Genius" creates: "Imagination, the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow. . . ." ¹⁰

Professor Frye's critical theory is based on the apocalyptic assumptions of visionary poetry. That is why he has pitched on Blake; why he reverts so often to the Book of Revelation; why he has borrowed the archetypes from C. G. Jung; why he refers at certain times to such writers as Ernst Cassirer and Mircea Eliade. (A good scholar leaves great big footprints all over the place so you can tell where he stole the stuff.) Thus Frye says in a crucial passage in "The Archetypes of Literature":

Patterns of imagery . . . or fragments of significance, are oracular in origin, and derive from the epiphanic moment, the flash of instantaneous comprehension with no direct reference to time, the importance of which is indicated by Cassirer in *Myth and Language*. By the time we get them, in the form of proverbs, riddles, commandments and etiological folk tales, there is already a considerable element of narrative in them. They too are encyclopaedic in tendency, building up a total structure of significance, or doctrine, from random and empiric fragments. And just as pure narrative would be unconscious act, so pure significance would be an incommunicable state of consciousness, for communication begins by constructing narrative.

The myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative to the oracle. Hence the myth *is* the archetype. . . . ¹¹

As we can see, this is a virtually religious statement, but a religion of a very special kind. The mystic who returns enlightened from the ecstatic experience usually tells us that he cannot describe or give an account of what he has seen or received. The visionary world is closed to reason and to our ordinary modes of knowing. But Northrop Frye has tried to put together what the mystic cannot express; he has assembled systematically what he considers to be the body of intellectual knowledge that is implied in mystical experience. More important still, he has found the fragments of that knowledge in literature: "building up a total structure of significance, or doctrine, from random and empiric fragments." And when particular writers like Dylan Thomas or William Blake have had the whole archetypal vision descend upon them, or like Milton, Spenser, and Shakespeare, they have constructed works of an epic or tragic wholeness, Frye has found the entire system implicit in works of literature.

Now, I should say one more thing about the archetypal theory before I leave it here. Like Ernst Cassirer, Professor Frye is a Renaissance scholar. The Renaissance is an outgrowth of the great centuries of religion; and the literature of the Renaissance is soaked in Christian reference and the theology of the Bible. If you are teaching literature in a modern school or university, this material is very hard to translate into valid contemporary terms: as we say, we have outlived all that — it's out of date — God is dead — science knows — and the frame of reference of traditional literature is dusty and moth-eaten as an old sofa. What Professor Frye has done is give this old paraphernalia a new shining look. He has made its concepts of Heaven and Hell, its kingly tragedies, its religious quest, eternal properties of the human mind. Thus the scheme of the Great Chain of Being, descending from God and the angels down to man, the animal creation, and so to plants, rocks and stones (which seemed to have been set aside by science) has been given a permanent place in literature by this new psychology. ("Psychological truth" is the phrase Jung has used¹² — it recurs in Robertson Davies — for things you *must* believe because, as they say, the mind is made to think that way. This used to be one of the standard proofs of God; now it's a proof of the archetypes.) Even the Ptolemaic astronomy, which Milton held fast to a half-century after Galileo, has been refurbished as a structural unit in the archetypal scheme. For the theory of archetypes nothing is ever out of date, and nothing is ever true — as relating to the common world we live in — it is all part of the eternal vision revealed by the awakened imagination. No wonder that people for whom all truths have vanished, or who find their traditional truths rather shaky, find this theory of literature very congenial.

I have spent some time wrestling with Northrop Frye, poking a little fun at him, trying to put his theory into perspective. What he did, however, had to be done. The visionary view of literature, which had gathered force through the nineteenth century and within which literature served as a kind of religion — in fact it replaced religion — has needed a full systematic statement of its theology. Frye's psychedelic view of literature — for that's what it is — where the archetypal background provides "an immense reverberating dimension of significance"¹³ to works of literature, needed to be put systematically on record. In fact, it is when it has been fully stated that we can stand away from this position and decide whether we want to accept it or not.

Personally, I do not. *Dubito ergo sum*. I cannot accept the view that someone else's oracular vision, or the revelation through literature of a supernal order of some kind, is the key to literature or to life. I cannot accept the view that the constructs of Northrop Frye — which are, after all, particular with him — are the patterns I must keep looking for when I read new novels and poems. I cannot accept the visionary view of literature, that something other than this world is

revealed, or some meaning other than that we know by the light of sense and reason is suddenly revealed by an extraordinary experience; and that some such special revelation, and not the light of common day, is the truth about life and art.

They "want a 'vision', / having the sun-blasted world before their eyes. / It has been given!" Whatever meaning life has, we have to create out of the material given us here. I cannot accept that imagination is pre-programmed as "A structural power, which, left to itself, produces vigorously predictable fictions." I revolt against a view of literature that sees in it "abstract story-patterns" with "interchangeable motifs that can be counted and indexed." I oppose the tyranny of a view which claims that "mythology as a total structure, defining as it does a society's religious beliefs . . . is the matrix of literature, and major poetry keeps returning to it." I do not want to keep "returning"; I want to go forward. And I believe that literature does go forward, as human thought goes forward.

With Frye, all the meaning is to be found in the past, or elsewhere than right there on the page. The great myths and archetypes rarely appear in toto in any particular poem or novel. The archetypal appears in bits and pieces only; and yet it is the real meaning you are to pick up. I object to this way of looking at literature. In one poem, for example — a poem by Irving Layton — Northrop Frye interprets two fragments, a reference to the sun as a "bloodsmear" and the phrase "my heart beating in the grass" as signifying "a hanged god or nature spirit torn apart and distributed through the landscape."¹⁶ Since there is no hanged god or nature spirit in the poem, this is to me a gratuitous importation which yet claims for itself the place of primary importance in the interpretation of the poem. "Each event or incident," says Frye, ". . . is a manifestation of some underlying unity . . ."¹⁷ I do not want to look for such an abstract unity, nor for any single meaning; I want multiplicity, and actuality, and a forever-expanding field of unpredictable useful meanings.

To understand this alternative, we must go back to the very roots of the psychology of literature. This has to do with the way man thinks and the way he has learned to think. The ultimate nature of things is unknown to us, but we know the world through our minds and our senses. This knowledge begins with perceived things, which later acquire meaning. The dog, the cat, the bird receives some image of an object — a bone, a mouse, a moving insect — so that he can effectively pursue that thing. Man must have begun his long mental history with the mere perception of things — he gave names to things — and he must have gone on to find relations between things, to "think with things". Lévy-Strauss in *The Savage Mind* gives us some inkling of the concreteness of primitive thought: its capacity to classify immense quantities of things and to relate things to one another by analogy and "magical" relation.

Art is often a leap forward in insight, but it also has something very archaic about it. It wants to go back to this method of thinking with things.

So much depends
 upon
 a red wheel
 barrow
 glazed with rain
 water
 beside the white
 chickens.

Why does so much depend upon the concrete thing, the vivid object? Imagine a wheelbarrow in the farmyard and chickens round-about: the farmer says to his son, "John, will you take that wheelbarrow into the barn, and be careful you don't scare the chickens." How does that wheelbarrow differ from Williams' Red Wheelbarrow? It differs because it is a mere object of utility, while the wheelbarrow in the poem is something more than that. The wheelbarrow in the poem is *an object of thought*, and as such carries meanings which the utility object does not have. What kind of meaning? Well, the kind that objects have when you "think with things". Not one meaning, but quite a number of possible meanings. A red wheelbarrow could suggest simply the idea of beauty, a beautiful red wheelbarrow; or it could connote labour, democratic values — red might even suggest communism; or it could suggest manure and dirt — that's what wheelbarrows carry; or it could suggest a heap of flowers — a red wheelbarrow might be in a flower garden; it could suggest bricks and building; it could suggest farming in general; it could suggest an old technology; it could suggest a decorated thing, no longer useful — a red wheelbarrow. . . . Ask your students what a red wheelbarrow means. Every answer is a possibility.

This kind of thinking is the oldest thinking in the world. When man advanced in consciousness beyond the dog and the cat, he learned to make things connect with other things, even "stand for them" — by analogy, by metaphor, by imaginative association — and the history of ideas began. Well, perhaps not yet the history of ideas, but the history of thought. For a very long time the primitive mind *thought only with things*, and learned to make complex connections between stories, significant objects, animals, trees and stones, ritual actions, masks, costumes — and the ordinary activities of life. There is obviously a great richness and value provided by the ambiguity and emotional impact of pure presentation. But this very ambiguity involves a lack of precision, and it is clear that as time went on man desired greater and greater precision, for some purposes, in his use of language. (This is the history of language from emotive symbolism to mathematics.) In the search for precision *thing-words* were frozen into what we call abstractions, old words in which some "thing" is hidden, but which now has become a name for a specific category. ("Abstract" used to mean *abs* — away and *traho* — I drag something; but nobody thinks of dragging anything at all

when they talk in abstractions: it all goes along smoothly like floating on air, from pure idea to pure idea.)

THIS PROCESS, in a way, goes counter to poetry and art, and one might even say that a great dividing line in the history of human culture, lost somewhere in the backwards of time, was marked by the transition from a language rich with symbolic concreteness to one made efficient and precise with abstractions. "Poetry has a limited tolerance for abstractions," says Northrop Frye, with whom I agree here; and he adds, "Poetry seeks the image rather than the idea."¹⁸ Fine, but here a small clarification is needed. The relation between concrete imagery and abstraction has been a very confusing problem in twentieth-century modern poetry, and it has not yet been properly solved. William Carlos Williams' dictum "No ideas but in things" is only a half-truth, or maybe even less. We can no longer have ideas *only* in things; that would be a regression to pre-history. There must be abstract ideas and there must be ideas in things; it's the proportion between them that remains the real issue for poetry.

"No ideas but in things," in any case, is an *idea* borrowed from Ezra Pound. And he learned it from Ernest Fenollosa, a scholar of Eastern languages, who pointed out that the Chinese language depended on concrete visual presentation, whereas English tended to non-visual abstraction. Ezra Pound ruined his *Cantos* with this idea, by making his poem a mere avalanche of concrete things, samples, without giving the reader much help in connecting these "things" together with clear abstract ideas. It's still a magnificent poem, very vivid and very suggestive of multitudes of meanings; but it lacks the proportion between connecting ideas and multifaceted realities that communication now demands. It pretends to be an epic with a coherent thought, but it has no coherent thought, either in the parts or in the whole.

Consider, in this light, William Carlos Williams' "Red Wheelbarrow". The key to this poem, the abstract idea that makes it a poem, and that gave him the push to write it, is right in the opening phrase:

So much depends
upon

The *thought* that so much depends upon concrete perception of an object — I do not even have to mention the red wheelbarrow and the chickens — the thought that actual things, experiences, are important, is the whole point of the poem. (You see, all the meanings suggested above, for "wheelbarrow", were wrong: it means simply an object, a concrete thing. What the images mean in a poem is controlled and limited by the idea.) Thus, Williams could hardly have had a poem without the idea.

A red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

These words, alone, would be a haiku. And that kind of poem, coming from Japan, assumes a preliminary preparation of thought, of meditation, so that things in themselves speak, evoking thoughts that are already in the mind.

Meditation, or thought, is the key. Whatever you look at, for itself, becomes an image fraught with meaning, a poem. You could have a real wheelbarrow standing in the yard, and keep looking at it, for itself, until it became a poem in your mind. But if you kept looking at it only sporadically, with the irritated thought, "I've got to get that thing out of the way!" it would never become a poem; it would remain an object of utility, not an object of thought.

Aristotle puts thought third in rank among the elements of a tragedy; but this is not really how he sees it. By thought, in the list of six elements, he means the statements or ideas expressed as such by the characters in their speeches. He places the narrative or plot first; characters second; but what he means by plot and characters has really a lot to do with thought. (Northrop Frye would of course agree.) The plot, for Aristotle, has to do with the pattern of action dealing with human happiness or misery; the characters have to do with moral nature, what a person loves or hates; and poetry, he tells us, is "more philosophical than history", so that the meaning of such a plot and such characters expresses a universal truth of life, not just a single incident. That is, the plot must be an idea of universal significance pertaining to human happiness or misery. I always begin the analysis of a novel or a play with the interpretation of its plot. The plot is the key to the whole meaning; it usually contains the meaning in a nutshell: and the meaning, or thought, is primary in all works of literature.

The right proportion between abstract ideas, or intentions, and the concrete presentation of realities is what we expect in any successful work. These things are so combined that the richness and ambiguity that pertains to concrete presentation — the action of a play or a novel, the images of a poem — are given direction and held in control by the general ideas; and neither is the work impoverished by too narrow a purpose, defined by abstraction, nor is it allowed to sprawl and lose itself in a vague and wandering chaos of particulars.

So now we have to ask, how is the meaning generated? And why is the meaning of literature, as distinct from editorials and essays, so powerful and lasting in its impact? Does it derive from archetypal forms, with their "reverberating signifi-

cance"? Or is there another source that explains their interest and continuing fascination?

For an answer to this, we must look to the psychology of creativity. The source of every work of literature is in a human individual, and that individual in a particular state of mind and motivation. What do we know about this? I would say, from long experience and observation, and after long resisting some of the conclusions it leads to, that creativity is a crisis phenomenon. It is the result of problems facing the individual psyche — exactly as Freud explained the origin of dreams — and it is an attempt to resolve these problems in complex symbolic forms.

(The crisis, of course, is internal; it doesn't have to show itself in any external disturbance — but often it does. I only have to mention Eliot's nervous breakdown after the writing of the *Wasteland*, Rilke's emotional upheavals in writing the *Duino Elegies*, Nietzsche's state of possession in writing *Zarathustra*, Dostoevsky's diarrhoea in writing *Crime and Punishment*, Ezra Pound's physical collapse in prison that resulted in the Pisan Cantos, to make it seem very likely that a psychological crisis of some kind usually accompanies the production of great works of literature.)

Gregory Bateson, anthropologist and psychologist, has a theory which asserts that "there is an experiential component in the determination or etiology of schizophrenic symptoms and related behavioral patterns, such as humour, art, poetry, etc." His theory "does not distinguish between these subspecies. Within its terms there is nothing to determine whether a given individual shall be a clown, a poet, a schizophrenic, or some combination of these."¹⁹

In any case, the first meaning of a poem, a novel, or a play, is biographical: it comes out of the tensions and dilemmas in the mind of the author, and it is therefore a concrete symbolic representation of these tensions and dilemmas. (Solutions are there sometimes; but these are solutions as he would hope to have them work, not real solutions that have resolved the problem finally. That is why didacticism is poor stuff in literature.) By "symbolic" I simply mean that the representation is mainly by means of "things", in the primitive way of thought, and that the "meaning" of these "things" presented is multi-faceted and has a continuing power to generate meaning and to be interpreted. Nothing mystical about this, simply an imaginative method of generating meaning.

The first meaning of a poem, a play, or a novel is biographical. But who is that much interested in the life-problems of the original artist? We can ignore the biographical meaning and still go on with it. Somehow, a transfer of personal symbolism to public symbolism occurs; and this is one of the mysteries of art psychology. (It involves the question of why some works are popular and some are not; why some works become classics and others are forgotten.)

When I said that the writing of literature is "a crisis phenomenon", I implied

that no one would think of constructing *The Magic Mountain* or *War and Peace* in the normal course of his daily activities. Our faculties were not evolved for that kind of undertaking. We think to act, and we communicate to join in communal action. However, when an individual is thrown into an impossible situation, it seems that his psyche plunges into itself, it resorts to the oldest and deepest forms of expression and communication to try to handle the crisis. So-called abnormal psychological manifestations appear — neurosis, and the foreshadowing of psychosis in various degrees — as the accompaniments of this resort to primitive emotional expression. The products of such a mind are highly-charged concrete emotional images, which contain in them many-sided relations to the world of experience; their object is to express, and to integrate, in the old way of “thinking with things” — with some help from the abstract intelligence, which tries to translate their significance and to resolve its own conflicts. I seem to be pushed for a moment into the realm of psychotherapy rather than literature, but I think you can see the relation of this to literature.

The world of rationality and of precise generalization is the one in which we normally live, and in which we sometimes get stranded high and dry if the vital juices don't reach us up here. But functional abstractions direct our everyday behaviour. And it certainly is a superior level of human existence, this realm of abstract conceptual thinking; on the practical plane it is absolutely essential to our existence as social beings. If we lose touch with these abstractions, or they become confused and disordered, we become alienated — or, as they say, “out of contact with reality”. Actually, it is “out of contact with unreality” — the world of concepts — but this fiction, or unreality, is necessary to our survival. “Psychosis,” a noted psychologist said to me recently, “is an intellectual disorder.”²⁰ The human being cannot function successfully when he reverts to being a plant or an animal.

At the higher level of rational consciousness when serious life-problems — personal and social problems — come upon us, and we cannot solve them in the usual rational way because they are too much for us, we inevitably regress to the older level of symbolic thinking. The rich human world of “things” is soaked in powerful emotions; we use it for expression — the symbolic projection of our state — and we struggle by means of it for integration, the resolution of our problems, at the level of fundamental subsistence.

Obviously, complete descent into the primitive irrational is catastrophic. For art and literature, cooperation between rationality and the concrete symbolic thought-process is the source of creative achievement. The cooperative working together of reason and archaic imagination is creative activity.

Now, the troubled individual is not alone. He is part of the group, the tribe, or the society in which he lives. If he is driven to extreme anguish, his state must be symptomatic of something in the group or the society. And as mankind has

dark sheep in the drill field and on wet days were clouds
in the mountain as if under the guard roosts.
A lizard upheld me
the wild birds wd not eat the white bread
from Mt Taishan to the sunset
From Carrara stone to the tower
and this day the air was made open
for Kuanon of all delights,
Linus, Cletus, Clement
whose prayers,
the great scarab is bowed at the altar
the green light gleams in his shell
plowed in the sacred field and unwound the silk worms early
in tensile

LIGHT

in the light of light is the *virtù*
"sunt lumina" said Erigena Scotus
as of Shun on Mt Taishan
and in the hall of the forebears
as from the beginning of wonders
the paraclete that was present in Yao, the precision
in Shun the compassionate
in Yu the guider of waters²²

From this quotation, and almost from every other example of major poetry, it will be at once clear that the integrating power of the imagination turns on large perspectives, on the great issues of life, and on the total frame of reference, rather than on the mere detail. It is essentially philosophical and religious. Despite the descent into particulars and into concrete things, the imagination in its deepest working generalizes the meanings that it combines into an order of rationality; it uses the particular for the general, and thus projects a total order. The crisis phenomenon, at its best, especially in art, releases a kind of super-sanity upon the mind, through images of total harmony, of perfection, and of ideal fulfilment, and this imagery of a desirable goal contains the general model of cure for the ills of any particular life.

SO I HAVE MADE the case that the individual suffering the crisis of a society makes his own pain and prayer the cry of agony and of hope for a whole society. He draws from his inner self emotional images that correspond to his own suffering and his desire for a cure and for salvation. Mankind is so constituted as a body that the individual and the group communicate empathically, just as birds break into panic at the sign of a cry from one bird. The community responds to the complex emotional expression of one exceptional individual. The

peculiarity of this multi-faceted communication is that its meanings proliferate and apply to ever-new conditions. What the artist expressed as perhaps his own personal neurosis, becomes comprehensible as a complex of signs referring to the age he lived in and its human problems. But then decades and centuries pass, and the *language of things* is re-translated again and again into meanings relevant for other times.

In teaching literature, therefore, it is the *language of things* — the ambiguity and suggestiveness of literary presentation — which should be our first object of study. We should learn by example and training to see how objects and incidents can serve to signify an ever-expanding aura of meaning, and how the thought in a poem or story helps to focus and control this meaning.

A good work of art has its own special way to steer the interpretation that we should recognize. Each one of us is born with a unique shape to his nature, a constitution of emotions, talents, predispositions. Life is a kind of electricity that works on this inner being, and modifies it, like an electric current inducing a strong magnetic force. In creating a poem or a story, the writer's powerful internal fields of force arrange the particles of his work — images, words, the shaping of a new reality — according to his inner nature, striving toward that self-realization we all desire. This is the direction of meaning that we must find in his work.

So a work of literature is a wonderful, complex, psychological entity. It has relation, first, to the private biography of the author. It is translated readily, usually by the author himself, into a statement about the problems of his own age, and of the world he lives in. It will be applied, later, to other times and other ages. It is never merely a *literal* statement or representation; it is always *literary*, that is an object of contemplation and communication. As such, it is a symbolic structure of multiple reference — what Pound has called an “inspired mathematics” — referring, not necessarily to any universal archetypes, but to all the unpredictable and yet possible eventualities of life and experience.

NOTES

¹ Northrop Frye, “The Archetypes of Literature” in *Fables of Identity* (New York, 1963), p. 13.

² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³ C. G. Jung, “Aion” in Violet S. de Laszlo, ed., *Psyche and Symbol: A Selection from the Writings of C. G. Jung* (Garden City, New York, 1958), p. 11.

⁴ See C. G. Jung, “The Collective Unconscious and Archetypes” in Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr., eds., *The Modern Tradition* (New York, 1965), pp. 642-643.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 643.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 643.

⁷ *Fables of Identity*, p. 24.

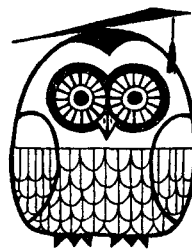
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- ¹⁰ Quotations from "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" and from "Jerusalem," preface to Chapter IV.
- ¹¹ *Fables of Identity*, pp. 15-16.
- ¹² C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven, 1938, 1960), p. 56. See also Robertson Davies, *Fifth Business* (Toronto, 1970), p. 207.
- ¹³ Northrop Frye, "Myth, Fiction, and Displacement" in *Fables of Identity*, p. 37.
- ¹⁴ Louis Dudek, *Atlantis* (Montreal, 1967), p. 99.
- ¹⁵ *Fables of Identity*, pp. 29, 31, 27, 33.
- ¹⁶ Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden* (Toronto, 1971), p. 53.
- ¹⁷ *Fables of Identity*, p. 24.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- ¹⁹ Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York, 1972), p. 272.
- ²⁰ Dr. Zygmunt A. Piotrowski, in conversation. A well-known Rorschach expert, he is honorary professor of psychiatry (psychology), Thomas Jefferson University of Philadelphia.
- ²¹ Peter Farb, *Man's Rise to Civilization* (New York, 1969), pp. 63-64.
- ²² Selections from Ezra Pound, *Pisan Cantos*.

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MOUNTAINEERS AND SWIMMERS

Tom Marshall

*Roberts, moving yet on the high
green hill over Tantrammar, needed
the distance from which he looks.
Carman, his cousin, not so lucky
as to have found distance,
made of our vagueness
a virtue, a voice for loss
and the uncertain floods of longing.¹*

IT IS INTERESTING to compare Roberts' poem "The Tantrammar Revisited" with Bliss Carman's "Low Tide on Grand Pré". Both poems are concerned (as is Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey", their likely ancestor) with loss and the return to a remembered landscape. But Roberts remains aloof from the beloved landscape, attempting to hold it unchanged in his mind:

Summers and summers have come, and gone with the flight of the
swallow;
Sunshine and thunder have been, storm, and winter, and frost;
Many and many a sorrow has all but died from remembrance,
Many a dream of joy fall'n in the shadow of pain.
Hands of chance and change have marred, or moulded, or broken,
Busy with spirit or flesh, all I most have adored;
Even the bosom of Earth is strewn with heavier shadows —
Only in these green hills, aslant to the sea, no change!
Here where the road has climbed from the inland valleys and
woodlands,
Dips from the hill-tops down, straight to the base of the hills —
Here, from my vantage-ground, I can see the scattering houses,
Stained with time, set warm in orchards, meadows and wheat,
Dotting the broad bright slopes outspread to southward and
eastward,
Wind-swept all day long, blown by the southeast wind.

From his vantage-ground Roberts surveys his country's stretching space but also recalls the precise details of interiors:

Yonder, toward the left, lie broad the Westmoreland marshes —
Miles on miles they extend, level, and grassy, and dim,

Clear from the long red sweep of flats to the sky in the distance,
 Save for the outlying heights, green-rampired Cumberland point;
 Miles on miles outrolled, and the river-channels divide them —
 Miles on miles of green, barred by the hurtling gusts.
 Miles on miles beyond the tawny bay is Minudie.
 There are the low blue hills; villages gleam at their feet.
 Nearer a white sail shines across the water, and nearer
 Still are the slim, grey masts of fishing boats dry on the flats.
 Ah, how well I remember those wide red flats, above tide-mark
 Pale with scurf of the salt, seamed and baked in the sun!
 Well I remember the piles of blocks and ropes, and the net-reels
 Wound with the beaded nets, dripping and dark from the sea!
 Now at this season the nets are unwound; they hang from the
 rafters
 Over the fresh-stowed hay in upland barns, and the wind
 Blows all day through the chinks, with the streaks of sunlight, and
 sways them
 Softly at will; or they lie heaped in the gloom of a loft.

Here is a power of observation like that of a Maritime realist painter. Roberts' verse is "Homeric" in its sweep and its enumeration of particulars, as Lampman was probably the first to note.² As the Tantramar lands are bounded and preserved by dykes, so the poet attempts to hold them in timeless suspension in the microcosm of a poem whose repetitions of phrase and whose rhythmic rise and return themselves embody the sense of an endless cycle.

Yet, as I sit and watch, this present peace of the landscape —
 Stranded boats, these reels empty and idle, the hush,
 One grey hawk slow-wheeling above yon cluster of haystacks —
 More than the old-time stir this stillness welcomes me home.
 Ah the old-time stir, how once it stung me with rapture —
 Old-time sweetness, the winds freighted with honey and salt!
 Yet will I stay my steps and not go down to the marshland —
 Muse and recall far off, rather remember than see —
 Lest on too close sight I miss the darling illusion,
 Spy at their task even here the hands of chance and change.

Roberts holds the landscape of remembered happiness at a distance. He seems to want to be godlike, above the battle. By contrast, Bliss Carman immerses himself in the intensely re-lived experience of love and loss in "Low Tide on Grand Pré". The landscape is made expressive both of his remembered joy and the grief that followed it.

A grievous stream, that to and fro
 Although the fields of Acadie
 Goes wandering, as if to know
 Why one beloved face should be
 So long from home and Acadie.

Was it a year or lives ago
 We took the grasses in our hands,
 And caught the summer flying low
 Over the waving meadow lands,
 And held it there between our hands?

The while the river at our feet —
 A drowsy inland meadow stream —
 At set of sun the after-heat
 Made running gold, and in the gleam
 We freed our birch upon the stream.

There down along the elms at dusk
 We lifted dripping blade to drift,
 Through twilight scented fine like musk,
 Where night and gloom awhile uplift,
 Nor sunder soul and soul adrift.

* * *

Then all your face grew light, and seemed
 To hold the shadow of the sun;
 The evening faltered, and I deemed
 That time was ripe, and years had done
 Their wheeling underneath the sun.

So all desire and all regret,
 And fear and memory, were naught;
 One to remember or forget
 The keen delight our hands had caught;
 Morrow and yesterday were naught.

The night has fallen, and the tide. . . .
 Now and again comes drifting home,
 Across these aching barrens wide,
 A sigh like driven wind or foam:
 In grief the flood is bursting home.

At first everything is hazy, as in an impressionist painting or a romantic film resorting to slow-motion. For a magical moment it had once seemed as if love could stop time. The captured bird, the slowed stream, the rhyme-scheme and the metre reinforce this idea. But the final stanza returns us to the present with a vengeance. The bird of happiness (or youth?) escapes; it is the sun (and not "time") that falls like a ripe fruit; days and summers end; the tide comes in. The hands of chance and change are victorious here, too, but unlike Roberts, Carman makes no attempt to distance himself from the situation. He lets it, so to speak, wash over him.

Roberts, at his best in "realistic" poems of observation, is the man who culti-

vates olympian detachment; Carman, the lyrical impressionist who advised "paint the vision, not the view", is the man who plunges into emotional experience.³ Many of our best poets later on have been either mountaineers, who "free" their myths from fact (Pratt, Birney, Purdy, Newlove), or swimmers who explore their depths (Klein, Layton, Cohen, MacEwen, Atwood). These figures, as anyone who has read much Canadian poetry knows, actually occur in some of our most significant poems, a thing not surprising in a country with so much rock and water about. Sometimes, as in Frank Scott's poem "Lakeshore", the figures of swimmer and man on mountain (in this instance Noah) are combined. Mountains evoke (among other things) objectivity and a god's-eye view of the dangerous external world, water the ever-changing depths of the self, the collective unconscious and the racial and evolutionary past. But it is, as I suggested before, a difference of emphasis or method rather than of essential purpose that I mean to stress, since all good poems embody the relationship between inner and outer worlds, and great art is subjective and objective at once. Consciousness involves a continuing inter-action between "fact" and "dream".⁴

ROBERTS was the first Canadian poet of impressive achievement. He deserves his special position as the father of Canadian poetry, and, as we know, he gave particular impetus and inspiration to Archibald Lampman, who in turn encouraged Duncan Campbell Scott. In this context Lampman's well-known account of his discovery of *Orion* is worth our examination:

It was almost ten years ago, and I was very young, an undergraduate at college. One May evening somebody lent me *Orion and Other Poems*, then recently published. Like most of the young fellows about me I had been under the depressing conviction that we were situated hopelessly on the outskirts of civilization, where no art and no literature could be, and that it was useless to expect that anything great could be done by any of our companions, still more useless to expect that we could do it ourselves. I sat up all night reading and re-reading *Orion* in a state of the wildest excitement and when I went to bed I could not sleep. It seemed to me a wonderful thing that such work could be done by a Canadian, by a young man, one of ourselves. It was like a voice from some new paradise of art calling us to be up and doing. A little after sunrise I got up and went out into the college grounds. The air, I remember was full of the odour and cool sunshine of the spring morning. The dew was thick upon the grass. All the birds of our Maytime seemed to be singing in the oaks, and there were even a few adder-tongues and trilliums still blossoming on the slope of the little ravine. But everything was transfigured for me beyond description, bathed in an old world radiance of beauty [by] the magic of the lines that were sounding in my ears, those divine verses, as they seemed to me, with their Tennyson-like richness and strange, earth-loving, Greekish flavour. I have never forgotten that morning, and its influence has always remained with me.⁵

What I find interesting in this passage, apart from the attractive enthusiasm of youth, is the suggestion that poetry, acting upon the mind and sense, fuses two worlds, the immediate physical beauty of Canadian spring ("our Maytime") and the "old" world (which is, to the Canadian on the outskirts of civilization, a dream-world) of the cultural past: "everything was transfigured . . . bathed in an old-world radiance of beauty [by] the magic of the lines that were sounding in my ears, those divine verses . . . with their Tennyson-like richness and strange, earth-loving, Greekish flavour." These poets, as British North Americans, felt the need to impose the European cultural past on Canada.

Possibly, as I suggested before, the savagery and mystery of Greek myth — the stories of Orion, Marsyas and Acteon for Roberts — proves more appropriate to the savage and beautiful character of the new land than the high art of settled Europe. A classical education could take on a new meaning in a harshly lovely land.⁶ Looking at Roberts' poems one feels that something in the nature of the new land could, with some degree of appropriateness, be rendered in terms of a "Greekish" and "earth-loving" (though hardly a Tennysonian) sensibility. Consider these lines from "Orion":

All the morning's majesty
And mystery of loveliness lay bare
Before him; all the limitless blue sea
Brightening with laughter many a league around
Wind-wrinkled, keel-uncloven, far below;
And far above the bright sky-neighbouring peaks
And all around the broken precipices,
Cleft-rooted pines swung over falling foam,
And silver vapours flushed with the wide flood
Of crimson slanting from the opening east . . .

This could as easily be Canada as Greece; the passage has the same sense of distances as does "The Tantrammar Revisited" but not, unfortunately, the complementary vivid focus on particulars. Instead we get this "classical" description of a woman:

For there beside him, veiled in a mist
Where — through the enfolded splendour issued forth —
As delicate music unto one asleep
Through mist of dreams flows softly — all her hair
A mist of gold flung down about her feet,
Her dewy, cool, pink fingers parting it
Till glowing lips, and half-seen snowy curves
Like Parian stone, unnerved him, waited SHE . . .

This mélange of mist, music, gold and marble tangled up in a somewhat labyrinthine syntax may (or may not) have excited the undergraduate Lampman, but

it is more likely to suggest a coy, artfully posed statue to us than the warmblooded woman called for in Roberts' happy ending to the story of Orion. The "Tennysonian" prevails.

Roberts is at his best in almost purely descriptive landscape poems. He shies away from any very acute consideration of human relationships, and his overtly "philosophical" poems are too grandly general to be very convincing. Aside from "The Tantramar Revisited", it is the sonnets — "The Potato Harvest", "The Pea-Fields" and "The Winter Fields" in particular — that constitute his lasting achievement as a poet. Except for the delightful "Pea-Fields" these poems tend to be sombre in tone.

I like to ask my students whether these poems make them think of another well-known poet, and someone usually volunteers the name of Robert Frost. "The Winter Fields" is similar in theme to Frost's poems "The Onset" and "Desert Places". In all three of these poems there is sharp observation of the coming of winter, but there is this important difference: Frost is strongly present in his poems both as distinctive voice and as character; Roberts is the remote, god-like observer. Unlike his pupil, Lampman, he would never offer such self-revelation as we find in this famous passage from Frost's "Desert Places":

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars — on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.

It is also interesting that Frost, an American wrestling with the optimistic ghost of Roberts' and Carman's kinsman, Emerson, is able to suggest the possibility imaged in the snow's blankness — that existence may be a meaningless void — while the Canadian Roberts refuses, in his official "philosophical" poems, the possible implications of his own description of New Brunswick's "amber wastes of sky", "wide flats", "lonely flush", "lonely reaches", "waste of hard and meagre weeds", "brackish pools and ditches blind", "low-lying pastures of the wind", "crying knives", and "sleet and frost that bites like steel" — these quotations are all from the descriptive sonnets — affirming instead (in the windily unconvincing "In the Wide Awe and Wisdom of the Night") an Emersonian "august infinitude of Man." It is not so far, after all, from New Hampshire to New Brunswick. In his anguished doubt and self-doubt the somewhat younger Frost became a modern poet. Roberts maintained an official Victorian optimism, but only, it appears, by refusing to enter completely his native space. Still, the best poems remain to show us that he began the journey.

Carman too exhibits a certain cultural schizophrenia. The official optimism of British and American taste-makers sorts ill with his sense of the haunted quality of his homeland. His emotions are usually expressed in terms of natural processes,

most notably those of autumn's colourful decline and decay. His characteristic self-images are tiny flowers, moths, children or waifs, whose beauty is ephemeral and doomed. He feels what I have called the eeriness of the Canadian space:

Come, for the night is cold
The ghostly moonlight fills
Hollow and rift and fold
Of the eerie Ardise hills!

The windows of my room
Are dark with bitter frost,
The stillness aches with doom
Of something loved and lost.

In this poem, "A Northern Vigil", the absence of an imaginary girl named Guendolyn, who is characterized as the soul of the place, is lamented, i.e. this place is empty of spirit or meaning. The early Carman seems quite happy with Edgar Allan Poe's myth of the lost beloved, and perhaps feels himself, as Poe apparently did, to be a culturally displaced person.

A little later, having gone completely American, he writes his cheerful but empty vagabondia poems to protest, unconvincingly, a Whitmanesque optimism. There are also, however, poems on classical themes (like "The Dead Faun", which objectifies Carman's own sense of death and loss in terms of the classical world), the successful adaptations of Sappho, and a mixing of mythologies that foreshadows the work of Leonard Cohen. (In a number of ways Carman was the Leonard Cohen of his time, a restless man with a remarkable lyric gift much appreciated by an international public; one could even view Cohen's song "Suzanne" as an updated version of Carman's "Lady of the Rain": in each a versatile mother-goddess or Isis-figure is celebrated).⁷

It seems to me, as I've suggested above, that Carman's best poems convey a sense of loss, of that psychological and cultural displacement that many sensitive Canadians have experienced. Carman does not, like Crawford and Lampman and Scott, go forward from this to engage the gods of place on their own ground. But he leaves us, in his own vague, musical and impressionistic fashion, with an atmosphere, a sense of the problem.

NOTES

¹ Tom Marshall, "Macdonald Park."

² A. J. M. Smith (ed.), *Masks of Poetry* (Toronto, 1962).

³ *Literary History of Canada*, p. 413.

⁴ "I often wish," said Carman, "that I could rid the world of the tyranny of facts. What are facts but compromises? A fact merely marks the point where we have agreed to let investigation cease. Investigate further and your fact disappears. Under the scrutiny of thought all facts are alike, from the atom to the universe . . .

and they dissolve ...” (James Cappon, *Bliss Carman’s Beginnings*, *Queen’s Quarterly*, Autumn 1929, p. 657). More recently, William Irwin Thompson writes interestingly of the physicists Weizsäcker and Heisenberg and their awareness of the “psychological implications of the quantum theory” in his *Passages About Earth* (New York, 1974): “... if the modes of perceiving [subatomic particles] through laboratory instruments and mathematics after the material itself, then, as Heisenberg would say, we no longer have a science of nature, but a science of the mind’s knowledge about nature” (p. 91). Similarly, the most basic techniques of poetry (which are extensions of the body’s modes of sense-perception) after the “object” of the poet’s attention, however “objective” he may think he is being. His true “subject” and what it is that demands that he find the exact form for his utterance, is himself experiencing the world.

⁵ “Two Canadian Poets: A Lecture, 1891,” *Masks of Poetry*, p. 30.

⁶ Similarly, a biblical story could express man’s relationship to a cruel nature. Northrop Frye has elucidated the hidden “Canadian content” of Heavyside’s “Jephthah’s Daughter” (*The Bush Garden*, pp. 150-51).

⁷ In a letter to Michael Ondaatje in 1967 or so I called Cohen (rather unfairly) “the Bliss Carman of the sixties”. Later, looking at *Read Canadian*, I noticed that Dennis Lee had had at some point a similar thought.

IDLE

Anne Corkett

I could believe
I am water — disliking
pressure, I meander; am much
given to idle
reflection.

There is a certain
amount to be learned
from the way water
manages its shallows,
the dull resistance
of stones, the earth
readily giving way.

I could believe
I am all things did
I not lack the perfect
accord of things whose
purpose is not
to seek purpose
but to teach there is
no elemental bar to the design.

ANNE HÉBERT

A Pattern Repeated

Kathy Mezei

IN LES CHAMBRES DE BOIS,¹ Anne Hébert tells a simple story with few characters, little action, an uncomplicated plot. Amid the bleakness of a mining town, Catherine, the heroine, brings up her sisters under the shadow of her brooding, silent father. She encounters, in a Gothic atmosphere of misty forests and a forbidding ancestral mansion, the young and sensitive *seigneur*, Michel. He carries her off to Paris where they both hope to escape the prison of their unhappy, loveless pasts. But, Michel, an *artiste manqué*, imprisons her in *les chambres de bois*, a stifling world of dreams. Michel's sister, Lia, arrives and the two siblings, caught in a strange and destructive relationship, exclude Catherine who finally falls deathly ill. In one last desperate gesture of defiance, Catherine leaves Michel and Lia and goes to recuperate in the sunny Mediterranean. Here she meets the earthy Bruno and becomes attuned, once again, to the natural, real world.

Anne Hébert's language is sparse and precise, *dépouillé*. Time and space are anonymous, and are, in fact, internalized; the real time and space of the novel exist *within* the characters, *within* their dreams, *within* the confined world created by Michel and Lia in their *chambres de bois*. The tone of this novel, its symbolic language, its deceptive simplicity, its timeless, spaceless quality, its paradoxical concrete abstractness are reminiscent of a fable. It is a story of a journey through death and stagnation into life, of the affirmation of life, and of the struggle of life against the forces of darkness, death and evil. The movement experienced in this novel and reflected symbolically through language, theme and image is the repetition of a pattern developed within individual poems and throughout the body of Anne Hébert's work.

The clear and dramatic development that occurs in Anne Hébert's writing, is a development that can be traced from her earliest poems, *Les Songes en équilibre*, through to her latest novel, *Kamouraska*, and to the poems in *Mystère de la parole* and her most recent poems. Moreover this development is reflected in microcosm in both the poem, "Le Tombeau des rois", and in *Les Chambres de bois*. In fact, a very close affinity exists between the volume of poetry *Le Tombeau des rois* and *Les Chambres de bois*:

Il y a, entre *Le Tombeau des rois* et *Les Chambres de bois*, plusieurs rapprochements, même anecdotiques, qu'il nous paraît important de relever. La thématique du roman est précisément celle des poèmes: le langage symbolique des *Chambres de bois* fait écho à celui du recueil; enfin, la technique structurale du roman est éclairée par le lien secret qui joint les uns aux autres les poèmes.²

In *Les Songes en équilibre*, the young poet explores the external world, composing a type of inventory about what she sees and feels; she is discovering the world:

Laissez-moi mes yeux!
Laissez mes yeux
Courir sur le monde
Comme la couleur sur la mer!

(“Tableau de grève”, *Songes*)

It is a world clouded with *songes* which represent a way of interpreting and dealing with the reality that begins to close in on her. The basic emotions here are a combination of joy and melancholy.

Le Tombeau des rois carries us into a world where the poet has some experience in the Blakean sense. Here and in *Les Chambres de bois* and in the short stories, the poet explores the inner world to the limits of anguish and death; she descends into herself, into hell, into *les chambres fermées* towards the realm of death, confronts death and either emerges victorious like the falcon in “Le Tombeau des rois”, with “les prunelles crevées”, like Catherine into the arms of Bruno, or succumbs to the raging river, and death, like Francois in *Le Torrent*.

Then, with *Mystère de la parole* and *Kamouraska*, the poet bursts into a vigorous, joyful affirmation of life and the poetic word, an acceptance of the self and the world, a delight in passion with all its accompanying sorrows and ecstasies:

Que celui qui a reçu fonction de la parole vous prenne en charge comme un coeur ténébreux de surcroît, et n'ait de cesse que soient justifiés les vivants et les morts en un seul chant parmi l'aube et les herbes.³

Not only is the poet's vision altered, but also her style and language. In *Le Torrent* and *Les Songes en équilibre* the language is personal, subjective, effusive like the rush of the torrent, a little undisciplined, but already revealing the precise, cutting images so characteristic of Anne Hébert. In *Le Tombeau des rois* and *Les Chambres de bois*, the image is more concise, the language sparse, controlled, even more *depouillé*. The experience is still subjective but has been assimilated and carefully moulded into the form and structure. The language is as clear and limpid as a deep pool, though in the case of the novel, it appears stilted and enclosed.

In *Mystère de la parole* and later poems, “Le jour qui fut”, “Pluie”, “Fin du monde”,⁴ and in *Kamouraska*, there is a mature, sophisticated control of language and form. Here we find a richness — not the undisciplined effusions of adolescence, nor the awkward, too deliberate exactitude of an author seeking a style, but

the richness of a maturity of expression and vision. The lines of *Mystère de la parole* roll on, long, expansive, overflowing; the sentences in *Kamouraska* are short but energetic, comprising the abrupt thoughts of a harassed woman; both works abound with a wealth of emotion and imagery not found in *Chambres* or *Le Tombeau des rois*. We have moved from a poetry of silence and immobility, through *le tombeau des rois* and *les chambres de bois* towards a *poésie de la parole* and movement, from *Les Chambres de bois* which says little to *Kamouraska* which tells all.

We then discover that the movement within *Chambres* is similar to that within the poem, "Le Tombeau des rois": descent into the tomb or room (self), confrontation with death and, finally, a mutilated but promising affirmation of life. It must not be forgotten that this "rebirth" of Catherine in Part Three is not without drawbacks, for Bruno never takes on a strong or vital character and we are left wondering whether Catherine will fall passive victim to just another man's desires, different though they may be from Michel's. Similarly, the child who emerges from the tomb, in the poem, does so with "les prunelles crevées".

This descent into the self, symbolized by the *chambres de bois*, the tombs of kings, the long night, in order to explore and confront the limits of death and silence, to struggle through fever, against "la main sèche qui cherche le coeur pour le rompre" (*Poèmes*, p. 61), and this re-emergence into the light of dawn, is a recurring movement in the poems, stories and novels. *Les Chambres de bois* can thus be seen as drawing together the themes and images of *Le Tombeau des rois* and becomes a culminative prose expression of the poetic concerns of that volume. It almost seems as if Anne Hébert found it necessary to repeat, in prose, once again, that process she ceaselessly explores in the poetry of *Le Tombeau des rois*. By focussing firstly on the themes, then on the images and finally on the symbols that insist their way through her work, we can further understand the development of Anne Hébert's work. The image forms the core of her work. From the images are constructed the structural and thematic patterns of the novel. The precise and emotive images that haunt the reader with their strange and impressionistic accuracy comprise Anne Hébert's chief mode of perception and expression.

BASICALLY one theme permeates the whole of this novel, as well as most of the poems in *Le Tombeau des rois*, the short stories and the plays. Anne Hébert continually recreates "l'expression littéraire d'une incapacité de vivre".⁵ Man confronted by the bleakness, the harshness, the despair of his existence, appalled by the spectre of death ("Une petite morte/s'est couchée en travers de la porte"),⁶ recoils from life, from the fact of death, retreats into himself, into *la chambre fermée*: "Nous nous forçons de vivre à l'intérieur".⁷ Here he experi-

ences a type of living death, ("Nous menons une vie si minuscule et tranquille"),⁸ dwelling in the past, in some lost and fantastic childhood, locked in silence. He either remains there like Michel in this "Chambre fermée / Coffre clair ou s'enroule mon enfance / Comme un collier désenfilé",⁹ or rebels violently, fatally like François in "Le Torrent". Some poems are concerned with the "inventory" of *les chambres de bois*, others with articulating the despair of being locked in one's childhood, in silence, in the past, in "ce doux ravin de gel / en guise de mémoire", cut off from the world. The other alternative chosen by Catherine, by Isabelle, Lucie, Sébastien (*Le Temps sauvage*), by the child in "Le Tombeau des rois", is to escape to a more open and satisfying life. It is only in *Mystère de la parole* that the "poet" accepting the earth in all its beauty and horror can partake in a genuine rebirth or incarnation.

This "incapacité de vivre" is a common trait of Anne Hébert's characters: "Je me gardais de la vraie connaissance qui est expérience et possession" cries François in *Le Torrent*. Why is he, like Michel and Lia, "un enfant dépossédé du monde"? Why does Michel insist upon *un refus de la vie, du réel*? What is Michel's strange attraction for death? And, above all, why is the main response to this despair a refuge into the dream, the chamber, the *château*, the night or the barren wilderness? What is this *absence* that envelops the characters like a cloak of anguish: this absence without, which is the rejection of the forces of life, this absence within, which is symbolic of an incapacity to love: "Je me pendrai / A la place de son cœur absent" ("La Fille maigre", *Poèmes*). Only during that one hour between day and night is Michel "sauvé de toute absence et de toute crainte", is Michel capable of caressing his wife, Catherine.

Isolated and embittered, Claudine, François' mother in *Le Torrent*, lives in the forest with her son. By depriving herself and her child of any human warmth, she hopes to compensate for bearing an illegitimate child.

Agnes, in *Le Temps sauvage*, equally embittered, attempts to isolate her family in the mountains. By living in seclusion she aspires to avoid the pain that life inflicts, the pain she once suffered when she lost her fiancé to her sister.

Michel and Lia, bound by strange loyalties, tainted forever by the arrogance, pride and depravity of an aristocratic but decaying family for whom affection does not exist, only indolence, ostentation and cruelty, shut themselves up in *les chambres de bois* in a futile existence of half-read books, unfinished paintings, and childhood memories.

Agnes in *Le Temps sauvage* articulates the nature of this barren existence: "La plus grande réussite de ce monde, ce serait de demeurer parfaitement secret, à tous à soi-même, sans âge ni raison, ni responsabilité, une espèce de temps sauvage, hors du temps et de la conscience" (*Le Temps sauvage*). The inner self becomes a kind of locked cabinet, containing dark and mysterious secrets. Is not this long,

monotonous season, unmarked by age or reason or responsibilities, a kind of wild time beyond time and consciousness, the very goal of Michel?

This feeling of exile that Anne Hébert is continually expressing in one form or another has its seeds (in the terms of reference provided by her writing) in the alienating experience of family life, of a deprived or lonely childhood, a morbid past, in the harsh, unrelenting land and climate; seeds which fall on fertile ground in the sensitive, neurotic, passive natures of Anne Hébert's protagonists. Moreover, Anne Hébert's preoccupation with this "absence au réel", this "refus du présent",¹⁰ can be traced to the kind of Catholicism prevalent in Quebec with its Jansenist orientation:

Tout notre passé est inscrit dans cette séduction de l'absence et tout notre présent est au travail dans cette inexorable métamorphose de l'oeuvre, dans ce voyage souterrain vers la lumière, vers la possession et l'accomplissement [...] la présence n'est acquise qu'à travers une absence vécue jusqu'à l'absurde. Il y a toute la nuit à traverser pour retrouver l'aube et tout l'irréel à arpenter avant d'accéder de nouveau à une géographie de l'homme. Les diverses modalités d'une absence habitée par la tentation de la mort donnent à l'oeuvre d'Anne Hébert sa dimension tragique.¹¹

But it is not the *reason* as much as the *portrayal* of this state of being that concerns Anne Hébert. This, then, leads us to the other themes which form an intricate part of the "incapacité de vivre". These are the themes of childhood, the past, dreams, death, solitude and silence, enclosed space (and time) and finally, the inability to love.

If we pause for a moment and reflect upon these prevalent themes, we realize that this obsession with closed rooms, memories, dreams, the past, solitude, is really an obsession with enclosed time and space. Anne Hébert's most intriguing image stems from her various renderings of this enclosed space. The title of the novel, *Les Chambres de bois*, is vital proof of that. The enclosed space, be it tomb or *château*, is symbolic of a soul closed in upon itself, of a stultified inner existence, of a neurotic self-obsession. Many of the poems in *Le Tombeau des rois* develop around this image and it is interesting to note, at this point, some of the correspondences between these poems and the novel.

In "Vieille Image", it becomes necessary to burn the *château*, relic of childhood days; the *château* described here reminds us of the home of Michel and Lia: "Ce mirage de château / A la droite / De notre enfance" (*Poèmes*). In "Un Mur à peine", the poet is drained of life, is enclosed in a walled garden because of the "liens durs / Que j'ai noués / En je ne sais quelle nuit secrète / Avec la mort!" (*Poèmes*).

The voice of "La Chambre fermée" could well be that of Catherine, crying out, "Qui donc m'a conduite ici?". She describes this "chambre fermée" where she is

placed like a sacrificial Christ, arms spreadeagled, her heart cut from her breast. The last verse foreshadows the novel:

Laisse, laisse le feu teindre
La chambre de reflets
Et mûrir et ton coeur et ta chair;
Tristes époux tranches et perdus.

(*Poèmes*)

Do not "tristes époux tranches et perdus" inhabit *les chambres de bois*, and is not Catherine set to "ripen" into a beautiful playmate for Michel within those rooms?

The poem entitled "La Chambre de bois" is closely linked to the novel, and, again, the voice emerging from the poem could be Catherine's. The inhabitant dwells there, imprisoned with her anguished senses while life surges at her window: "La place du monde flambe comme une forge / L'angoisse me fait de l'ombre / Je suis nue et toute noire sous un arbre amer" (*Poèmes*).

The poem "Vie de château" describes a life that has a clear affiliation with the life led by Michel and Catherine. I quote it in full:

C'est un château d'ancêtres
Sans table ni feu
Ni poussière ni tapis.

L'enchantement pervers de ces lieux
Est tout dans ses miroirs polis.

La seule occupation possible ici
Consiste à se mirer jour et nuit.

Jette ton image aux fontaines dures
Ta plus dure image sans ombre ni couleur.

Vois, ces glaces sont profondes
Comme des armoires
Toujours quelque mort y habite sous le tain
Et couvre aussitôt ton reflet
Se colle à toi comme une algue

S'ajuste à toi, mince et nu,
Et simule l'amour en un lent frisson amer.

(*Poèmes*)

Here we find the same spartan inventory of furniture as in the novel. There is the same futile preoccupation of gazing in the mirror at oneself, that is, delving into one's inner self. As the novel illustrates, the hazard of this preoccupation is that "toujours quelque mort y habite sous le tain". The "dead man" who feigns love in a slow bitter shudder bears a strong resemblance to "l'étrange amour de Michel".

In "Le Tombeau des rois" we find that the enclosed space has narrowed from a *château* to a chamber to become, finally, a tomb, the resting place of corpses, the space that encloses death.

In *Les Chambres de bois*, we move from the seigneurial mansion, "trapue aux fenêtres longues et étroites", from Catherine's home where her recluse father "parût apaise au coeur de sa maison bien close" into *les chambres de bois*, "ces deux seules pièces lambrissées de bois, aux meubles anciens, aux bibelots rares, aux objets usuels incommodes ou abîmés."

As if this tiny apartment were not small enough, Michel constructs "une petite maison de paille", composed of his narrow iron cot and his piano, so that he can retire even further into his solitude. He then proceeds to fashion another tiny camping ground, "au coin du feu, en cet espace réduit" for himself and Lia, where "des verres, des livres, des cigarettes, des cendriers débordants de mégots s'entassèrent sur le tapis et marquèrent les places de Michel et Lia". Their life is now encompassed by this "espace réduit". Excluded from all this, Catherine has found her own space: "Catherine s'enfermait volontiers dans le petit cabinet de toilette qui était tout en glaces." She amuses herself with "la seule occupation possible ici / Consiste à se mirer jour et nuit." But when she leaves the *chambres de bois* to recuperate at the seaside, the space opens up, the land spreads towards the sea, the windows of her bedroom look out over gardens, over the sea and much of her time is spent in the open air. In this way, Anne Hébert attempts to create a feeling of freedom and release.

IT IS INTERESTING TO note that in *Mystère de la parole*, the image of rooms or houses expands into cities; these, with their brimming, bustling life become the key image; we pass out from the cloistered rooms to mingle in the life of the city. By existing in a tiny space where little happens Michel hopes to make time stand still. For him, real time exists in the bittersweet years of his childhood, real space in the faraway family home. Both are beyond his reach, especially when Lia sells the estate to her lover.

Lia has sought to expand her experience of time and space, her memories are not just childhood fantasies but memories of her lover; she has visited far and distant lands; she attempts to present a piano concert. But when her experience of love grows bitter, when her concert is a failure, like a wounded animal, she seeks shelter in the comfort of the arid existence created by her brother. By attempting to make time stand still, by further and further narrowing their space of habitation, Michel and Lia hope to avoid pain by avoiding experience. And enclosed time becomes a metaphor of enclosed space and vice versa. In a small apartment with the curtains drawn, one can barely distinguish between night and day, mark the passing of the seasons.

However, the result of this desperate retreat from the motion and flow and dimension that constitute the forces of life is a withdrawal into the self. Then, time is perceived in terms of memory, as an ever-present past. Feeding upon oneself, in this way, becomes a destructive and sadistic act. The time and space that Michel inhabits is that of his own inner self. But what a barren, frozen, tormented place that is! Its main quality being that of *absence*, what a desperate existence he has sentenced himself to! And so, the cluttered and gloomy apartment is merely the metaphor of his own close and unhappy soul.

To prevent external time and space from encroaching upon him, Michel insists upon living in the dark; he does his work by night and sleeps during the day, frantically avoiding the sunlight. "Il ne faut pas reveiller Michel, le jour l'irrite et le blesse; moins il en a, plus il vit," Lia informs Catherine.

Catherine attempts to share this constricted world of Michel. But the memories of the past that haunt Michel are not real to her and she is stifled in the tiny apartment: "Moi, j'ai toujours aimé le jour et l'été." She wants to run barefoot in the puddles — to feel the earth pulsing beneath her feet. She, unlike Michel and Lia, does not possess the deep and mysterious resources of the self that subsume any desire to dwell in the present and to experience the flow of life around them. She is, in many ways, a superficial person, a passive person; yet the profoundness of Michel and Lia, tormented as they are, does not seem particularly enviable.

Closely allied to this incapacity to live, is the inability to love. Here is another theme that permeates Quebec literature. Love in the novel is either an act of desperation or violence, tragically resolved, or at best, a calm and sensible agreement between two people. These relationships are sketchily portrayed, they erupt quickly, and no other alternative seems feasible. In other words, they are not developed realistically. But this tends to enhance the fable-like quality of the novel. Anne Hébert does not intend to delve into the psychology of her characters, their lives or emotions; she wishes to suggest a certain state of being, evoke a certain mood. We are in the realm of stark charcoal sketches, not rich oil paintings.

We have seen how images of *châteaux*, *chambres de bois*, develop the theme of enclosed space, of *un refus de la vie*. It is these images that form, enhance, and reveal the themes of the novel. Words for Anne Hébert become symbols and we can observe how these symbols thread their way throughout the entire body of her work and complement her thematic concerns. Her most effective and striking symbols seem to fall into three corresponding categories: the body, nature and the house. There is a correlation between the components of these categories. For example, the parts of the body such as eyes, heart, hands (fingers), breath (song), bones correspond to water (rain, fountains), forest, branches, wind, trees in nature which in turn correspond to mirrors (windows), rooms (houses, tombs), furniture, piano (music) in the house or *château*. These corresponding phenomena tend to perform similar symbolic functions and to supplement each other.

Let us now examine three of these symbols which occur in the novel: eyes, hands and bones. Eyes, mirrors, and water are modes of perception: eyes gaze outward into the external world, mirrors and water are instruments for reflection, for looking at and into oneself, “les prunelles pareilles / A leur plus pure image d’eau” (Il y a certainement quelqu’un,” *Poèmes*).

Anne Hébert is often concerned with the concept of “transparence”: windows and the surface waters of pools should be transparent so that one can clearly see into the life of things. Catherine is associated with this transparence — there is little pretence or illusion clouding her soul. In the opening pages, there is an emphasis on cleaning windows covered with soot from the blast furnaces, and Catherine insists on “tout transparence refaite à mesure”. So when Catherine observes herself in mirrors, it is “sans que son image mièvre la trompât, reflétée au passage dans les glaces des vitrines”. And when she tries to imagine herself as an infant as she gazes into the mirror, she is greeted, instead, by images of her little sisters at home, reminding her of her true nature and dispelling all illusion.

However, for Michel, such an occupation must be an “enchantement pervers” for in his case “toujours quelque mort y habite sous le tain”. Unlike Catherine he is not transparent; what lies beneath his polished surface is too deep, mysterious and disturbing for the mirror to reflect a true image.

Water is even a more profound and complex symbol: “La vie la plus belle et la plus forte devait ressembler à cela: une eau transparente et vive, sans jamais revenir en arrière, renouvelant ses images à mesure.”¹²

Clear waters reflect a lucid image. But waters are deep and dark and to sink into them is to sink into a dream, into death.

L’eau de ces bois sombres
Et si pure et si uniquement fluide
Et consacrée en cet écoulement de source
Vocation marine où je me mire.

(“Les Grandes Fontaines”, *Poèmes*)

Water is the source of the creation of life, the symbol of the mysterious depths of the creative soul. It is also, as in *Le Torrent*, the destroyer of life, the symbol of death. It forms one of the elemental forces of life from the time of the separation of the earth and the waters. In *Mystère de la parole*, Anne Hébert writes “Je suis la terre et l’eau . . .”. The flow of water cleanses and purifies like the baptismal waters. Catherine, hurt by Michel and Lia’s disparaging remarks, lets the water flow over her hands as if they were raw wounds, hoping to wash away the pain. Michel, dreaming of a purified Lia, calls to her: “Lia, tu es lavée comme l’eau, ma soeur eau, c’est toi, Lia.”

Catherine experiences her “resurrection” by the sea. Thus, water draws its

wealth as a symbol from sources in the Bible and religious rituals, as well as from the rivers and pools of the forest, from nature.

Hands are symbols of giving and receiving; they are instruments of utility and creativity; they are symbolic of one's total being, of the relationship between one's inner self and the outer world. In the poem, "Les Mains", the girl's hands are an intermediary between herself and the world, they are making futile gestures and

Les signes du monde
Sont gravés à même ses doigts.

Tant de chiffres profonds
L'accablent de bagues massives et travaillées.

(*Poèmes*)

Like Catherine, this girl's hands are "cette offrande impitoyable / Des mains de douleurs parées / Ouvertes au soleil."

The poet, in another poem has "cette idée / De planter nos mains au jardin", but for the hands to flower, "Il faudra la saison prochaine / Et nos mains fondues comme l'eau" ("Nos Mains au jardin", *Poèmes*).

Catherine's hands are described as being capable, busy — they are the external manifestations of her state of being. Michel pauses to admire them as she sews: "Quelles mains pleines de pouvoir tu as!" But once she moves into *les chambres de bois* and becomes idle, her hands are no longer rough and reddened, but "ses mains [...] devenaient blanches et ses ongles [...] s'allongeaient comme des griffes de bête captive." It is through her hands that her illness first manifests itself, "les premières, ses mains vinrent à manquer."

The most powerful image employed by Anne Hébert is that of bones:

Je suis une fille maigre
Et j'ai de beaux os.

("La Fille maigre", *Poèmes*)

This stripping to the bones, this denial of the flesh, is the striking metaphor for the *refus de la vie*; it is the ultimate *dépouillement*. Language, too, is stripped to its very bones, shorn of all excess flesh, only the clear, hard, exact word remains: the skeleton of an idea or image. Flesh betrays one. Witness how Michel succumbed to the warmth and softness of Catherine; the hard, inflexible bones of one's being are too rigid, too immobile to permit betrayal, action or emotion. But the skeleton — the bare outline of bones is the very image of death:

Alors surgit le thème des os, qui représente ce qu'on possède de plus sûr et de plus irréductible, le dernier recours de la solitude et sa dernière complaisance. La chair devait nous faire communiquer avec le monde, et elle nous a trahi. Tandis qu'avec les os on peut être tranquille, même si c'est une tranquillité [*sic*] à l'image de la mort. Le poète célèbre maintenant, non plus la solitude aux "mais ouvertes", mais

la dernière extrémité de l'isolement . . . l'existence nue, sans beauté et sans don; . . . le poète imagine des amours étranges ou la chair ne jouerait aucun rôle.¹³

To strip to the bones is the ultimate purification. Michel praises Lia's thinness to Catherine, "la maigreur de Lia qu'il comparait au pur tranchant de l'esprit." He believes that "un jour . . . elle redeviendra pure comme ses os." Catherine and Lia are set in contrast: Catherine as the warm living flesh, Lia the cold, brittle skeleton of death.

Claudine, François' mother in *Le Torrent*, constantly tells her son: "Il faut se dompter jusqu'aux os", precisely because the bones are "ce qu'on possède de plus sure et irréductible, le dernier secours de la solitude et sa dernière complaisance."

When Anne Hébert plunges into the vitality of *Mystère de la parole*, when her vision of the world expands into a joyous affirmation and acceptance of the earth and water, when her language grows richer and more vibrant, it is as if the world were made flesh. But, as "Le Tombeau des rois" illustrates, it was necessary to "connaître l'étau des os", to experience this *dépouillement* in order to emerge victoriously into the fullness of a new life.

The "fille maigre" in Anne Hébert's poem, with her thin, frail, ephemeral appearance, seems to characterize all the heroines: Catherine and Lia of this novel, Lucie in *Le Temps sauvage*, Emilie, Catherine, Stéphanie, Dominique in the short stories are all such intense and slight girls. Their childlike appearance enhances their refusal to grow up. This intimation of childish innocence and rejection of the adult world also pervades the poems of *Le Tombeau des rois*.

Catherine, when confronted by the demands of the adult world, such as marriage, retreats into childishness, "simulait le travail ou l'enfance lorsque l'un d'eux s'arrêtait pour la regarder et lui dire bonsoir." Only at the end does she develop into a woman capable of making decisions and pursuing her own well-being. Lia, on the other hand, grows thinner, retreating into the solace and hardness — or as Michel would have it — the purity of her bones.

Elizabeth, in *Kamouraska*, as she recalls her past is a plump, middle-aged woman, and this one heroine has developed from a thin, dreamy girl into a solid, desirable woman: the essence of her beauty, unlike Lia's, is in her flesh not her bones.

Thus words become symbols, form images that unite to create thematic and structural patterns in individual works as well as in the entire body of Anne Hébert's writing. And we can see that the movement of *Les Chambres de bois* as it is developed symbolically through language, theme and image is the repetition of a pattern. *Les Chambres de bois* is both a crystallization and a prophecy.

NOTES

¹ *Les Chambres de bois* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1958). All references to the novel are from this text. It follows two volumes of poetry, *Les Songes en équilibre* (1942),

and *Le Tombeau des rois* (1953), and a volume of short stories, collected under the title of *Le Torrent* (1950). It is Anne Hébert's first novel. Since then, she has brought out another volume of poetry, *Poèmes* (1960) comprised of *Le Tombeau des rois* and *Mystère de la parole*, a collection of her plays, *Le Temps sauvage* (1967), and a novel *Kamouraska* (1970). Some of her later poems are printed in René Lacôte's *Anne Hébert*, (Paris: Seghers, 1969) and have been published in various periodicals.

² Réjean Robidoux et André Renaud, *Le Roman Canadien-français du vingtième siècle* (Ottawa: Éditions de L'Université d'Ottawa, 1966) p. 174.

³ "Mystère de la parole", *Poèmes*, p. 75.

⁴ See Lacôte, pp. 151-52, 155-56, 163-64.

⁵ Pierre Pagé, *Anne Hébert* (Montréal: Fides, 1965), p. 36.

⁶ "une Petite Morte", *Poèmes*, p. 42.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁹ "La Chambre de bois", *Poèmes*, p. 42.

¹⁰ Albert Le Grand, *Anne Hébert: de l'exil au royaume*. (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1967), pp. 20, 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹² Pagé, *op. cit.* p. 14 quoting from Anne Hébert's script, *La Canne à pêche*, p. 1.

¹³ Gilles Marcotte, *Un Littérature qui se fait*. (Montréal: HMH, 1966), p. 291.

MONSOON

John Ditsky

one of those days when the rain
stays on, and off and on,

making the dawn stay on
as well, fooling the birds

— days when the sky pours
down Sumatra on the town:

the afternoons when old *colons*
can sip their tonics — skip

administering — let the lights
make night of outer fact;

then clocks lie Dali-limp,
the drums don't thump, and you

and I may lie (if sense
be there) in permanent siesta

MATT COHEN'S MONOLOGUE IN MORALITY

Betty Moore Ewing

IN HIS FIRST TWO published works, Matt Cohen used the novel form as a vehicle for a searching inquiry into the moral struggle facing the individual today in a rapidly expanding technological society. Essentially, the author is attempting to discover a solution to the personal dehumanization which results first from extensive role playing and secondly from an inability to accept the responsibility involved in being an individual; that is, in differing from the norm. The problem emerges as twofold. On the one hand, accepting the inevitability of role playing leads to the corruption of personal integrity and the paralysis of emotion. On the other hand, variance from the role or norm necessitates an honest evaluation of self, which, if not impossible, is likely to be, at best, disheartening.

Early in the first novel, *Korsoniloff*, Cohen states his intentions. Korsoniloff admits that the following journal (which constitutes the book's narrative) is a "morality monologue". Korsoniloff, a Toronto philosophy professor is making a mental pilgrimage in search of a "true understanding of self". He recognizes in his own personality the split which is the product of sociological pressures to conform. Korsoniloff's opposing selves, the one active and imposing, the other passive and introspective, vie incessantly for supremacy. A third faction develops in the form of a narrator removed from the reality of the action — a spectator capable of viewing, at once, opposing personalities struggling to conquer the total individual. Korsoniloff names it the line of contiguity. If this third power were indeed a line of contiguity, it would by definition join the opposing halves in a complicated and many-faceted, but *complete* whole. This accordingly should result in an integration of selves and a liberation from the struggle for self-identification. Instead, an implacable arbitrariness results. When Korsoniloff's third self assumes the role of onlooker, all action loses meaning. The actor can no longer be held responsible for his actions since he is merely an observer. Actions, consequently, are lifted beyond morality and are neither right nor wrong. How then, if Korsoniloff can judge his separate selves only by their actions can he establish which is the better faction and accordingly allow that faction total supremacy? From this develops the circular motion of the morality monologue to what is, as Cohen calls

it, a non-existent centre. Essentially, Korsoniloff has arrived at the most fundamental of philosophical questions — what is good or evil? Because of the very nature of philosophical questioning, there can be no definite solution.

Korsoniloff himself recognizes the paradox. Out of the fear that our uncontrived personality may be unacceptable to society, we establish our roles so firmly that there remains no escape. He wonders if we see ourselves as others see us and if so, could we ever be sure of this matching perception. His final conclusion is that we simply do not really WANT to see ourselves.

In an effort to avoid confrontation with ourselves, we rely on the role created for us by our past or occupation. "One must inevitably appropriate and console oneself with one's own history." That is, one converts one's history to one's own worth without authority and seals the gaps in the present with the putty of the past. Tonker, Korsoniloff's lawyer, exemplifies the personality hidden behind the employment role. The pile of papers on his desk is "an externalized monument". Not only is it necessary for today's generation to establish a sense of self-importance through externals but to eternalize it. A house is renovated for "the first child who must begin in conquered territory". And so, false values, values today's generation has named false, are monumentalized by the individuals wishing to defy them.

The second consideration is the acceptance of responsibility. Korsoniloff states, with unusual candour, that he is "tired of responsible reality". The alternative, if not split personality, is total surrender to unreality, distinguished by irrational action. But this too is undesirable, for irrational action demands even greater responsibility. Korsoniloff meets the dilemma head on when he ventures that perhaps he is "afraid to be really insane".

IT IS IN THIS POSITION that Johnny Crackle finds himself in Cohen's second novel, *Johnny Crackle Sings*. Johnny, having lost a preliminary battle in the crusade for success, begins to withdraw with increasing regularity into the medium of chemically induced euphoria. Eventually, withdrawal gains an impetus of its own, disjoint from drugs. As Johnny escapes reality and moves into a state of (as he sees it) oneness with the universe, he is menaced with having to face the responsibility which accompanies refusal to conform and communicate as demanded by his role. Threatened in a psychiatric clinic with shock treatment, Johnny realizes that variance from the norm will bring neither escape nor peace but rather a discomfort far greater than that produced by role playing. Since his intent in withdrawing was to produce infinite peacefulness, Johnny discards the decision as having no ultimate purpose.

In *Korsoniloff*, Matt Cohen elaborates on the theme of frozen emotion. This

results from two seemingly opposite causes. Gail is the best example of an individual who chooses to prostitute her beliefs, toss off all personal integrity and assume an easier mode of living — role playing. So completely does she give herself to the playing of roles that she becomes totally pliant, totally without a personality of her own. Morally, she is corrupt. Without hesitation she allows Tonker to make of her a gift to Korsoniloff, and a gift which is merely a replacement for the inaccessible Marie. If she has emotions, they are unidentifiable. Korsoniloff sees her as unperturbed, moving with the flow as it were, and imagines marrying and living together in Rosedale. Rosedale, apparently, for Korsoniloff represents the home of those who have successfully integrated their personalities with a very acceptable norm. But as he imagines the ease of such a situation, he can foresee the effect. Gail is a “closed system” with whom communication would be, at best, limited.

The second cause of paralyzed communication and emotion is, surprisingly, an unwillingness to conform. More exactly, when Korsoniloff as narrator begins to question the established reactions of his other two selves, as mentioned earlier, an arbitrariness results. Introspection, therefore, although intended to provide freedom from false actions, results also in stultified emotion. As Korsoniloff oversees with dread his contrived relationship with Marie, he becomes so totally removed from its actuality that he can no longer communicate at all. Unable to play the role, yet unable to discard it, he chooses the only remaining alternative — escape. But even at the final parting, he is socially handicapped. Programmed by social mores, he resents having turned back before leaving, thus losing the “upper hand”. As long as he feels that he has lost the battle, although the relationship has ended (which after all was his aim) he has not truly escaped. The disruption of Marie’s wedding represents, to Korsoniloff’s distorted vision of reality, absolute freedom.

Significantly, Korsoniloff is unwilling to admit his guilt when legally charged with the disruption of Marie’s wedding. Morally, he sees the issue as one-sided. Since the act was precipitated by a need to be free of past contrivances, to be true to his personality in opposition to the norm, then surely the act was not wrong. He perceives his innocence as necessarily so.

This theme of necessary innocence is stressed repeatedly in *Johnny Crackle Sings*. Lengthy passages of prose poetry argue on behalf of man’s innocence as the child of God. After all, should that not provide an unchallengeable escape from responsibility? Johnny faced with failure reminds himself:

Yes I was born perfect flawless . . . they can’t take that away from us and nor can we we were perfect once and always are . . . and we are still perfect and we have killed and torn apart and destroyed and we are still perfect . . .

Johnny is, in a sudden stream of religiosity (prompted by fear), attempting to establish some worth, some goodness in himself which does not rely on the opinion

of society. He seeks the promise of innate value which cannot be destroyed by failing in some socially imposed role. For Johnny, the solution lies in forfeiting, at least temporarily, a public life for a quietly secluded marriage, in which the closeness of friends and the establishment of a family (an "externalized monument"?) provide him with sufficient reminder of his own worth.

For Korsoniloff the solution is more difficult. After imagining his own suicide and the subsequent shooting of an old woman, he finally recognizes the latent guilt connected with his mother's drowning. This realization affords Korsoniloff a sudden insight into his, and all men's, ability to destroy. Having accepted the possibility of self, not as necessarily innocent, but as responsible for his own actions, he acknowledges his inability to stand apart and in a "morality monologue" divide finally and without exception, right from wrong.

Did I do it or didn't I?
I still don't know.
But I know I never will.

In both cases, with Johnny now living on the coast with Jenny and monument-child, and Korsoniloff assuming semi-communicative self-acceptance with Gail, we are left with a feeling of futility. This feeling persists, not because there is no total escape from the jaws of social obligation, but because the real battle was for mobility through understanding and, having perceived the predicament, we are no freer. Avoidance, as in Johnny's case, or acceptance, as in Korsoniloff's, bring no promise of relief from forced conformity to socially acceptable roles in order to interact effectively. The monologue has indeed been a circular one, ever moving toward a non-existent centre. Early in the novel, *Korsoniloff*, Cohen sets the tone. "The mood is spiritual poverty." Essentially, nothing has changed.

PACIFIC SALMON

Roderick Haig-Brown

River-born fugitives, red muscled under sheathing silver,
Alive with lights of ocean's changing colours,
The range of deeps and distances through wild salt years
Has gathered the sea's plenty into your perfection.
Fullness is the long return from dark depths
Rendering toll of itself to the searching nets
Surging on to strife on brilliant gravel shallows
That opened long ago behind the failing ice.
In violence over the gravel, under the burn of fall,
Fullness spends itself, thrusting forth new life
To nurse in the stream's flow. The old life,
Used utterly, yields itself among the river rocks of home.

CONQUETE HORIZONTALE ET VERTICALE DE LA VILLE

Antoine Sirois

LA VILLE, acceptée comme espace définitif de vie, est entrée tardivement dans les littératures canadiennes d'expression française et d'expression anglaise. La crise de 1929 et la deuxième guerre mondiale, points tournants dans l'histoire du pays, ont provoqué une transformation du roman qui s'attardait à des espaces ruraux et à des nostalgies révolues. L'industrialisation suscitée par la guerre a surtout contribué à faire émigrer les ruraux vers les espaces urbains et le roman vient témoigner de ces mutations sociales majeurs. *Au pied de la Pente douce* de Roger Lemelin en 1944, *Bonheur d'occasion* de Gabrielle Roy en 1945, *Earth and High Heaven* de Gwethalyn Graham en 1944 et *The Loved and the Lost* de Morley Callaghan en 1951 nous présentent des héros nouveaux, dégagés de l'idéologie rurale et marqués des préoccupations du citadin moderne.

Le thème de la "quête" apparaît avec plus d'évidence que jamais durant les années quarante et cinquante. Il se dessine surtout sous la forme d'une conquête du nouvel espace urbain qui propose un défi à la fois matériel et moral. Quatre romans m'ont paru bien se prêter à une étude comparative de cette quête dans les deux littératures.

Au pied de la Pente douce (1944) de Roger Lemelin, qui se déroule à Québec et *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959) de Mordecai Richler, qui se déroule à Montréal, illustrent une conquête sur le plan horizontal, où les ambitions des protagonistes tendent vers des valeurs plus matérielles et extérieures; *La Fin des songes* (1950) de Robert Elie et *The Watch that Ends the Night* (1959) de Hugh MacLennan, polarisés sur Montréal, manifestent une recherche plus intérieure que l'on qualifierait de verticale par rapport à l'autre.

Les deux premiers romans, bien que publiés à plusieurs années de distance, évoquent des souvenirs d'adolescents qui s'enracinent dans une même période, celle de la crise économique. L'un couvre de 1936 à 1939, l'autre de 1932 à 1951. Les histoires sont bien connues, mais rappelons que les héros, Denis Boucher et Duddy Kravitz, sont des adolescents du même âge, grandissant dans le même contexte économique de l'avant-guerre, aux prises avec une crise d'identification que les amène d'abord à triompher d'eux-mêmes, de leur conscience, de leur sensi-

bilité et à s'émanciper de leur milieu. L'ambition les propulse ensuite vers des espaces symboliques de réussite, qu'ils atteignent, en tout ou en partie, vers l'âge de la majorité. Denis grandit dans un quartier populaire canadien-français de Québec, aux pieds de la Pente douce qui mène à la haute ville où logent les riches et les instruits; Duddy pousse dans le "ghetto" juif de Montréal, à l'ombre du Mont-Royal, où trônent les financiers de la métropole. Une analyse des espaces physiques et moraux à travers lesquels évoluent les héros rend compte des étapes de leur marche conquérante, de la base au sommet.

Le narrateur décrit la basse ville, d'où émerge Denis, comme "un grand trou sombre", sans verdure, un sale faubourg, piqué de bicoques, un univers délabré et fermé. Le ghetto d'origine de Duddy se prête à une description tout aussi noire: "one street would have seemed as squalid as the next", avec leurs "cold water flats", où grandissent des enfants sales et tristes. Les gens de la haute ville perçoivent d'ailleurs ces quartiers comme mal famés. Les héros appartiennent à des familles où le père se montre faible et sans poigne. Madame Boucher domine l'espace familial et Denis "ne pouvait se débarrasser de l'emprise de cette femme" (196). Chez Kravitz, où la mère est décédée, c'est le patriarcat, le grand-père, qui impose son autorité, transmet la tradition orthodoxe. Les adolescents secouent ce cadre sévère, comme ils rejettent celui de leur paroisse et de leur communauté religieuse dominés par le curé ou le rabbin. Ils se retournent vers la haute ville, lieu de leur affranchissement, image de leurs désirs. A la fois hostile et attirante, juchée sur ses sommets, elle représente la réussite, l'argent, l'instruction, la puissance. Duddy lorgne vers ces demeures accrochées au Mont-Royal, habitées par ceux qui sont "vraiment riches", "vraiment puissants". Denis contemple les hauteurs qui couronnent la Pente douce et abritent l'instruction, la culture et les postes stables. Même les biens élémentaires de la nature, les arbres, les jardins, les parcs nichent dans les aires élevées. Au milieu de leurs concitoyens qui piétinent dans les bas quartiers, les adolescents impatients brisent donc les coquilles écologiques, familiales, religieuses qui les retiennent, inaugurent la poussée des gagne-petit dans la civilisation urbaine. Les quartiers d'en haut catalysent les jeunes ambitions, incarnent des valeurs auxquelles ils aspirent, que ce soit de posséder un lopin de terre ou de "devenir quelqu'un" pour Duddy, ou d'accéder à une puissance ou de récolter un succès littéraire pour Denis. Ces quartiers reflètent aussi un temps dynamique, évolutif, progressif, aux yeux de Denis outré par les siens, "parasités d'une petite antiquité qui pourrit dans les traditions" et rétifs au progrès, ou de Duddy, rebelle aux us et coutumes périmés de son entourage.

L'étude des espaces physiques et moraux, et de leurs significations, nous amène à constater que deux adolescents, à une même époque, veulent franchir des étapes analogues, à la recherche de valeurs, argent, puissance, prestige, liées à la nouvelle civilisation urbaine, et qui revêtent un éclat plutôt matériel et extérieur.

Deux autres romans viennent illustrer une forme différente et plus fondamen-

tales de quête que semble aussi susciter la cité, recherche cette fois-ci de personnages dans leur maturité. Il s'agit de deux œuvres des années cinquante, *La Fin des songes* de Robert Elie et *The Watch that Ends the Night*, de Hugh MacLennan, qui nous entraînent dans un pèlerinage avant tout intérieur, des années 1926 à 1946 pour le premier, des années 1922 à 1950, en majeure partie, pour le second. Ils couvrent tous deux la crise économique et la seconde guerre mondiale. Marcel a 37 ans vers 1946 et George, 45 vers 1950, années qui, dans les récits, correspondent aux années les plus critiques de leur vie d'adulte.

Les espaces physiques ou moraux traversés par les protagonistes signalent encore évolution, mais ils se présentent autrement. Le narrateur perçoit la ville de façon plus globale, insiste moins sur les oppositions physiques, ce qui est déjà significatif, car les héros ne mesurent plus leur réussite au passage d'un quartier moins favorisé à un quartier plus huppé. Au contraire de Denis et de Duddy, ils font une évaluation très critique de la société qui compose la ville et contestent les ambitions superficielles qu'elle entretient, ses soucis d'argent et de prestige, ses préoccupations futiles. La famille n'apparaît plus à ces adultes comme un frein à leur ambition, mais comme un espace conflictuel qui n'offre pas la chaleur et l'unité désirées, ce qu'ils déplorent. La religion même que les adolescents percevaient comme un empêchement à leur évolution, devient ici le lieu des expériences fondamentales. Mais dans ces deux romans-ci, comme dans les deux autres, les narrateurs ou les personnages entretiennent une grande nostalgie de la nature. Les jeunes citadins la recherchaient déjà dans la haute ville, à travers ses parcs, ou à l'extérieur, et l'associaient à leurs amours et aux bons moments de leur jeunesse. Elle garde toujours pour les adultes les mêmes connotations positives et prend une extension plus grande par son assimilation non seulement à l'enfance et à la jeunesse, mais aussi à la pureté, à l'innocence, à la joie et à la régénération, à une sorte paradis perdu. Marcel, en contemplant le lac, se dit: "C'est le pays de mon enfance . . . Perdue . . . Elle est perdue". George déclare: "If childhood is a garden, the gates closed on us then and ever afterwards we were on the outside . . .".

Dans les récits d'Elie et de MacLennan, les protagonistes se déplacent aussi physiquement, dans et hors de Montréal, soit qu'ils déambulent sur la rue Sainte-Catherine avec les chômeurs désœuvrés durant la crise, ou arpentent le port qui invite à l'évasion, soit qu'ils gagnent la campagne qui les régénère, mais tous ces parcours extérieurs doublent des parcours intérieurs, et traduisent une évolution verticale plutôt qu'horizontale. L'idéal des personnages n'apparaît pas lié à des espaces physiques, tandis que ceux-ci, pour les jeunes conquérants, symbolisent non seulement le succès, mais le conditionnent et le concrétisent en quelque sorte. George et Jerome rejettent les ambitions superficielles de leurs concitoyens, désirent, dans un premier temps, une vie de foyer et de famille et, dans un deuxième temps, aspirent à découvrir Dieu et à trouver un moyen de vivre sous la menace constant de la mort représentée par la bombe atomique. Marcel, las de la vie en

surface de ceux qui l'entourent, cherche aussi Dieu et tente de se retrouver lui-même et de rejoindre les autres. Il essaie d'atteindre à une réalité qui mettra fin aux songes et aux apparences: *La Fin des songes*. George et Jerome, dans un mouvement analogue, sous une autre image, poursuivent une lumière au bout de la nuit: *The Watch that Ends the Night*. Les préoccupations de Denis ou de Duddy, bien que significatives des rêves d'un prolétariat urbain qui cherche émancipation et bien-être, sont circonscrites dans des frontières assez restreintes, physiquement et moralement. Les protagonistes des autres romans ont conscience de s'être embarqués dans une aventure à la dimension même du monde, leur crise individuelle s'intégrant dans la grande aventure humaine et la figurant. MacLennan fait particulièrement ressortir cet aspect par ses références au mythe de Sisyphe et à l'Odyssée, et par ses jeux de microcosme-macrocosme.

Les obstacles que rencontrent ces derniers sont à la dimension de leur objectif. L'épreuve à traverser pour retrouver la réalité ou la lumière, la vie authentique, est ni plus ni moins que la mort, suicide de Marcel désespéré qui réveillera ses compagnons, les arrachera à leurs illusions; descente aux enfers de Jerome, par la guerre et les camps de concentration, qui mourra à lui-même en renonçant à sa femme qui, parce qu'elle le croyait mort, a maintenant épousé son meilleur ami. Il illuminera ainsi George et Catherine. Ces formes d'anéantissement constituent le choc révélateur des raisons profondes de vivre. Le problème fondamental des protagonistes rejoint celui soulevé par l'existentialisme, à l'issue de la seconde guerre mondiale, celui de la coexistence possible ou impossible de Dieu et de la souffrance des hommes. "Cherche Dieu dans ta vie, dit Marcel dans son angoisse, et un immense vide répond à l'appel de ce mot". Les héros de MacLennan mettent également en doute l'existence d'une justice supérieure, face aux épreuves qui les accablent. Les deux romans se terminent cependant sur une note d'espérance, à la suite des événements catalyseurs rapportés ci-haut, alors que la vie paraît désormais possible malgré la mort qui plane toujours.

Les derniers romans traduisent donc une évolution par rapport aux premiers. Ceux-ci rendent plutôt compte des débuts d'une évolution sociale, ceux de personnes économiquement défavorisées, attirées d'abord par les appeaux et les miroitements de la ville, par des valeurs axées sur l'avoir. Les personnages d'Elie et de MacLennan, plus favorisés au départ, possesseurs d'une instruction plus élevée, tentent de dépasser ces valeurs superficielles, apanage aussi, constatent-ils, de la bonne société qui les entoure, pour se plonger dans une recherche plus intérieure et qui relève de l'être, non de l'avoir. La crise économique, la guerre et l'urbanisation semblent avoir provoqué des inquiétudes plus fondamentales sur le destin de l'homme.

Des romanciers des deux groupes ethniques, à peu d'années près, bousculés par les mêmes phénomènes sociaux, ont traduit, chacun avec leurs moyens, une même quête, sous ses deux faces.

EMILY CARR'S

Klee Wyck

Maria Tippet

EMILY CARR'S *Klee Wyck* was awarded the Governor General's medal for non-fiction literature in 1941. The Oxford University Press publication of the twenty-one sketches, "made out of memories which had been stored up in Miss Carr's mind as she went into lonely places along the British Columbia coast seeking subject-matter for her painting," marked not only the culmination of her northern excursions, but also the end of long frustrating attempts to see these stories into print. The process of recalling, and in some cases embellishing upon those experiences, which have made Carr into somewhat of a legendary figure, is the subject of this essay.

From Emily Carr's childhood recollections in the later *Growing Pains* (1946) and *The Book of Small* (1942), one would assume that, apart from "Wash Mary," the family's native washerwoman, the very English Carr family had little contact with the native Indians of British Columbia. The journals of Richard Carr, however, reveal that as a young traveller in North and Central America, he possessed a lively sympathy towards all native peoples. In Mackinac he found the Indians "civil and obliging and very honest, much more so than their white neighbours", while in the Yucatan "the poor Indians" were "badly treated". In Victoria, British Columbia, where he settled in July 1863 Richard Carr would have come into frequent contact with the numerous Indians who were enticed there by the colonial city's glitter, though his first exposure to the more traditional villages probably came during his voyage around Vancouver Island on the Hudson's Bay Company's steamer the *Princess Louise* in August 1879. None of the voyaging Carrs (Richard was accompanied by his daughters, Alice and Elizabeth) left a record of their impressions, but doubtlessly shared the excitement of a fellow traveller who recorded seeing "numerous carvings", then at their apogee. Though Emily Carr leads us to believe that the discovery of the Indian was her own — beginning with her idle curiosity near Trial Island in "Sleep", and culminating with her two major northern excursions of 1912 and 1928 — one may suspect that the seeds of her wish to have "been born an Indian" were sown in the Carr home.

Nevertheless, it was not until 1898, at the age of twenty-seven, that Emily Carr

first lived in an Indian village. Miss Armstrong, a Methodist missionary at the Toxos mission and school directed by the Rev. Melvin Swartout, was a close friend of her sister Elizabeth. In the spring of that year Miss Armstrong invited Carr to that west coast village near Ucluelet. Carr, now trained in art at San Francisco, sketched the Indians and delighted in being called by them "Klee Wyck" — "Laughing One" in Nootkan language.¹ Though she later recalled that Ucluelet "made a lasting impression on me," the experience does not seem to have been more than a pleasant and exotic sojourn. The decisive event in Carr's life-long love affair with the Indian came yet another nine years later when, with her sister Alice, she travelled to Alaska.

In the summer of 1907, Carr embarked from Seattle, Washington, on the *Dolphin* and travelled to Sitka. There she met an American artist, probably Theodore Richardson, whose pictures of the Tlingit poles and houses inspired her to emulation. She returned to her Vancouver studio with the resolution "to picture totem poles in their own village settings, as complete a collection of them as I could."

The following summer, 1908, Carr made the first of three visits to Alert Bay, an accessible Kwakiutl village with notable figures and house posts which had already attracted artists F. M. Bell Smith, John Kyle and Statira Frame. It was also during these years that she met Sophie Frank, a native of North Vancouver's Coast Salish reserve, well-known locally for the enormous woven baskets and lush blackberries which she sold door-to-door in Vancouver. Through Mrs. Frank, Carr learned much of the Indian ways. It was probably her nieces living in areas of northern British Columbia who made Carr's 1912 trip to the Queen Charlotte Islands, the Skeena River district and points along the coast practicable. Daughters of her elder sister Clara, Lillian Nicholles, school teacher in Masset, Q.C.I., and Emily English, wife of a cannery boss at Balmoral on the Skeena, together with Methodist missionary friends of her other sisters, provided Carr with bases and contacts for exploration on perhaps the most significant of her northern excursions. So monumental was this trip for Carr, that after working up her summer sketches during the winter, she felt by spring capable of giving an exhibition and lecture based on her summer's work.

Carr was optimistic that financing for a northern visit the following summer might be aided by the provincial government. The Provincial Archives was in the process of being reorganized and, hopeful that her paintings might find a place on the walls of the new building in exchange for financial assistance, Carr approached the minister of education Dr. Henry Esson Young. The museum official whom Young appointed to examine Carr's work found the totems "faithfully drawn," but "too brilliant and vivid to be true to the actual conditions of the coast villages." This rebuff is not mentioned by Carr in any of her autobiographical writing. It can only be an hypothesis that it had something to do, perhaps a very great

deal to do, with the considerable redirection of her activities at the time of her move to Victoria in the following year. Dropping most of her painting and entirely forgetting her ambition of artistically preserving the totems and houses of the British Columbia Indians, Carr began a life of landladying, dog-breeding and souvenir-making. Significantly, however, her souvenirs, selling as far east as Montreal, were small pottery objects after Indian motifs and hooked rugs incorporating Indian designs. The pottery was signed EMC or more often "Klee Wyck" with a hook-shaped symbol.² Though little documentation of her contact with the Indians during this 1913-1927 period is available, she did continue her friendship with Sophie Frank in North Vancouver and visited the Cowichan and Ahousat Indian reserves on Vancouver Island.

It was not until 1927, after the success of the "North West Coast Exhibition of Indian Art" in Ottawa, which exhibited pottery and rugs as well as paintings from her 1912 northern excursion, that Carr renewed her interest in painting Indian artifacts. The following summer she travelled north. The trip, though "very interesting in some ways," was "disappointing [*sic*] in many." She missed many points of her intended itinerary. Her Skidigate friends, the "Jimmie and Louisa" who had provided her with transportation in 1912, and Emily English's husband, now managing the South Bay cannery on the Charlottes, were unable to provide boats at the height of the fishing season. Though she found an Indian willing to take her to perhaps the most interesting Indian villages on the Islands — Tanoo, Skedans and Cumshewa — it "rained *incessantly*" and rough seas prevented them getting any further than Skedans. She was, however, able to visit, for the first time, Niska villages on the Nass, though here the mosquitoes hampered her severely. On the Skeena River she was saddened to find that since her 1912 trip the Gitskan poles had "greatly deteriorated" and "the 'restored' ones have lost so much of interest and subtlety." But the Skeena region provided what was certainly the highlight of her trip — the journey to Kitwancool. Unbelievably remote in 1928, the village lying adjacent to the Kitwanga River still requires a dusty, bumpy journey, but Carr had to endure a seven-hour wagon trip to a village whose inhabitants had only recently, she heard, "chased missionaries out and drove surveyors off with axes."

It is difficult to overestimate the physical courage and heartiness of Carr on her 1928 trip. True, her passage was arranged by Eric Brown of the National Gallery through the Canadian National Railway, Marius Barbeau of the National Museum made connections for her with the manager of the Arrandale cannery at the mouth of the Nass River, and she still had contacts through her nieces, Indians and missionary friends. But she was a portly fifty-six. Travel and overnight facilities were rude or non-existent, and such amenities as insect repellent on the mosquito-infested Nass consisted of mosquito oil and her own improvised protective costume. The wonder is not that Carr's major northern excursions were terminated

by this 1928 visit; it is that she had the courage and endurance not only to undertake, but to complete her trip. Carr was, of course, aware of its arduous nature; she had, she wrote Eric Brown, "stood it remarkably well." Though she travelled the following two summers to northern Vancouver Island to paint the totems, this 1928 visit marked the end of her mission to make "as complete a collection of them as I could." After 1930 contact with the Indian was limited to day visits to reserves on lower Vancouver Island and to North Vancouver.

IN THE LATE 1920's when Carr first began to write of these experiences in what eventually became *Klee Wyck*, she was confronted with several difficulties. She had kept a journal of her first, 1907, northern visit, but that journey seems to have provided her with little material. For her later excursions, she had "to rely on memory." She had generally been "too buisy [*sic*] painting from dawn to dark to do more than write home." Carr "intended to use these letters later perhaps," but the sister to whom she had written "had burnt them as received." Thus when she did come to write, remembering, filling in the gaps, separating the villages, bridging the smells and the feelings with words, were things that caused her much concern. "I've been tramping round these old villages," she wrote to a friend, but "— my pickings are pretty *bumm*." Carr inserted "bits of dialogue here & there to break [the] monotony" of recording village after village. She wanted to be "true to the places as well as to the people," but found it difficult "to avoid slopping over to fill up." Old notes, like the "Story of Mrs. Russ's Grandmothers Pole at Tanuu," recorded when visiting the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1912, were probably used to "fill up."³ So too was a 1929 article, "Modern and Indian Art of the West Coast", the last portion of which appears in "Canoe".⁴ Because she had "sketched intensely" the places came to her "with great vividness," though early photographs of remote coastal villages taken by herself, George M. Dawson and C. F. Newcombe were also invaluable in helping her to recall the layout of many villages. Aside from notes, articles, photographs and sketches, Carr no doubt drew from her often repeated repertoire of stories about her experiences among the Indians.

To decipher which incidents in *Klee Wyck* were drawn from memory and which were a product of filling in the gaps is difficult. The authenticity of "Salt Water" may be verified by comparing the sequence of events recorded in two letters written shortly after the incident with the story, as may portions of "Greenville" and "Kitwancool". The only inconsistency in "Salt Water" is that in one of the letters she speaks of the two Indian children as the man's son and daughter; in the story they appear as his nephew and niece. On the other hand, the strict veracity of how Carr learned the meaning of "D'Sonoqua", the Kwakiutl "wild

woman of the woods" totem figure, in the story of that same name may be questioned. She had written to C. F. Newcombe in 1912 asking "the name and pronunciation and meaning of that figure," that "wild red woman with outstretched hands among the nettles." "You called it by name," she continued, "what do they mean and why erected?" In *Klee Wyck* it is the Koskimo, Tom, who explains to her the story of his big carved woman who steals children from their mothers.

Carr oscillates between fact and fabrication in naming the participants in her stories. In some cases names are made up, in others they are consciously altered. Carr probably forgot the name of the Indian, Fred McKay, who took her up to Greenville from the Arrandale cannery, so called him Sam. Mr. Walter Walker, manager of the same cannery on the Nass, becomes "the cannery boss," and the two ladies at Ucluelet, Miss Armstrong and Mrs. Swartout, "the Greater" and "the Lesser" missionary. For the most part the white man remains anonymous; the farm girl of "Cha-atl," Maria, is an exception, the seamen, Jones and Smith, of "Salt Water" less so. Her Indian characters are more often named, though sometimes altered from their life models. Sophie Frank remains Sophie, but Carr's Indian friends at Skidigate, Will and Clara Russ, whose names she would certainly have not forgotten, are referred to as Jimmie and Louisa in the five stories in which they figure. Their sons, Will and Walt, are altered to the equally alliterative Jim and Joe, while Clara's mother, the remarkable pipe-smoking Mrs. Brown, becomes Mrs. Green. The Douse family of the upper Skeena River, remain Douses in "Kitwancool," though Carr does change the chief's son Albert, to Aleck. While some changes and omissions may be attributed to lapse of memory, it is not uncommon to find that elsewhere in Carr's autobiographical writing names have been altered.

Paucity of sources and difficulty of remembering were not, however, Carr's greatest concern in recording her experiences. Having skipped her last year of "High", she felt inadequately equipped to write. To bridge the gap between "feels" and "words" would only come easier, she thought, if she "were better educated." In 1926 she had taken the Palmer Institute of Authorship's correspondence course in writing and in the summer of 1934 she enrolled in Mrs. N. de Bertrand Lugrin Shaw's short story course at Victoria College. She even sent one story, "Hully-Up Paper", to the International Correspondence Criticism Service. The usefulness of such courses and criticism, however, bears no comparison to the help and encouragement that she was to receive from Flora Hamilton Burns, Ruth Humphrey and later Ira Dilworth.

For many years Flora Hamilton Burns was the only person who knew that Emily was writing. Carr asked Miss Burns to be her critic "and read or sent her manuscripts for criticism." Though she was "very shy of anyone who taught at a University," in the spring of 1936 she allowed Ruth Humphrey, an English teacher at

Victoria College, to join Burns as her critic. The degree of help and moral support offered by Miss Humphrey was so immense that when the latter left for a world tour in 1937, Carr wrote:

Ruth has gone. I did not know how blue I'd be without her. She has meant an awful lot these last months.

Emily acknowledged that both "Ruth and Flora have helped me, but their way of expressing is not my way." Nor did they "see with the same eye": "Flora wants too much sentiment," she complained, "and Ruth strips and leaves them cold and inhuman." Carr knew she was "raw", that the mechanics of her writing were weak, but somehow felt that she could turn her vice — simplicity — into a virtue. For only "if one says something ultra-honest, ultra-true, some deep realizing of life, can it make the grade, ride over the top, having surmounted mechanics." Others — Margaret Clay, Carol Pearson, Fred Housser, Eric Brown and Lawren Harris — were the recipients of her manuscripts for criticism, and Victoria College stenographer, Mrs. Chapell, and a lawyer, Oswyn Boulton, typed them before Carr taught herself. Carr accepted all this help with reserve. Her belief that truth, honesty would somehow compensate for her rawness, prohibited her from accepting, without some resentment, the help of the more sophisticated critics. When she met Ira Dilworth it was, however, a different matter. He was "a million times younger, a million times cleverer," but never made her "feel an old fool, or finished, or stupid or ignorant."

Six years prior to meeting Ira Dilworth, Carr had received rejections from *Saturday Evening Post*, *The Countryman*, *Atlantic Monthly* and *Maclean's Magazine*. Her hopes soared, however, when in the spring of 1937 Ruth Humphrey showed her stories to University of British Columbia English professor, Dr. Garnett Sedgewick. Though Dr. Sedgewick had seen Carr's stories "some years back", he agreed to read them again. Carr was pleased that he "likes my stories and will be glad to write an introduction if Macmillan's [*sic*] will publish them." Dr. Sedgewick was even willing to edit them.⁵ Despite the enthusiasm of both Mr. Ayres of Macmillan and Dr. Sedgewick, they feared the book "would not find a big appreciative audience." It was not surprising that shortly after its submission to Macmillan, Carr was notified that they would be unable even to consider acceptance for some time. Though disheartened, she continued to pursue other publishers, sending "D'Sonoqua" to the British *Blackwood's Magazine* in July. Meanwhile Carr waited for Dr. Sedgewick. It was not until February of 1938 a year later, that, after much prodding, the stories were returned with "spelling and punct." corrected. Upon receipt, Carr sent them to Ryerson Press who reported, three months later, that they had lost her only fair copy.⁶ Her animosity towards publishers now reached its zenith: "I hate 'em all." By the fall of 1939 even

Humphrey and Burns had disappointed her and she resolved that "this is the last time I shall hand my manuscript over to others."

Though prospects for publication in the autumn of 1939 remained bleak, Carr had, in June of that year, been corresponding with Ira Dilworth regarding the possibility of having her stories read on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. "One of the faithful 'listening ladies,'" Ruth Humphrey, had taken her manuscripts "to Vancouver and showed them to Dilworth" who felt they "had great quality" and "great literary appeal". As former neighbour on both Government and Simcoe streets, one-time principal of Victoria High School, University of British Columbia English professor and current regional director of the CBC in Vancouver, Dilworth would certainly have not been unknown to Carr. Though Carr and Dilworth had been in correspondence by June 1939, it was not until the winter that they began working together on her stories. The following spring she informed a friend that someone, no doubt Dilworth, was taking the stories back east to have them evaluated. It was only shortly after this that Carr received an appreciative letter from King Gordon of Toronto's Oxford University Press, the future publisher of *Klee Wyck*.

Emily Carr's dependence upon Dilworth began immediately. In July 1940 he read the stories on the CBC. In September of the same year he was "East again", and we can assume that negotiations with William Clarke of Oxford University Press were well under way. By late September Dilworth was proposing the publication of a "mixed bag *soon*" which displeased Carr who preferred the "Indian stories" and "Reminiscences of the Old Carr House" to be kept separate. This seems to have resolved itself by June 1941 when Carr reported that "Ira was East a couple of weeks back, says Clarke is *delighted* with material." The pace picked up that summer when Carr was "looking forward to the change in Vancouver & to working with Ira — the book!!!!!" Though by this time the work for Carr's second publication, *The Book of Small*, was being selected, the only thing holding the first back was a title — "Stories in Cedar" was vying with "Klee Wyck" as the title. By October *Klee Wyck* was "a real *object* at least even though only in her underwear" — the book lacked a dust jacket.

Dilworth's assistance was limited to grammatical correction and minor word changes. Carr wrote that he "never added or omitted anything without consulting me," and if he made suggestions "he made me re-word the thought myself." She came to rely on his "final judgement"; no manuscript was complete without it.

THE TWENTY-ONE "short sketches or glimpses" emerged largely out of Carr's last two northern excursions. "Tanoo", "Cumshewa", "Sailing to Yan", and "Cha-atl", were based on her 1912 visit, while "Greenville",

"Friends", "Salt Water", "Kitwancool", and "Canoe" on her 1928 visit. "D'Sonoqua" and "Two Bits and a Wheel-Barrow", are set in Koskimo villages visited in 1912, 1929 and 1930, "Juice" in the Cariboo after her six-week visit en route to Victoria from England in 1904, and "Sleep" and "Wash Mary" in her Victoria childhood. "Ucluelet" and "Century Time" are derived from her first visit to that Indian village in 1898 and in 1905 respectively. "Sophie" is a product of her friendship with Sophie Frank encompassing 1908-1930's, while "The Blouse" and "The Stare" are difficult to place or to date.

Carr told even Dilworth that she wrote these stories while in hospital beginning in 1937. She recalled that "I have been lucky indeed to have words come to me when I had to give up the woods and sketching and prepare for long inactivity"; the writing took her "back so vividly on those sketching trips," that she forgot being sick. Actually, they were started much earlier. "D'Sonoqua" was begun in 1934 and by June 1937 sixteen Indian stories had been posted to Dr. Sedgewick "for his reading and criticism". Writing was not an alternative to painting for the bed-ridden artist in 1937. The verse and the short story, based closely upon her experiences, were not new forms. About twenty sketch books riddled with rhyming verse she called "jingles", in addition to prose fragments dating from 1912, were found after her death. Writing and painting were complementary means of expression. By 1934, long before her 1937 heart attack, the creative experience of writing had become so intense that "I want to write and write longer spells than I want to paint," because "writing is more human than painting."

Though *Klee Wyck* may have been written for the "pure joy of reliving and travelling among the places and people" she loved, it is also didactic. She tells us that she had seen Sophie Frank drunk, that Aleck Douse was "straight from jail" and that the Indian in "Sleep" was "dirty all over". But like the smallpox epidemic in Cha-atl and Cumshewa, the influenza in Ucluelet, the starving dogs in Greenville or the resentment on Indian Tom's face, all was the fault of the white man. Was it not the missionary who "came and took the Indians away from their old villages and the totem poles," and made them rely on "a store instead of . . . nature"? Was the Indian reserve across the water from Vancouver not "a different world — no hurry, no business". Could the old Indian in Ucluelet not "speak with authority to white people" on the wild things? Was the "Lesser Missionary" not "glad when she came out of the dark forest," while the Indians were linked to the land, slipping "in and out of their places like animals" as the tides and the seasons directed. To Carr, the Indians were in harmony with nature — the white man was not.

If Carr romanticises the Indian, she idealizes herself even more. From her first contact with the Indians in "Ucluelet", she is heartily accepted. They tell her she has "no fear", is not "stuck up", and, since she knows how to laugh, they call her "Klee Wyck". She is accepted in every village, even the hostile Kitwancool where

the Indians are "peculiar and resent white intrusion greatly." She is throughout the doer of good deeds — removing porcupine quills from the starving dogs, offering a Bartlett pear to the thirsty Doctor Cabbage, giving her blouse to the dying Mary and writing Louisa's and Mrs. Green's catalogue orders. And, of course, there is her mission: "to make pictures of them [the totems], so that your young people as well as the white people will see how fine your totem poles used to be."

Carr, the well-wisher, the saviour not of souls but of culture, is, however, humble before the Indians. In Ucluelet she "felt so young and empty standing there before the Indians"; in North Vancouver she was "Sophie's Em'ly". Though twenty-seven years old in Ucluelet, she writes of herself as a mere school girl of fifteen. Gesticulating conversations with the old man in Ucluelet and the old woman in Greenville, perpetuate the child-like atmosphere.

Though Carr portrays herself as a person of good deeds, encountering everyone amicably, there are occasions when the harmonization is not complete. Upon leaving Greenville only the dogs follow her to the wharf. They were "more domestic and more responsive than Indians." "The thought of Lizzie's tongue licking the jam-tin," prohibits her from sharing the Douse's food. And when sleeping in the big room with the same family, she told Eric Brown that she maintained her privacy by hanging a tent fly across her corner of the room.

Carr idealizes herself in yet another way. She diminishes her contacts with the white man by rarely mentioning him. At Toxis where Carr recalls that "visitors were rare," there was a large white community, Ucluelet, across the bay. At the Arrandale cannery on the Nass River, she lived in a cottage and ate her meals in the mess. Although she "kept pretty much to herself," she took tea daily with "the cannery boss" and his wife. On her trips to Alert Bay and the Queen Charlotte Islands before 1928 she always travelled in the company of a white person. Though one cannot steal from Carr the courage displayed, especially on her later trips, the idea that she lived with the Indians is exaggerated.

AFTER THE EXCURSIONS into remote Indian villages, after the trauma of writing and remembering, and after the failures of acceptance, *Klee Wyck* was finally published by Oxford University Press in the autumn of 1941. Despite Dr. Sedgewick's pessimism that it would not appeal to a larger public, it did. In fact, it won the highest award for non-fiction in Canada, and has been almost continuously in print ever since.

Carr, approaching seventy, had a great sense of satisfaction over its success. She received many congratulatory letters, though one clergyman did complain about her treatment of the west coast missionaries. The most comforting aspect of the

reception, was the revenge against those Victorians, especially her sisters, who thought her a puttering eccentric. "Klee Wyck continues to sell," she wrote, "they tell me she is a Canadian Classic & is to be put into special edition for the schools." This made her "laugh and laugh because you know Aunt Betty always thought me such a *poor* example for the children at Alices [school] I smoked and I occasionally used to swear, and my manners were not up to scratch." Now to think that school children across Canada are "studying Klee Wyck makes me 'he-haw'."

NOTES

- ¹ Emily Carr, *Klee Wyck* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1971; original edition, 1941), p. 8. I am indebted to Mr. Peter McNair and Mr. Allan Hoover of the Ethnology Department of the British Columbia Museum for their kind assistance on this matter.
- ² This symbol could possibly be either the phonemic glottal stop or the Cree syllabary symbol for L plus a vowel, though neither seems appropriate in the context.
- ³ B.C. Archives, Newcombe Collection. One may compare this story with that on p. 13 of *Klee Wyck*.
- ⁴ Compare Carr, *The McGill News*, Supplement, 29 June 1929, p. 3 and Carr, *Klee Wyck*, p. 111.
- ⁵ Carr to Humphrey, 10 August [1937], in *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XLI, 111; Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands*, p. 291. Dr. Sedgewick initially saw Carr's stories in the early 1930's when Frederick Brand, lecturer in the Mathematics Department of the University of British Columbia showed them to him.
- ⁶ It was not until January 1939 that Ryerson found and returned her manuscript.
- ⁷ Carr to Mrs. C. Pearson, n.d., copy in author's possession. The author would like to express appreciation to Fran Gundry for her stimulating comments and to the Canada Council for a grant which has made the research for this article possible.

RIVERGRASS CONSIDERING HUMAN HABITS

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

when they stay home
children grow roots
that is why their feet
are sore when they leave
with new shoes

I want to follow
the water
along this river
to find out
why only old men
like to repair
older clocks

THE BLASPHEMIES OF A. M. KLEIN

Kenneth C. Russell

MIRIAM WADDINGTON argues in her study of A. M. Klein¹ that it is wrong to think of him as a religious poet. She vigorously maintains that, on the contrary, his outlook is secular and that much that is taken as religious in Klein's verse merely reflects his pride in his cultural inheritance. Indeed, she finds several of his so-called "religious" poems blasphemous² and she is amazed that critics stubbornly ignore the religious doubt which she sees everywhere in Klein's poems.³ Consequently, while Pacey and Dudek might label the poems of *Hath Not a Jew . . .* "religious",⁴ Waddington insists, "Whatever these poems are, they are not religious."⁵

Faced with such disagreement one must ask what meaning these critics are putting on the term "religious". What, in particular, does it mean to Miriam Waddington? This is never entirely clear but some of her statements reveal the presuppositions underlying her eagerness to establish Klein as a modern and therefore, secular poet. She remarks for example, that his editorials in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, his essays on Joyce, etc., "all show to what extent he was a twentieth-century artist, *committed, not to the simple universal therapy of religion*, but to the power and magic which reside in language."⁶ Her description of religion as a therapy and its juxtaposition with what is taken to be a twentieth-century cultural credo suggests that she sees religion as retrograde and the crutch of those not fully equal to life's demands. One cannot help but suspect that the dichotomy between religion and modernity, — the either/or gap between them that she seems to accept as self evident — will seriously influence her reading of Klein. For her, it would seem, he cannot be secular and religious, and above all, he cannot believe and doubt. Most certainly he cannot share the horrors of this modern age, shake his fist at the heavens and still believe.

A person who does not share her presuppositions might very well ask, "Why not?" And he might well look in vain for many of the blasphemies she points to and find little evidence of denial in the doubt she continually underlines. This is particularly true if he reads the poems against the backdrop of the religious tradition in which Klein grew up. One can hardly, for example, term Klein's "Psalm

XXIII" in which he breaks into heaven and wrecks the scales of justice blasphemous when one remembers that Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Bertichev summoned God to stand trial for the sufferings of Israel⁷ and told God bluntly that if grace and mercy did not come "Your throne will not be a throne of truth."⁸ And if some of the biblical psalms lack the playful wit of Klein's poem they nonetheless express consternation at the inexplicable vagaries of divine justice, and do this in the strongest language.⁹

In dealing with Klein's own frank way of speaking we should perhaps keep in mind Irving Layton's remark that God has been part of the Jewish family for so long that disagreements with him take on the characteristics of a domestic quarrel.¹⁰ We might also pay heed to what Klein himself says in "Psalm 166":

Consider my speech, O Lord, not too severely;
It does not mean what it does seem to say. . . .
For you I need not choose my language; surely
Need not measure the words with which I pray; . . .
I speak to you this day
Even as once I spoke to my sire, now with You.
And I never loved one more than I did my father. (258)¹¹

We should also note that Waddington calls "Psalm VI" a blasphemous complaint about God's indifference.¹² She tells us that in this poem God remains unmoved by the Nazis' extermination of the Jews while the very angels are driven mad by the sight of the atrocities.¹³ She quotes from the text but fails to include the last two verses:

And the good Lord said nothing, but with a nod
Summoned the angels of Sodom down to earth. (214)

The last lines, it is clear, cast quite a different light on the poem and in no way can it be read as a complaint about God's indifference. At the most it reflects an impatience with God's slowness to act but this element is also evident in many of the psalms and hardly amounts to blasphemy.

But it would be an injustice to Waddington and to Klein himself to deny that there are poems which seem to overstep the boundaries of religious propriety. The psalms of the Bible do, indeed, sometimes speak as though they are trying to jar a sleeping God into action¹⁴ but they never go so far as to dress down God as a "dotard" whose ears are stuffed with wads of cloud-cotton nor attempt to bestir him with the irritable plea, "How long will you sit on your throne, and nod?" (139). This would seem to strain even Elie Wiesel's proposition that from inside the community a Jew may say anything to God provided that it be on behalf of man.¹⁵

Nor is there any way to explain away the harshness of "Talisman in Seven Shreds." Here, God, by a sort of mirror image, has taken on the features of a

mechanized golem (robot) and all dogma has become foolishness in a fated universe:

What, then, is good and true and beautiful,
The tongue is bitter when it must declare:
matter is chaos, mind is chasm, fool,
the work of golems stalking in nightmare . . . (135)

And even faith that affirms justification after death in the face of life's miseries is bitterly mocked:

There is no witch of En-dor to invoke
asking dead spirits to pronounce the fact. . . .
But I will take a prong in hand and go
over old graves and test their hollowness:
be it the spirit or the dust I hoe
only at doomsday's sunrise will I know. (136)

If this were all there is to Klein one would be compelled to agree with Waddington's assessment that Klein's poems are certainly not religious in the ordinary sense of the word.¹⁶ At best they would seem to be the detritus of a faith crushed by scepticism. But the attitude evident in these poems is not typical of his work and they cannot be given privileged status while the more numerous poems in which his faith is evident are written off as wistful attempts to be religious or as weak departures from secularity. One wonders therefore on what internal evidence Waddington can write of Klein's "Psalm II" that here "we have a series of irresolute vacillations as the poet seeks to justify his political retreat and renewed religious belief."¹⁷ There is, in fact, nothing irresolute about the poem although he clearly knew what people would make of his attitude:

How is he changed, the scoffers say,
This hero of an earlier day, . . .
Who in his Zion lay at ease
Concocting learned blasphemies
To hate, contempt, and ridicule
The godly reign, the godly rule (210)

It seems to me that only a prejudgment which sees religion as weakness and withdrawal could conclude that this poem expresses uncertainty and retreat. Taken at face value it reads as a solid confession of faith in which the poet realizes that there are no arguments to convey to others his experience of God. But if there were

Then might they also know, as I
The undeniable verity,
The truth unspoiled by epigram
The simple, *I am that I am* (211)

At this point it would be appropriate to go on to examine later poems such as "Of Remembrance", "Stance of the Amidah", "Elegy" and others which can hardly be termed anything other than religious poems on the basis both of theme and attitude.¹⁸ But this would take us too far away from the criticism of Miriam Waddington and leave her emphasis of Klein's religious doubt unexamined. I should like, therefore, to leave a more thorough analysis of Klein's religious poetry for another time and to return to the questions of Klein's doubt and unbelief.

I use the plural "questions" here deliberately because while unbelief may be thought of as doubt grown into certainty they are not necessarily connected and they are certainly not identical. Doubt, indeed, or a certain disquieting questing after "proof" is one of the characteristics of faith which by its very nature leaves the mind thirsting after the sureness of vision. Theology itself is born of this need of faith to seek understanding but the coolness of the traditional phrase — *fides quaerens intellectum* — hides the personal anguish that is so often part of the individual's maturing process. It is a paradox that the naive faith of the child must give way to the adult's faith-in-tension to be resolved finally into the mature faith that says its amen in the darkness of unconditional acceptance. If the childhood faith is never doubted, never challenged by the questions that life throws up then it remains truly a therapeutic retreat from reality and can never come to tranquil maturity.¹⁹

KLEIN'S POETRY provides ample evidence of the three stages of faith's growth.²⁰ There are poems that remember an untroubled childhood faith,²¹ others that grapple with God's silence²² and finally those that accept the darkness of incomprehensibility that is an inescapable part of believing.²³ The first division is represented by many poems which look back nostalgically on the simple faith of childhood or find this faith preserved in simple people. But Klein has gone beyond this and he can only look back at an earlier time or upon an unquestioning faith with the realization that his questioning has separated him from such simplicity and caught him up in turmoil. This surely is a common experience of believers and so I cannot agree with Miriam Waddington that in "The Cripples" Klein deals openly with his loss of faith because he reacts to the extraordinary trust shown by the pilgrims to St. Joseph's Oratory by saying:

And I who in my own faith once had faith like this
but have not now, am crippled more than they (299)²⁴

I would think rather that his sense of weakness has been shared by many a Christian who has watched in wonder what seems the less complicated, stronger faith of his fellow believers and that this poem is accordingly akin to those which look back nostalgically on the religion of his childhood.

Such simple faith is admirable perhaps but for most men faith must eventually grapple with questions that trouble its tranquillity:

Nothing was difficult, O Master, then,
No query but it had an answer, clear,—
But now though I am grown, a man of men, . . .

There is
Much that I cannot grasp, and much that goes amiss (232)

Most painfully of all, faith must suffer the silence of God who refuses to justify himself to man. This is the theme of "Reb Levi Yitschok Talks to God". In this poem the renowned Hasidic rebbe who was famous for his faith and blunt questioning of God turns to him to complain of the suffering of Israel. But after his raging:

He suddenly went mild
Begging the Lord to lead him through the fog;
Reb Levi Yitschok, an ever-querulous child,
Sitting on God's knees in the synagogue,
Unanswered even when the sunrise smiled. (147)

The same burden of silence is apparent in "Psalm I" of the "Psalter of Avram Haktani":

Where in this dubious days shall I take counsel,
Who is there to resolve the dark, the doubt? (210)

There is no denying the burden of these lines in which the poet finds nothing to give him the clarity of insight that he seeks. The darkness is a fact and yet faith continues despite the irony and weariness. And so we have poems of mature, tranquil faith. Here, for example, are lines from "Stance of the Amidah":

Oh, give us such understanding as make superfluous second
thought; and at Thy least, give us to understand to repent (346)

Psalm XXIV which begins:

O incognito God, anonymous Lord,
with what name shall I call you?

concludes:

I have no title for your glorious throne,
and for your presence not a golden word,—
only that wanting you, by that alone
I do invoke you, knowing I am heard. (224)

Although much of the doubt that Klein's poetry reveals seems to belong within the context of faith rather than outside it, there is no denying that there are lines in which doubt seems to have given way to unbelief. One might point, for instance to "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" where we read

My father is gathered to his fathers, God rest his wraith!
 And his son
 Is a pauper in spirit, a beggar in piety,
 Cut off without a penny's worth of faith. (117)

It might be argued, however, that in these verses the poet speaks in the name of modern Jewry which found itself the victim of persecution despite its modernism and secularity. It is harder, though, to explain away the lines in "Diary of Abraham, Segal, Poet," in which the speaker separates himself from both the religion of his father and the Marxism of his brother, saying bluntly, "My idols have been shattered into shards" (87). These lines and these negative sentiments are present in Klein's work and Waddington is right to insist that critics take note of them. It would be a mistake, however, to exaggerate their importance or to insist that all the poems be read in the shadow they cast. Surely there is no reason at all why they should be linked with "Talisman in Seven Shreds" and considered the keys to unlock Klein's treasure.

The fact is that they only take on undue importance when the presupposition of a neat dichotomy between faith and doubt is accepted. Only then do they become paradigms for the interpretation of all his work. Otherwise they take their place in a body of poetry which displays the erratic evolution of one man's faith in its passage from naive simplicity through doubt and moments of outright denial to a faith that can affirm and delight in "The Mystery beyond the mysterious." (345)

Once we free ourselves from the either/or dichotomy that creates a gap between religion and secularity it is possible to accept peacefully the social dimension of Klein's poetry, his delight in language and even his belief in the quasi-magical power of words and to find all of these elements inseparably joined to his fundamental concern with man's relation to a transcendent and personal God. Once we move beyond this mental block we see that Klein is secular and religious, socialist and Jewish and that he both believes and doubts.

In conclusion then, we must say against those who call him a religious poet because they find him a pious optimist, and against those who deny him this status because they find him a faith-denying writer of minor blasphemies, that A. M. Klein is a religious poet, not because he writes devotional piety, but precisely because his work reflects without veneer the bitter tensions of a soul that takes God seriously.

NOTES

¹ Miriam Waddington, *A. M. Klein*, Toronto, 1970.

² *Ibid.*, 65 and 68.

³ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴ She presents their positions on p. 10 of her critical study.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 98. Italics added.

⁷ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's* (Published as one volume with *The Sabbath*), Harper and Row, New York, 1966, 84; Elie Wiesel, *Souls on Fire*, translated by Marion Wiesel, Random House (Vintage Books), New York, 1973, 110.

⁸ Wiesel, 110. A similar tone of accusation appears in the song "Rebono Shel Olam" attributed to Levi Yitzhak.

⁹ It is significant that when Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel dedicated his book *The Prophets*, Harper & Row, 1962 "To the martyrs of 1940-45" he quoted Psalm 44:

All this has come upon us,
Though we have not forgotten Thee,
Or been false to Thy covenant.
Our heart has not turned back
Nor have our steps departed from Thy way . . .
. . . for Thy sake we are slain . . .
Why dost Thou hide Thy face?

¹⁰ Irving Layton, "Review of *Poems (1944)*" in *A. M. Klein* (Critical Views on Canadian Writers) edited by Tom Marshall, Ryerson Press, 1970, 24.

¹¹ The bracketed numbers are page references to *The Collected Poems of A. M. Klein*, compiled by Miriam Waddington, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974.

¹² Waddington, *A. M. Klein*, 65.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Ps 44, 23; 59, 4; 7, 6.

¹⁵ Wiesel, 110.

¹⁶ i.e. pious and devout.

¹⁷ Waddington, *A. M. Klein*, 64.

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that Helen Gardner, the editor of *The Faber Book of Religious Verse*, London, 1972, says of her own quest for a definition of a religious poem, "I arrived at the criterion that a religious poem was a poem concerned in some way with revelation and with man's response to it." I take this as an adequate notion which makes it possible to recognize as religious even poetry that grapples in a serious or agonized fashion with the question of man's relationship to God.

¹⁹ cf. Louis Monden, "Sources of Difficulties in the Life of Faith" in *Toward a Theology of Christian Faith*, edited by Michael Mooney et al, New York, 1968, pp. 212-39.

²⁰ In his essay on Klein, Louis Dudek tries to establish a chronological progression in his poetry away from religion toward "a realistic and cosmopolitan view of things". ("A. M. Klein" in *A. M. Klein* (Critical Views on Canadian Writers) edited by Tom Marshall, p. 68). He therefore arbitrarily confines Klein's religious verse to his immature period explaining anything later away with the remark "No doubt he can return to his origins . . ." p. 68.

It is manifestly difficult to accurately date poems on the basis of their publication dates as Dudek points out and I have not therefore tried to argue that any strict pattern of development of faith is evident in his poems. An examination of the manuscripts and the correlation of the poems with his other writings might allow such an order to be established. . . . I suspect however, that even then we would find that the stages would not neatly follow each other but blend and mix together as they evolve.

In the meantime, however, it should be remembered that when Klein describes the development of "Uncle Melek" in his 1951 novel, *The Second Scroll*, he sees his progression as having three stages: naive, "private" faith gives way to Marxist dedication and finally to a love of God which commits him to service of the oppressed. This is clearly a pattern of unquestioning faith, doubt and unbelief, and ultimately a mature, consuming faith.

²¹ cf. e.g. "Bestiary": (158-59), "Psalm XV" (219), "Autobiographical" (271-73).

²² cf. e.g. "Psalm XXXIV" (231-33), "A Psalm of Resignation" (261).

²³ cf. e.g. "Psalm II" (210-11), "Psalm XXIV" (224).

²⁴ Waddington, *A. M. Klein*, 97.

ARS POETICA

Dorothy Livesay

i

Words have
no morality
exist in innocence

handled well
can perform miracles
gently massaging
the heart
yet
like snowballs
secretly laden with ice
can strike the eye
blind

ii

Ralph,
on my first undistracted evening
in Ottawa
I heard you airing
your Russian travelogue
an historical architectural
spiritual journey:
yours, not Moscow's.

Thus do poets thrive!
We are vultures feeding
on the remains of man
in order to stay alive
and fly.

Remember Ned?
 Such an arrogance of optimism
 that pours oil on fiery seas
 never counting
 the conflagration.

iii

One feather
 winging its way down
 graces the air

three or four or more
 set the mind floating

but a thousand feathers,
 Ugh!
 a choking pillow.

iv

There's a wind out there
 suffers no silence gladly:
 we harness him with words —
 he likes that whip.

DRIVER BEACH

R. G. Everson

Important-looking serious
 large yellow Works-Department plough
 with a high amber revolving flashing
 light as on an officially-marked police
 auto, along with several lower red
 lights gesturing no-fooling warnings

is ploughing the loose sand at the motor ramp
 Atlantic-ocean end of Flagler street
 The plough is making it easier for autos
 to be driven out on the beach or safely away
 from the beach. Our seaside village
 has laid out twenty-thousand dollars
 of the taxpayers' money — from the little stores
 and from people like me — to abet a frivolity

No private car or camper is driven down
on the the New Smyrna beach for a serious purpose
We come here just for fun. There is no work
for us to do. The driver of the plough
alone is serious. He is important,
herding loose multitudinous grains of sand
out of our frivolous ways

The serious driver
looks as though he were pondering that the upper beach
could be the blowing snow of future sun-cold eons
or the lower beach — the wave-rolled flat —
is fused amber after this next moment's bang

A TREE IS FALLING

Audrey Conard

Twigs, leaves, bark slips
thrown off have dropped;
birds blown up in small explosion
settled down on sapwood feathers
of white-ripped points of trunk
years ago.
Now the grubbing birds fly up
from evidence at my booted toe
honeycombed with mumble of decay.

The crash with only squirrels
and birds to make away
from thunder thrust to forest floor
is there, with all the sounds
outside our ken, layers
of Devonian fernfalls,
saurian growls, volcanic groans
in concentric waves of history
that crash and roar their aeonian
silence, waiting for an accidental ear.
Like undone deeds, little candles, little sins,
they are not expunged, but carry on
at angels' skirts, in unfound heavens,
with molecules of Caesar's exhalations.

THE MODES OF MATURITY

Anthony Appenzell

RICHARD B. WRIGHT, *Farthing's Fortunes*. Macmillan. \$10.95.

IAN MCLACHLAN, *The Seventh Hexagram*. Macmillan. \$9.95.

NAIM KATTAN, *Farewell, Babylon*, translated by Sheila Fischman. McClelland & Stewart. \$8.95.

RUTH NICHOLS, *Song of the Pearl*. Macmillan. \$7.95.

SUSAN KERSLAKE, *Middlewatch*. Oberon Press. \$8.95 hardcover, \$4.50 paper.

MORDECAI RICHLER describes *The Seventh Hexagram* by Ian McLachlan as "The brilliant debut of an enormously talented novelist". Of the author of *Farthing's Fortunes* he tells us "Richard Wright is a very talented man, the best novelist to emerge out of Canada in recent years." Good show, chaps! Jolly good show! The irreverent, no doubt, will suggest that such banal judgments say less about the novelists they praise than about the effects on Richler's prose of his work at the Book-of-the-Month Club. Yet, uninspired as such remarks may be, like most Richler has to say about books and writers these days, there is a touch of crude truth to them. Ian McLachlan has made a good first try with *The Seventh Hexagram*, though the book has too many and too obvious flaws for unqualified enthusiasm. And while it is a bit of meaningless gush to talk of Richard Wright as "the best novelist to emerge out of Canada in recent years", he is still a very good novelist and all the more congenial for being somewhat out of the fashionable swim.

What I imagine makes Richler react

immoderately to both these writers is that they display enormous energy of writing and a love of racy action, while each of them has strong satirical inclinations, on the whole well fulfilled. Richard Wright's *Farthing's Fortunes* makes no pretensions to formal innovation. It is picaresque in the grand old manner, the kind of book one could imagine Fielding or Smollett writing if either were reincarnated in our century. There are no games with time, no structural tricks. In fact, the one obviously artificial device, which makes the frame of the narrative, is the kind of thing Defoe and Swift were using nearly three hundred years ago to give a flavour of verisimilitude to their imaginary chronicles. The novel is introduced by a fictional publisher who claims that it was told to his tape recorder by an obstreperous nonagenarian he discovered in an Ontario old people's home.

A clue to the character of the story Bill Farthing tells — it is the story of his own life — is given by the book's epigram, which is a quotation from *The Horse's Mouth*. But Bill is no Gulley Jimson, since

he lacks the riding creative passion that makes Gulley at once a great artist and a monster of selfishness who manoeuvres even misfortune in his favour. Bill is much more the traditional picaresque half-hero, never a settled citizen, never dominated by an intellectual or creative passion, always open to the adventures of life, but swimming with them rather than controlling them, so that though on the whole he enjoys his existence, one can never say he has shaped it.

It is the luck of the road, the *deus ex machina* of continual coincidence, that in fact controls Bill's erratic career, and if that god from the machine has a personification, it is the monstrous Findlater, the genial, gigantic and totally amoral American confidence man who finds Bill Farthing working as a boy in a Toronto bar and takes him under his ample if somewhat ragged wing.

Findlater leads Bill into scrape after scrape as they wander across the States, alternatively feasting and famishing, and find their way eventually to the Klondike. Their fortunes rise and fall dramatically as Findlater shows himself all too often more gullible than the suckers he tries to defraud. The pair are recruited into Soapy Smith's gang in Skagway and endure prison terms in Seattle and Dawson City.

Bill conceives a romantic passion for Sally Butters, a red-haired burlesque dancer, that lasts him to the verge of old age, but though he has tempestuous affairs with other women, Sally always eludes him. Even his attempt at wartime heroism ends in an anti-climax in the true picaresque style; having seen his comrades killed in the battle of the Somme and survived its horrors, he sets out to assassinate General Haig in retribution, but when he enters the grounds of the château where Haig's headquarters are situated, he is felled by a cricket ball and stays in a state of amnesia for sixteen years, awakening

like a latter-day Rip Van Winkle to endure the Depression and to wander off with Findlater on a last shabby caper, promoting phoney prize fights in the deep South. Now he realizes the monster of callousness Findlater has become, and finally parts company with him, to return to his childhood Ontario town. There he takes up with the daughter of the local undertaker's ex-prostitute wife (who had seduced him long ago in adolescence), and, after a spell of amateur mortician-ship, ends his career rearing pigs on the advice of an old Black farmer who told him that "pigs is about the best friends a man can have", which seems to accord with Bill's experience, for no human friend turns out to be true to the end and no love brings lasting happiness. Like all good picaresques, *Farthing's Fortunes* ends in the sadness of life spent, its hardest lessons learnt.

All this is standard Fieldingesque stuff, but picaresques never get their effect from formal originality; in fact, the more hackneyed the general plot the better, since what all writers of such books, from Cervantes on, have really relied on is — first — the liveliness of individual episodes and — second — the vividness of detail with which a credible setting is created for the hero's barely credible adventures. Here Wright is in his element, for he is a first-rate fictional documentarian, doing his research into modes and manners very thoroughly, weaving a background of astonishing authenticity in which the secondary characters behave, perhaps not as real people did in those days, but certainly as characters in contemporary plays and novels were made to do. It is the good old recipe of total verisimilitude once one has taken the first step into fantasy — the recipe that made *Moll Flanders* and *Gulliver's Travels* and *Roderick Random* so successful in their day, and now so enjoyably turns the tricks in *Farthing's Fortunes*.

The most memorable single creation in *Farthing's Fortunes* is undoubtedly the monstrous Findlater, and it is another satirically conceived monster of flesh and ambivalence that dominates *The Seventh Hexagram* — otherwise a very different book from *Farthing's Fortunes*. For the character one remembers most vividly from Ian McLachlan's novel is a pustular, foul-mouthed gay named Donald Winn, who is the most deadly gossip in Hong Kong and has parlayed his genius for inquisitiveness into a career as intelligence agent for the British rulers of the island. I am not sure how intentional this may have been on McLachlan's part. In fact, I suspect that originally Winn was conceived as a minor character who would be useful in tying together the various strands of this novel of sultry love and political intrigue in the colony that is a margin between two conflicting worlds of self-righteous violence, the western and the communist. But by the end of the book Winn has so shouldered his way into our attention that he seems to dominate the whole chaotic action.

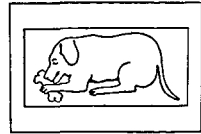
In the process, *The Seventh Hexagram* has emerged from what seems to have been the original concept of a kind of political thriller about the Far East — Malraux laced with Ian Fleming — into a work of grand satire marred mainly by the clinging fragments of the original intent. The main action centres on the romantically conventional triangle between Joe Stewart (the radical journalist anti-hero), Jordan King, an ageing and bombastic half-Chinese veteran of the Long March, marooned in a Hong Kong mansion, and King's French wife Evelyn, who takes Joe as her lover. There are other forces that try to pull Joe out of the triangle: Winn, of course, Mei, the erotically tantalizing Chinese girl capitalist, and Kwan, the aristocratic Chinese intellectual who finds himself in control of revolutionary manoeuvres for which

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he is temperamentally unfit. It seems as though in the original plan of *The Seventh Hexagram* suspense was an important element, as it is in all conventional thriller novels, and it is sustained even in the final version to such an extent that, though the novel begins with Joe fleeing from the violent death of Evelyn (killed by Jordan) and Jordan (killed by Joe), it is not until the end that we are told how it actually happened, and by then so much else has taken place in other directions that the final revelation is uninteresting. There is a similar sense of duty to the tough-minded Fleming kind of thriller in the treatment of sex, which is obvious and rather boring, as most overt description of fornication has now become.

On the other hand, Winn and his world of faggots, never displayed in real action, are marvellously alive, original and convincing, and it is with them that *The Seventh Hexagram* takes on its strength as we compare the empty vanity of a revolutionary has-been that negates Jordan's epic tales of the Long March, with the capricious viciousness (combined with a good deal of spontaneous personal tenderness) which Donald Winn projects as the nature of his particular kind of autocracy. The Communists bungle their Hong Kong agitations; the British bungle their counter-measures. We see history shambling towards some kind of climax, and we know already that though its threats will be clumsily fulfilled, its promises will not be kept. As a thriller, *The Seventh Hexagram* is marred by too slavish an observance of the rules. But as a satire on the ability of power — or the very chance of holding it — to make fools and monsters of men it is admirable. In neither role, of course, is it realistic except in its supporting documentary detail and its sharp vignettes of Hong King life, for the thriller is as much a convention as the satire; McLachlan's beginner's

luck had led him to be caught between the two conventions and to achieve no satisfying reconciliation. I look forward to his next novel. He seems the kind of writer whom practice will make — if not perfect — at least very good.

In *Farewell, Babylon*, Naim Kattan moves between conventions with the adeptness of an *homme de lettres* trained in the French tradition of stepping with ease from genre to genre. *Farewell, Babylon* is in fact a novel so autobiographical as to be fictionalized memoirs rather than *roman à clef*. Kattan is really telling us the tale of his own youth and young manhood as a Jewish intellectual in Iraq during the period of final British occupation and emergent independence. But the convention of speaking as an anonymous narrator and of renaming the remaining actors in the story enables him to give that shaping into an artifact, to justify those poetic manipulations of fact, which not only create a haunting picture of a changing Baghdad, where the Jewish community finds its ancient place in the land finally endangered, but also presents an unusually appealing and authentic account of the process of growing up. It is a kind of *Iraqi Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and at times, in its most exotic evocations of a world so recent and so lost, it achieves the same epiphanous intensity as Joyce did in his exorcizing of the past. Since he came to Canada, Naim Kattan has contributed a great deal to our literary life; *Farewell, Babylon* may well be the best of his gifts.

A mature fictional tradition is a flexible one, in which many approaches of form and viewpoint can exist together, and the reassuring variety among Canadian novels is demonstrated if we compare the robust action and strong satire of *Farthing's Fortunes* and *The Seventh Hexagram* and the subtly modified autobiography of *Farewell, Babylon* with the pure lyrical fantasy of the last two books on my list,

Song of the Pearl by Ruth Nichols and *Middlewatch* by Susan Kerslake.

Ruth Nichols has already written two excellent books for children, and a haunting novel about transitional adolescence, *Ceremony of Innocence*, none of which have in my view been sufficiently recognized in Canada, though they have received considerable praise in Britain. Nichols has always written on the borderlines of experience, where the actual merges into the numinous, and in *Song of the Pearl* she leaves the realm of earthly life to write a novel of death and reincarnation. The heroine, Margaret Redmond, almost wills herself into death through her love-hatred of the uncle who raped her as a teen-ager. The novel begins with her return to earth thirty-five years later as an apparition to forgive and console, and the rest of the book tells of the experiences during death that lead her to this reappearance in her old form which precedes her actual return to earth as a reincarnated being.

The triumph of *Song of the Pearl* is the sense of concrete experience that is given to the world of death. From the moment Margaret recovers self-awareness after dying, and finds herself standing on a mountain path dressed in her blue cotton kimono, the world she inhabits may present some curious aspects—one can will the appearance of food and drink, for example—but it is nevertheless entirely tangible. In this world memories of earthly lives are intermittent; those of the last life are clear enough and are memories of the ordinary kind, since one remains the person of that life before death, but memories of previous lives involve concrete transitions, so that Margaret lapses into these past Elizabethan and Zapotec and Sumerian selves and for a short time experiences their tangible, physical existence. The central point of dying seems to be the re-establishment of contact with one's most primal self, as Mar-

garet realizes when she visits the Oracle and senses that its power "was in some way herself; but a self so ancient that it was not yet human in her terms. It was the well of vitality from which she drank in her deepest sleep; it was the self that had first looked down into the shadow in the depths and had resolved to become Man."

The reason behind dying is that it frees us from the bonds we gather during life; those who waste their death are people like the ancient Chinese extended family Margaret encounters, who have reconstructed in the world of unlife their own lost Right Order which they pursue in the Great Compound that Margaret is destined to destroy by fire, thus liberating them from an obsessive holding on to death so that they can return to life as, at the end, after her appearance to her uncle has exorcised her hatred, Margaret herself is about to return.

If *Song of the Pearl* is speculative as well as lyrical fiction, Susan Kerslake's admirably written first novel, *Middlewatch*, is lyrical-archetypal. It is essentially the story of Sleeping Beauty and the man who awakens her, in action rather like Gide's *Symphonie Pastorale* without the bitter ending, but in mood rather like Alain Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*; altogether the kind of novel one might expect to come out of Québec rather than out of the Maritimes, but welcome nevertheless. The plot is of exemplary simplicity. Morgan is a young schoolmaster who comes to teach at a Maritimes fishing village, where he lives alone at the teacherage. He rescues a young girl whom he finds naked and tied to her bed in the cottage from which her brother, with whom she lived, has fled. Sibbi suffers amnesia as a result of her experience, and Morgan takes her into his house and tries to nurse her back to conscious living. The simple plot is managed by the manipulation of time, so that we flash back

over Sibbi's life with her strange brother, and Morgan's early contacts with her when she would come very occasionally into his school. But it is not the action that is of prime importance; rather it is the web of mood, through which we understand the development of a kind of inarticulate communication between Morgan and the unspeaking, memoriless

girl, until at last, nurtured by tenderness, the spring of recollections begins to flow. It is a slight book, with no attempt made to build it into more than it is, what the French would call a *récit*; but the sureness of the language irradiates every small act and every image, so that the slightness paradoxically holds a richness, like gossamer loaded with the jewels of the mist.

THE LIMITS OF THE GARDEN

Mike Doyle

DOUGLAS LOCHHEAD, *The Full Furnace*. McGraw-Hill-Ryerson.

THE BACK COVER OF *The Full Furnace*, Douglas Lochhead's "Collected poems", is garnished with the usual cluster (or do I mean "clutter"?) of critics' remarks. In one of these which struck me as particularly just, Elizabeth Waterston speaks of Lochhead's poems as showing, "the historic reminiscent strain of Canadian literature", and she adds that "Such poems quietly attest to the intellectual life of the country, and to the national character. . . ." This is a testimonial worth earning, and worth pondering as a useful critical guidepost. As it happens, very recently Victoria (or, rather, the university) has had its own little contretemps on the question of Canadianism. As part of a very useful contribution to the affair, the editor of the *Victoria Times* provided a most timely statement from Northrop Frye, who said: "It is obvious that Canadian literature, whatever its inherent merits, is an indispensable aid to the knowledge of Canada. It records what the Canadian imagination has reacted to, and it tells us things about this environment that nothing else will tell us." While I recognize that there are people who have very different ideas about the purposes of literature, I like that statement very much. As regards our present con-

cern, it provides a proper perspective from which to view *The Full Furnace*, which is a book not notable for a few masterly set-pieces, but rather for a pervasive tonal quality.

Work in the collection presumably covers twenty years or a little over, but at least half of the poems are newly collected and fully eighty per cent of the work has appeared in book form only in the past five or six years. Perhaps this accounts for a certain sense of homogeneity I got through my first "feel" of the work, though a variety of forms and line lengths is employed.

How many years work went into Lochhead's *The Heart is Fire* (1959) I do not know, nor do I know the book itself. Of the dozen poems from it included here, two strike me as particularly substantial work, though on a small scale. Both "Sunday Rain at Ignonish" and "Nova Scotia Fishermen" have the quality of palpability, or "felt life". The latter has, in addition, an Anglo-Saxon starkness which seems appropriate at least to my Maritime imaginings:

Men whose red-torn faces reveal
Breast intimacies of dawn and sudden
Spilling from the reeling room
To balance cabers in the sun . . .

cased in the sou'wester. Now we become engaged with a man, but a man who contacts us through his poems.

Overhead are the same stars,
but this is not Halifax,
this is Millwood Road,
I say it out loud, Toronto.

A surprising thing about Lochhead as Torontonian, however, is the amount of nature poetry this seems to have drawn from him. He locates himself in what we may call the existential middle, that ground which, as he puts it in the title of one poem, is "No Eden, no hell" (where even the latter has a small "h"):

I walk the simple field at Davis ville,
suddenly the urgent tunnel of a siren's sound
tells me hard and true the limits
of the garden . . .

For some reason the poem reminded me of Purdy's "Archaeology of Snow" (I can't perceive any telling overt connection), and Lochhead cannot match Purdy's capacity for making imaginative leaps which are at once energetic and sensitive. Within the limits of his familiar garden, though, he can touch a nerve.

In the collection as a whole, the poems which do most for me are the first ten pages or so of the penultimate section, "Poems Roughly Divided":

in winter berry wood
on two half-stripped
tamaracks, some
fifty cedar waxwings
fed and flew
branch to branch
and despite my noise
and staring stayed
where they were
outlasting me
loose only on a Sunday.

These opening lines of "to keep alive" remind me of Williams, even though the line or "time-life" in them is vastly different. Here and elsewhere in the section ideas are embodied in things in such a way that one is reminded also of Robert

Langbaum's perceptive essay in *The Modern Spirit*, "The New Nature Poetry". Lochhead illustrates, in such pieces as "Evening grosbeaks", "Warblers" and "Swifts", Langbaum's description of contemporary nature poetry as being opposed to the pathetic fallacy. Lochhead in these poems offers both tact and economy. At times he verges on the fallacy, as in "Not mine":

a
red-tailed hawk
alights
on a rotting bale
of hay
to look
me over closely
as I walk
his field
in a soaking wind
this Sunday

to be alone
is his way
but not mine
not mine

But his encroachment is only enough to reveal a close engagement with the subjects (objects?) of the poem.

Elsewhere Lochhead says, "at the start / we are all natural explorers / pure poets", and that, "all our holes and poles / give nothing but the natural". At one point Langbaum claims that, "The new concept of the unconscious . . . has extended mind to the very borderline between animate and inanimate nature . . . thus reanimating all of nature and making nature poetry possible again". Sometimes one has a sense of this in reading the best of Lochhead's engagements with the natural scene. Tentative enough, to be sure, it is nonetheless present.

Poems such as "Not mine" have a kind of admirable integrity (which has to do only marginally with the deployment of line. In that poem and others, I believe I should have managed the line in a somewhat different fashion, but of course my own fashion). Small scale but true,

the work early in "Poems roughly divided" seems best in the collection. Much in the final section, "WAVE I" seems, by comparison, self-conscious and literary.

As a collection, *The Full Furnace* cannot justly be summed up as either "substantial" or "incandescent". For the work of a long span of time, it is relatively

slight. Its strength seems to rest in a measure of wit, some care in attending to the object, and an understated trueness. Let me conclude by endorsing Elizabeth Waterston's judgment, quoted already above: "Such poems attest to the intellectual life of the country, and to the national character . . ."

A WOMAN IS A WOMAN IS A WOMAN

Phyllis Grosskurth

BRIAN MOORE, *The Doctor's Wife*, McClelland & Stewart. \$8.95.

I HAVE NEVER for the life of me understood why Brian Moore is considered a Canadian novelist. He lived here for — was it four years (1948-1952)? — and wrote precisely one novel with a Canadian setting (although peopled with Irish characters), *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (1960). Then in 1971 he wrote a dull account of the Cross and Laporte kidnappings, *The Revolution Script*. Many of the characters in his later novels are expatriate Canadians and the names of Canadian cities are dropped in from time to time. But surely a *Canadian* writer is one who is immersed in the life here. I am not criticizing Mr. Moore for this situation where some people have insisted upon adopting him. He has every right to live and write about what he pleases. But in my view he is still Irish to the backbone.

In his first — and one of his best books — *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearn* (1950) one of the characters has returned regretfully to Ireland to retire after living for many years in the U.S.A. At one point he explodes in exasperation at Ireland:

"There's the whole world to worry about. So why bother about Ireland?" Mr. Madden said. "The Irish. I'll tell you the trouble with the Irish. They're hicks."

"Look who's talking. You were a hick once yourself."

"Hicks," Mr. Madden repeated, smiling happily. "They think everybody is interested in their troubles. Why, nobody cares. A little island you could drop inside of Texas and never see, who cares? Why, the rest of the world never heard of it."

Well, we have heard and cared a lot about Ireland since then, but not from Brian Moore. In his latest novel, *The Doctor's Wife*, a Belfast housewife escapes for a holiday in France where all the action takes place. Occasionally she wonders vaguely if some familiar landmarks have been blown up, but most of her time is preoccupied with her love affair with a young American student.

Moore has moved a long way from the hicks of *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearn*. In the early novels, his language, with its frequent cosy addresses to us — "you see" — was decidedly Irish in intonation. His characters like Ginger Coffey and Gavin (*The Emperor of Ice Cream*) were unmistakably fumbling Irish blatherers. To some degree a case could be made that by turning his back on what he really knows about, some of his work has deteriorated as a consequence. The exquisite novella, *Catholics*

(1972), the story of a group of Irish priests who stubbornly adhere to their old religious customs on their isolated island, is a striking example of where Moore's roots and *métier* belong.

Moore is a difficult writer to discuss because his novels range from the bad (*The Emperor of Ice Cream*), to the mediocre (*I Am Mary Dunne*) to the dazzling (*The Great Victorian Art Collection*). His writing and his craftsmanship are always skilful, but it is only when he allows his imagination full sway (as in *Catholics* and *The Great Victorian Art Collection*) that he approaches a brilliant novel.

One of his great assets is his Irish gift of the gab. He is particularly skilful at describing angry scenes in which people rage vitriolically, sarcastically, and woundingly — and, cleverest of all, he knows when and how to prevent someone from having the last word. In some scenes I found myself recalling the Christmas dinner squabble over Parnell in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

He is not an impressive creator of character. Judith Hearn and Ginger Coffey are touching and memorable to a degree. But to my mind there is only one character who captures our imaginative credibility — Mrs. Tierney in *An Answer From Limbo*. Perhaps she emerges from those pages so successfully because she really knows who she is. Most of his other characters tend to be wispy because they are people in search of themselves — or, rather, of an author who is capable of giving them an inner life or at least some sort of reason for living.

The Great Victorian Art Collection is not about particular individuals. An amazing *tour de force*, it is an allegory about the creative process. The experience of having a dream about Victoriana only to wake to find the car park of a motel in Carmel, California, filled with all the actual concrete objects of a young professor's subconscious, is breathtakingly

original. It is the sort of fantasy that becomes anagogical truth. Once the dreams of artists have materialized to the point where they are soiled and scratched by a gaping public, the artist has forever lost that particular dream.

To my mind, Moore's least effective books are those in which he tries to be trendy, giving us his version of the contemporary woman's search for identity. The first of these was Jane in *An Answer From Limbo*. Her mother-in-law is imported from Ireland to look after the children so that Brendan, the self-centred writer, can finally finish his novel. Jane, too, is being used because if she no longer has to look after the children, she can bring in the bacon by returning to her former job in an art department. Jane is doing this partly for Brendan's sake, and partly for her own so that she can get out of the house. There is not the slightest suggestion that she is creative or at all interested in her work. Her freedom becomes an affair with the office Lothario who finally abandons her to humiliation. If she cannot have sex with the machismo type of her dreams, there is nothing much left to live for. So it's back to the laundromat.

On the first page of *I Am Mary Dunne*, a thrice-married woman recalls an incident that occurred when she was a child in the convent. The nun had just written on the blackboard, "Cogito ergo sum." Mary shyly raised her hand and asked if the quotation should not have been, "I remember. Therefore I am." When the puzzled nun inquires what she means, she replies, "Because we are what we remember." It is an effective if not particularly persuasive means of introducing the theme of the book. Mary has reached the stage where she no longer knows who she is because her life has been so fragmented — even her husbands have become confused in her mind. On the particular day of the action she is expecting her period

and, as Moore seems to believe, women are expected to be pretty highly-strung at that stage in the month. Consequently, Mary can't think very coherently and her husband magnanimously understands her problem.

This is a very perplexing book. People exchange enigmatic looks. The reader is never sure if the characters are deliberately misunderstanding one another, or whether Moore is attempting a subtle method of conveying the ambivalence of human relationships. There is a happy ending to Mary's predicament: her husband kisses her good-night and tells her that he loves her. She is actually loved by a man, God be thanked, so her final Motley Bloom affirmation is, "I am Mary Dunne — I am Mary Dunne. I am Mary Dunne." And who, precisely, is she?

Moore's most recent novel, *The Doctor's Wife*, is a feeble version of Doris

Lessing's *The Summer Before The Dark* (Come to think of it, the husband in Lessing's novel was a doctor too!). Sheila Redden, a 37 year old Belfast housewife leaves for the Riviera for a brief holiday in the hotel where she and her husband spent their honeymoon sixteen years before. Kevin cannot join her for a few days so she breaks her journey in Paris where she falls in love with an American graduate student who is young enough to be her son. They become passionate lovers. Mark's major assets seem to be his sexual vitality and the decisive way in which he always makes up Sheila's mind for her. Sheila's liberation is sex, sex and ever more sex. She describes the experience as a state of grace. She is an attractive personality but her only form of emancipation seems to consist in fantasizing about running away from her husband — although it is Mark who makes all the prac-

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tical arrangements. Actually in the end she does not go — Mark is booked on a previous charter and she is to follow on another plane, the details of which Mark explains to her as though she were a demented child. One feels that if Mark had physically put her on the plane, she would now be rolling in the hay in Vermont.

In the end she disappears like the man who said he was going to the corner to buy a package of cigarettes. She cannot return to her husband and she is incapable of following Mark — the only alternatives the author leaves open to her. At one point in the novel, Sheila reflects:

"Oh God, The Troubles, you can't blame the Troubles for everything. That's become

our big excuse. They're the only thing we believe in any more . . . The Protestants don't believe in Britain and the Catholics don't believe in God. And none of us believes in the future."

Sheila is in limbo because she is helpless, hopeless and with no expectations for the future — because she hasn't got a man. This theme has appeared so persistently in Moore's novels that it would appear that he actually believes that a woman can find self-realization only through merging with a man. Perhaps Moore left Ireland because, like Joyce, he felt a love-hate relationship for it. If Moore has left Ireland physically, he has not abandoned the attitudes of the Old Sod.

TRIBUTE TO EVERSON

Al Purdy

R. G. EVERSON, *Indian Summer*, Oberon Press. \$7.95.

RON EVERSON is now in his seventies; this is his seventh book. And since he's spent most of his working life as a public relations executive, it's not amiss to wonder how many he would have produced in some other occupation? Many more or none? Of course, it's useless speculation. However, since I have a fairly close acquaintanceship with the man, I'm inclined to think he would have been even a finer writer, especially if beginning again in this day and age.

In the 1920's around the time when Arthur Smith and Frank Scott were publishing the *McGill Fortnightly* with its English-sounding title, Everson was writing love stories for Street & Smith, western and detective stories as well for the same string of American pulp magazines. He was also writing poems. And taking a law course at Osgoode Hall, Toronto; and

getting married. He tried to make a living at writing for a time, subsisting with his wife in a wilderness cabin, stringing his typewriter ribbon between trees when it got wet. (I've no idea how the ribbon got wet, but it's one of Everson's personal anecdotes.)

However, at half-a-cent a word or less — which was the going rate from pulp magazines — it was pretty hard to support a wife, even in those non-inflationary times. Everson graduated in law around 1930, but never practised. (The *Supplement to the Oxford Companion* is in error by saying he did.) The new lawyer went directly into public relations, and over the years gradually or swiftly advanced in his firm, finally becoming its senior partner with consequent increase of worldly wealth. He retired from business in 1962, and began to write even

more intensively. Of course he had never stopped writing over all those years as a corporate executive: recently I saw a poem of his listed in a Canadian catalogue that was published in *Willison's Weekly* in 1933.

I'm giving all this personal and lit. history because I think it throws light on a rather remarkable man. Everson's writing techniques have changed completely over the last few years. Whereas once he was metrical, using rhyme and off-rhyme, his poems are now almost entirely in free verse. And it's interesting to compare poems in his earlier books with those of *Indian Summer*. But even the early books were not so far-distant in time, since *Three Dozen Poems* appeared in 1957.

Everson's mind is encyclopaedic: it picks up information like vacuum cleaner dust, from books, from life, and from travel as slightly differentiated from life. Scraps of knowledge are stored, as well as complete interpretations of history, dates, weather, the moods of men and armies, etc. Walking or driving with him, one is liable to be given a dissertation, complete with dates, of, say the relationship of Pericles to the Greek city-state in classical Greece. It's a kind of memory bank he has, an automatic bone computer. And suddenly, gathering wood for a campfire and seeing it blaze up, analogy strikes again:

.... dazzlements that rear
Strange as Lincoln who — middle-aged —
awoke,
Or that one century when Athens blazed,
Florence but half that long, and in the mind
Of Keats the one great year when seas
would burn ...

(From *Three Dozen Poems*)

I happen to think that is a marvelous passage, and rather regret that anything similar will not come again from Everson. But something has replaced it, something that is perhaps much harder to do: write

in an everyday speaking voice, and make the written-down thing itself burn in the reader's mind. Not the actual words said, but the thing that happened, the incident, the mood that rises from words to leave the poem on its page and dwell in a reader's mind. Without the intermediate necessity of words forming in the brain and, in some degree, barring the way to experience? All of which leads to so many questions that I'd better abandon the subject. But in the sense that words evoke experience, there is also the reverse process: when something happens, either trivial or important, we are quite liable to have somebody else's poem-analogy pop into our heads.

Some coiner of clichés said: in the making of books there is no end. Just so with analogies. I note with pleasure that in Everson's present book the quality is still in evidence. Here's a verse about another fire, a roadside one in Mexico, the title of the poem rather awkwardly telegraphing the ending (Mexican Silence Behind the Conquistadors):

The far end of the scorch which we are
approaching is flaming noisily —
a red cock crowing, elbowing upward,
flapping smoke wings
This fire is the only event going on in
Yucatan
as though the Spanish Christian riders had
just now passed by

Of course there is some danger in having all this information thrust at one in poems — these sidelights and hind-sights of history: the reaction can be, SO WHAT? However, in the above example of Everson's powers of analogy (a roadside fire with the Spanish Conquest), the danger is by-passed for me, although I'm still not sure about the validity of that analogy.

Indian Summer consists very largely of "travel poems" — a genre of which the connective tissue in Everson's mind makes full use. Africa, India, Japan, Indonesia

and Norway all provide "settings" for poems, many of them very successful ones. And it makes me wonder (these travel poems) about the changing attitudes of Canadians: are they/we becoming more sophisticated and knowledgeable, citizens of a larger world and quite comfortable there — ? Because many Canadian poets are now writing travel poems, Birney, Layton, Pat Lane, Gustafson, etc. And how does that equate with Margaret Laurence and Mordecai Richler coming home to Canada, having overlived their foreign experience and used up the memory bank of Canada? But poets, unlike novelists, can rarely leave their own countries permanently unless they write as objectively as novelists — become more "professional". Eliot and Auden were exceptions to this rule, but Everson is not.

I make no judgment as to the virtue of this homing instinct of poets, except to say they do have such instincts and feel-

ings. Everson's last three poems are, inevitably, set in Canada, probably because he can't help himself. But he brings other greener fields and, possibly, more exciting places home with him. More exciting? If you've ever seen a fight break out between loggers in a Prince George pub, then what can Samarcand offer?

Anyway, I want to pay tribute to Ron Everson. Despite his onerous career as public relations executive and the chastening handicap of great wealth with a modicum of accompanying soft luxury, he has managed to produce many hard, taut and just-right poems. Not only in this book either: in all his other books. Of course they're not all "taut and just-right". But some of them are. Some of them reverberate; some lift right off the page; a few in this book do (a few is a great deal in my terminology). They reach into time and turn the past inside out, until you hear an echo of yourself before and after — of all our selves.

A MATTER OF HEALTH

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

a few dead friends
turn this house
into a coffin

let the crystal vase
find its own flowers

eternal and breakable
it knows that solitude burps
only when your memory coughs

THESE ABIDING QUESTIONS

ELIZABETH BREWSTER, *In Search of Eros*.
Clarke, Irwin, \$6.95.

IN PLACE OF a dedication, Elizabeth Brewster addresses some formal lines to friends of "the old days" who disputed together about the nature and use of poetry. As always she keeps her own distance —

being given to writing casually and as I
pleased,
can find no theory how or what to write,
merely reflect my small and personal world,
a second-hand vision or a passing love

This disclaimer represents well the dominant mask of her work and the chief subjects of this collection, but the lines that follow are perhaps more significant:

yet must maintain, though intermittently,
the worth of the argument, my deep
concern.

The argument is here, in this book, held with herself but no less one about the nature and limitations of her art, those abiding questions about the world of imagination as against that of actuality. It is this argument, "intermittently" certain of itself and "intermittently" distrusting, that carries this book forward from *Sunrise North*, her previous collection.

At the same time as there are questionings, there is a quiet joy, an expansiveness and ease, about *In Search of Eros*, the mark of an artist coming into her full powers. Consisting of seventy-five poems in four sections, somewhat reminiscent in arrangement of *Passage of Summer*, this

book is a substantial collection and perhaps Miss Brewster's most satisfying to date.

The first section, "The Magic Rod," opens with a poem addressed to "P.K.P." The masks worn by that poet are the opposite of those preferred by Miss Brewster. P. K. Page, both as painter and poet, is an artist who makes no effort to conceal the richly decorative and artificial nature of her craft; she glories, one might say, in the patterns, musical and metaphorical, of her art and through them reaches her own synthesis. What Elizabeth Brewster is claiming here, and not for just this poem, is a common concern, in spite of the surface differences.

In and out
in and out
we move as in a dance
an elaborate ballet
though I am clumsy
spoil the pattern

except in dreams, where I move
as you move
perfectly
your double
the perfect ballerina

This records not only the shared quest for perfection but also the doubts about her own place in the ballet and the ballet's place in life. It raises questions that this book will raise again and again. The final section of the poem might well serve as an epigraph for the book:

And the others move
swans, witches, the prince,
choric observers,
we all move
nobody first
all equal
reflecting one another

These opening poems are followed by a group of love poems which pick up from the love poems in *Sunrise North* but move to a more open quest of Eros. Ironic distance is kept here by frankness, the acknowledgement that

there is time even in bed
for a little light
verse.

(“Poems for Your Hands.”)

This humour keeps a continuity with the earlier work and asserts Miss Brewster’s separateness from more solemn love-makers.

The second section, “In Search of Eros”, consists largely of fairy tales, dreams and other stories, not so much brought up to date as brought within the compass of a particular imagination. Here, Miss Brewster displays her skill with a variety of verse forms—song, ballad, sonnet, nursery rhyme. The title poem, described as “Selections from a longer poem”, consists of segments of the Psyche-Eros story, richly elaborated in fine blank verse.

The third section, “Inanna,” more clearly returns to the central questions about the nature of things. Beneath its ironies, it affirms a primitive, natural order that predates and encompasses all mythologies.

But somewhere in the country
in a hovel under trees
some old crone dying in her bed
whispered a name she had heard in
childhood
to protect her from the dark

(“Death of the Gods.”)

As in the previous section, where the story of Willie Lump Lump, “the ugliest man in Canada”, becomes one with fairy and folk tales, actualities of contemporary life are absorbed in the larger mythology.

The final section, “Pilgrim,” has the effect of reiterating the book’s main themes and motifs. It does move on, though, to intimations of apocalypse, suggesting more than personal doubts about the continuity of culture and the survival of mankind.

But how can there be poems
if there are no sparrows

and no people?
How can a ghost haunt
a world without houses?

(“The poet in the last days.”)

The poet’s private mythology, her private doubts about her own art and its place in her life, take their place in the larger myth of our time. The outward movement, evident early in the book, is complete.

As she did in *Sunrise North*, the poet chooses to end this fine collection by reasserting the distinctness of her mask from more fashionable masks:

If I wanted to be fucked
I should probably choose a different word.
(Anyhow, I am not quite sure
whether it is a transitive or an intransitive
verb,
because it was never given to me to parse.)

Usually I can parse words, analyse sentences,
spell, punctuate,
and recognize the more common metrical
forms.

It is almost impossible
that I shall ever be
a truly established poet.

(“Disqualification”)

One might say, of this passage as of the book, that Miss Brewster is still a poet who insists on having her cake.

ROBERT GIBBS

URBANE COMEDY

MARGARET ATWOOD, *Lady Oracle*. McClelland & Stewart. \$10.00.

MARGARET ATWOOD’s new novel is a compound of domestic comedy, Jungian psychology and social satire, stirred with wit and flavoured with the occult. Its narrator-heroine, Joan Foster, tells the story of her ugly-duckling progress from unhappy childhood in suburban Toronto to literary success and fame (reviews in the *Globe*

and *Mail*, CBC interviews), and a personal crisis which sends her into hiding in Italy. As a child, Joan suffers from excessive fatness, and the tortures which this condition causes her are intensified by her prim mother's frustration and despair at having produced such a monster. At school, at dancing-class, at Brownies, she is made to feel an outsider, and learns to hide her feelings, even to fear them. Though a drastic diet reduces her to normal size, the adult (and attractive) Joan is still tormented by a lack of self-confidence, a fear of exposure and failure, and she is driven to hide behind other identities: mistress of a Polish émigré, wife of an immature student radical, adulterous lover of an artist—in each relationship she acts a role determined for her by her partner, seeking to be what he desires, too insecure to be herself. (Allegorists of national identity please note.) Joan's deeper emotional needs find some outlet in her writing, where she can parade her yearnings in the fancy dress of "costume Gothics" with such titles as *Stalked by Love, Love—My Ransom* or *Storm over Castleford*, published (not surprisingly) under an assumed name. She understands the importance of escapist literature to the thousands of bored women who share her frustrations; more importantly, she recognizes the danger of allowing her fantasy to subdue her real, waking life; and the novel is in large part the account of her efforts to bring the two sides of her personality into a harmonious and fruitful junction.

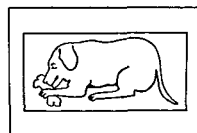
Atwood means to give her heroine a quality of helpless vulnerability, but endows her with an ironic sensibility so keen as to make her seem the strongest character in the book, a cool and amused observer rather than the chief sufferer. This is a minor failing, however, and it is a relief to turn from the humourless intensity of *Surfacing* to the urbane comedy of *Lady Oracle*. In the former novel, the

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heroine's grim entry into a primeval world and her determined rejection of human contact conveyed a kind of superior contempt for the equivocations and compromises of everyday life, as well as a feminist hostility to a society which reduces women to the level of sex objects. In some respects the pattern is repeated in *Lady Oracle*: the heroine, trapped in an identity she detests, searches for some meaning in her life; shedding men along the way, she undergoes a ritual death and rebirth, flirts with dark powers in her psyche, and emerges to a new awareness of self. Also reminiscent of *Surfacing* is the book's attack on the crassly materialistic concerns of North American life, on the vulgarity of a society dedicated to show. Yet in *Lady Oracle* these themes become largely a source of satiric humour; there is none of the morose self-righteousness which marks the tone of the earlier novel. Atwood has not lost her seriousness of purpose, but her vision has broadened, and she has developed a maturer sense of the possibilities inherent in any given situation.

This is evident in her treatment of the occult, which is presented both comically (who could be frightened by a spiritualist medium called Leda Sprott?) and convincingly: Joan's experiences with automatic writing are disturbingly inexplicable. These last give the book its title; Joan gathers the products of many hours of trance-script into coherent poetic form and publishes the collection under the title *Lady Oracle*, a phrase from one of the poems. The work, described by her enthusiastic publishers ("Morton and Sturgess") as a cross between Rod McKuen and Khalil Gibran, is a great success; and the process of marketing the book and its author provides Atwood with the opportunity for some telling satire at the expense of the Canadian literary establishment. Joan "receives" the poems by staring into a mirror before which is

placed a lighted candle. They tell the story of an unfulfilled love between a woman possessed of great but unhappy power, and an evil male figure with icicle teeth and eyes of fire; clearly they enact the conflicting emotions within Joan herself.

She sits on the iron throne
 She is one and three
 The dark lady the redgold lady
 The blank lady oracle
 of blood, she who must be
 obeyed forever
 Her glass wings are gone
 She floats down the river
 singing her last song

The allusion to the Lady of Shalott is clear: Joan must break the mirror if she is to find herself; she must face life directly instead of creating images or disguises. When the novel begins, we find her hiding, having faked her death in order to begin life anew; at the end she literally breaks through the glass, to an acceptance of herself as she is.

The heroine's search for emotional fulfilment and psychic integration gives coherence and direction to a plot that might otherwise seem rather creaky and disjointed. As is often the case with fiction cast in autobiographical form, the narrative follows an episodic line, and parts of the action are sometimes very tenuously connected. Why, for instance, does Joan suddenly decide to go to England? In life, the cause might be quite obscure or trivial; in fiction, we need to feel that such decisions relate to theme or character, that there is some point, but Joan's choice of England as the place for a new start seems quite arbitrary. Still, such weaknesses seem slight beside the deftness with which Atwood handles each episode in Joan's career and introduces so many unusual and interesting characters. She has, too, an admirable control of style; her ability to insert the telling phrase and her eclecticism of reference give her writ-

ing a liveliness and polish that are unusual in Canadian fiction. Diana of Ephesus and Bertrand Russell rub shoulders with Joan Crawford and Kentucky Fried Chicken; this may offend purists, but it makes *Lady Oracle* a readable and (dare it be said of *serious* writers?) entertaining book. And should Atwood ever be short of money, she can always fall back on Gothic romances; the excerpts she provides here reveal a talent that would be the envy of any Harlequin novelist.

HERBERT ROSENGARTEN

THE AGE OLD DILEMMA

JANE RULE, *Lesbian Images*. Doubleday, \$9.95.

JANE RULE, *Theme for Diverse Instruments*. Talonbooks.

IF ONE ACKNOWLEDGES that sexual intercourse has purposes other (and perhaps loftier) than mere procreation, one must accept the validity of sexual unions other than male/female. That most of us cannot is the age-old dilemma affecting homosexuals.

In her reader *Lesbian Images*, Jane Rule, herself a professed and practising lesbian, attempts to debunk the time-honoured theories that homosexuality is a sin and/or a sickness. For the most part she is successful, amassing a great deal of evidence to shore up her arguments about what lesbianism isn't. Unhappily she doesn't enlighten us much about what it is, claiming magisterially, "the reality of lesbian experience transcends all theories about it."

Rule argues that our moral ancestors are the Jews and not the Greeks. The nomadic Israelites — themselves continually threatened with extinction — prohibited homosexuality, no doubt because

of its barrenness and its links with the religious and social customs of such alien cultures as the Greeks. Later the Christians took up the cause and zealously "maintained a program of persecution of homosexuals for the next sixteen centuries." Nowadays the issue is homosexual marriage. Since most if not all religious marriage ceremonies exhort the virtue if not the necessity of progeny, one can understand the church's stance. Within that same context, it's difficult to condone the hypocrisy of a church that willingly marries heterosexuals who openly state they will not have children.

Rule argues that psychological theorists and practitioners who insist that lesbianism is a sickness are dangerous in that they often produce traumas in individuals who before suffered from nothing but a loving preference for their own sex. Lesbians, she complains, endure prejudices as ill-considered and unfounded as those traditionally heaped against left-handed people. The analogy is apt, for examples abound of the sorry repercussions of "correcting" a child's left-handedness. But what about the male and female homosexuals who genuinely believe they are sick and who want desperately to be cured? Won't they be tossed out along with the taboos?

Rule admits she is a polemicist — "I am so far from objective disinterest that my life, or at least the quality of my life, depends on what people think and feel about what it is to be lesbian." Still, admitting her biases doesn't excuse her frequently sloppy logic or the strident tone with which she condemns anti-lesbian arguments.

Where is the merciless scrutiny that flayed such enemies as Father David Ford and Dr. David Reuben when Rule takes on current feminist literati? The chapter on recent non-fiction reads more like a progress report on the problems and strife within the women's movement than any-

thing else, with Rule displaying an annoying reticence as though she were trying to placate all factions at once.

Certainly her own sense of separateness from lesbians who refuse or are unable to accept traditional roles of loyalty and commitment in their relationships is told much more effectively in fiction. In "My Country Wrong", one of the stories included in her collection *Theme for Diverse Instruments*, the narrator is on a Christmas trip from Canada to her native California. She looks up some old friends, including Lynn who takes her to a gay party. Lynn is obviously and desperately on the make, but it is the narrator who seems awkward, out of place, even faintly anachronistic in her "navy silk with a green silk coat." At one point the narrator, herself a lesbian, says, "I don't believe in fidelity though it is for me the only practical way to live." Like her narrator Rule seems slightly in awe of women who have abandoned (surpassed?) emotional bonds.

Traditionally gays have declined to declare themselves, presumably from fear of exploitation and discrimination. Large numbers are going public now — coming out of the closet — and the most commonly offered reason is "I was sick of living a lie." That this honesty leads more often than not to threats and abuses from heterosexuals is well documented. How much worse is the lie than the reprisals? and if one chooses the lie, what sorts of taunts and humiliations are delivered by other more open lesbians? It is a paradox that Rule never explores satisfactorily.

What she does explore with candour and intelligence are the changing images of women as expressed through the lives and writings of more than a dozen widely read novelists. They range from women who wanted to be men (Radclyffe Hall, Gertrude Stein, Willa Cather, Vita Sackville West) to women who were emotionally but not sexually engaged with other

women (Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Bowen) to women who recognized and tried to suppress the lesbian sides of their natures (Colette) to women proud to be women and lesbians (Margaret Anderson, Maureen Duffy, Rita Mae Brown, Rule herself). Aside from any emotional responses we may have to the sufferings and uncertainties of these women, Rule's careful scholarship and sharp insights provide both a sturdy framework and a context for examining women's literature. To say *Lesbian Images* is timely is absurd; it is long past due.

Few of the stories in *Theme for Diverse Instruments* are about lesbianism per se, but they are all about women and loving relationships. Mainly Rule's women are stumbling through a maze of apprehensions, conditionings, and stereotypings as they grope towards a better understanding of themselves and others. It is a hard struggle and that's why so many of the characters seem alone and adrift, even sometimes alienated.

Rule begins by giving us a positive myth about women. The allegorical title story "Theme for Diverse Instruments" explores a matriarchical family where the women are prolific and dominant and the men by contrast infertile and ineffectual. The metaphor is to America, its history and its value systems but this time the source is an Amazonian female and unlike mythical male gods she is mortal, capable of receiving and bestowing love.

The myth established, we move on to the girl child. In "My Father's House" a little girl is playing with her elder brother and a friend. That is they are playing and she is joining in whenever they let her. In her isolation the little girl muses about a drawing in her colouring book and decides, "If she was going to be in the picture she'd have to draw herself in." "Drawing herself in" is precisely the problem facing women and the task that

Rule has set herself in these stories. She succeeds admirably and yet I found this key story tainted by a slickness and a coyness. It seemed too pat, too simple.

One of my favourite stories is "Housekeeper" in which Ruth Tedmore is a successful personnel manager and the competent if somewhat restrained mother of two children. She has one major fault: She wants to be perfect. To enhance her self image, to avoid "virtue which would threaten or irritate," she hires a succession of hideously incompetent housekeepers. It is a technique she has used brilliantly for years in hiring clerks and assistants for the managers in her company. Her best and worst housekeeper is Anna for "cheat she certainly did and take advantage of and disappoint in a dozen ways a day, but she never threatened anyone else's self esteem." Each of these women has adhered to a role model: Ruth is the superwoman and Anna is the chronically inadequate housewife and mother. As much as Ruth needs to surround herself with imperfection, Anna must subordinate herself to excellence. The contrast between the two and the resulting conflict frees each somewhat from her self-imposed chains.

In "Middle Children" where the partners are from the first ideally suited, they invent a label to explain their happiness. Essentially they are very different, except each was born the middle child in her family. They pounce on this coincidence as the *raison d'être* of their compatibility. Where no stereotypes exist they must be invented, no matter how absurd.

Finally, in "Invention for Shelagh", Rule gives us herself. Ostensibly this is a series of journal entries — random notes for a letter to a close friend — but it becomes a clever and intimate collage. Rule weaves a delicate pattern amongst the abstract jottings that culminates in a self-portrait which depicts a woman who has confronted sex, career, money, iden-

tity, etc., and emerged as a loving, honest person. She concludes "that I am discovering the space we live in, how incredibly crowded it is with who I am, who each of us is, how much room there seems to be. I don't feel sure footed, but I feel together we are."

Lesbian Images and *Theme for Diverse Instruments* reinforce each other so completely that it is almost as though Rule consciously wrote one to complement the other. Together they make a marriage.

SANDRA MARTIN

MALIGNED INNOCENTS

JAMES REANEY, *Sticks and Stones. The Donnellys, Part One*. Press Porcepic. \$5.95.

IT'S EASY to see why James Reaney's imagination was drawn to the legendary Black Donnellys, the sturdy Irish pioneers who were hounded and killed by their neighbours in Biddulph Township not far from Reaney's birthplace, Stratford, Ontario. From the time of the Donnellys' arrival in 1844, the town was disrupted by violent infighting, barnburning and mysterious killings; the murder of five Donnellys in 1880 was the climax of a bitter vendetta, during which the family stood its ground despite all attempts by fellow-Catholic neighbours and Protestant officials to evict them. After their death — which remains unavenged — the town subsided into a more or less tranquil convalescence, as though a cancerous cell had been exorcized from the social gut.

Remember Reaney's poem called "Antichrist as Child?" The child, abhorred by nature and by his family, sees himself transformed in their perspective into a hooved, soot-suited devil. It's a poem about innocence.

In *Sticks and Stones. The Donnellys, Part One*, a group of players resurrects the Black Donnellys of popular legend; they are evil, quarrelsome and murderous.

For Reaney these are false images of an innocent and heroic family, distorted by public fear and hatred, as much as the child of the Antichrist poem. And Reaney's trilogy of plays was written to refute one myth and put another in its place — for him the Donnellys are Canadian heroes, resistance fighters. They have virtue, courage and vision, and this is why they are despised.

Reaney was always a visionary poet, and he doesn't write orthodox plays. What he's got, after immersing himself in local history, court documents and legend, is an intense, hallucinatory drama depicting a rather brutal phase of pioneering life in southwestern Ontario. The text of *Sticks and Stones* is recorded in a form of symbolic notation, choreography for a vision. The designer at Press Porcupic has honoured Reaney's text with a quarto sized, two columned "documentary" format, complete with period advertisements and photographs from the original production of the play. (It was first performed at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre in 1973 by Keith Turnbull's NDWT Company.)

Reaney started writing plays at his office desk in the English Department of Acadia University, Wolfville in the late 1950's. He had small knowledge of what actors, directors and producers are able to perform and predictably, his first play, *The Sun and the Moon*, was complex in structure and richly poetic, but hard to enact as conventional theatre. In 1965, working with Keith Turnbull's Summer Theatre in London, Ontario, Reaney began to formulate his opposition to canned realism — he evolved a counter theatre emphasizing mime, poetry, mixed forms, improvisation and group collaboration — and to devise the textual notation that makes the reading of his scripts such an extraordinary experience. If you've seen the play.

Reaney's plays, like his poems, are

governed by the principle of metamorphosis. There's a bare stage, a group of players, and a bagful of symbolic props. Ladders become roads and gaols, sticks are violins and iron rods, laundered shirts are the Donnelly sons. Incendiaries become court magistrates and victims are murderers. The chorus, a shifting group, performs various functions from ballad-deering to overvoice narration and sound effects. The action weaves between past and present, Ireland and Canada. Plot is superimposed on plot and the language ranges from low dialect to high poetry. Metamorphosis of images, people and events. The stage becomes a vehicle of vision.

The Donnellys have played to packed halls throughout the country during their national tour, and it's a rare poet who lives to see his vision imprinted on his contemporaries in this way, realized with its first and last intensity. However —

Many of the spectators I've spoken to found the plays overlong, repetitious and sometimes stagnant. This is the problem when you're watching somebody else's dream.

An interesting question remains about the politics of the play. Reaney chooses to play down the origin, in Ireland, of the widespread hatred of the Donnellys. They were persecuted, he suggests, because they refused to join a fanatical political sect, the Whiteboys. They refused to be joiners. But the fact remains that the Whiteboys were a group of organized Catholic peasants and farmers, agitating for land reform, and the Donnellys were thwarting an embryonic revolutionary movement. They were scabs, sellouts, blacklegs.

What Reaney understands so well, what *Sticks and Stones* portrays, is how ideas become inverted, perverted, fuelling ancient hatreds on new soil. He understands how whole communities can be ignited by a single, passionate idea of good or evil.

LINDA SANDLER

THE LOWRY FRINGE

Malcolm Lowry: Psalms and Songs, edited by Margerie Lowry. New American Library. \$6.95.

ALMOST TWENTY YEARS after Lowry's death much of his fringe writing remains uncollected or unpublished, and there remain various gaps and ambiguities in the available accounts of his life. This is obviously not an entirely satisfactory situation for the reader faced with work which frequently explores autobiographical material, and which exists in a complex, almost hermetic continuum of cross-reference and private allusion.

Malcolm Lowry: Psalms and Songs, edited by Lowry's widow, collects together nine of his fugitive stories, all but two of which belong to the period before *Under the Volcano* was completed, and makes his much-revised Thirties' novella *Lunar Caustic* available to the North American reader in the form of the posthumously-edited version published in Britain in 1968. In addition this anthology contains ten biographical reminiscences by friends and acquaintances, as well as a chapter from an early Canadian Ph.D. thesis on Lowry's style.

Much still remains uncollected, including other stories, letters, book blurbs, narrative sketches such as "The Ordeal of Sigbjorn Wilderness" and the "Journal for Eridanus", the key "Work in Progress" statement, the elusive political-philosophical essay "Halt! I Protest!" and such fascinating items as Lowry's review of Earle Birney's *Turvey*. It is disappointing that *Psalms and Songs* should involve a reprint of much easily accessible published material, rather than select from the wealth of obscurer but equally relevant material still awaiting publication or collection.

Psalms and Songs is chiefly welcome for making available two hitherto unpub-

lished stories, "June 30th, 1934!" and "Enter One in Sumptuous Armour". These are minor yet accomplished works from the period of Lowry's apprenticeship, and show a plainer, more naturalistic side to his writing than we might expect from the author of *Under the Volcano*. In the first story a missionary, Bill Goodyear, travels from Paris to England by train and ferry, in the company of a pro-Nazi mining engineer named Firmin. At the end Goodyear's brooding, neurotic intimations of apocalypse are confirmed by the news that Hitler has just consolidated the absolute authority of his regime by slaughtering the leading Brownshirts. In sharp contrast "Enter One in Sumptuous Armour" offers a nostalgic account of the initiation of a new boy at a British public-school, and includes a surprisingly benign portrait of what is transparently Lowry's family background in the Twenties.

With the exception of "The Forest Path to the Spring", Lowry's stories have tended to receive a cursory and negative response from critics, and by including stories as good and as different as "China" and the intriguingly experimental "Ghostkeeper" this anthology illustrates a versatility of technique and material on the author's part which should encourage a reconsideration of his short fiction.

Having said this it must be admitted that *Psalms and Songs* is dissatisfying in some respects. The choice of stories included seems perplexingly arbitrary. "On Board the 'West Hardaway'" is included, but the source of this story, an earlier piece entitled "Port Swettenham", which Lowry cannibalized, is not. "China" is reprinted here, but a companion sea-story, "Tramps", is not, and remains unpublished. "Hotel Room in Chartres", describing what is obviously the first phase of Lowry's unhappy marriage to Jan Gabrial, is here, but its superior sequel

"In Le Havre" is omitted. "June 30th, 1934!" is here (with the exclamation-mark Lowry used in the title in all three manuscript drafts mysteriously missing) but "Economic Conference 1934" is not. "Bulls of the Resurrection" is not included, nor is, more regrettably, "Goya the Obscure", a precocious stream-of-consciousness piece which offers an amusingly ribald account of an intellectual sailor disintegrating from syphilis.

All but one of the biographical essays have been published before, and many of them were drawn on by Douglas Day in his recent popular biography. Since Lowry was an intensely private writer who sought his literary aesthetic more in magazine articles than in debate with other novelists these memoirs contain little about the disciplined, questing craftsman, but much about the public Lowry in his role of the engaging drunkard.

Lowry's Vancouver friend William McConnell recalls the novelist's antipathy to "literary people" and his acid remark that "They don't write, they talk aseptically about it as if there were no bloody birth pangs and the work emerges well scrubbed." This comment is very apt in connexion with the one piece of criticism included in *Psalms and Songs*, fifty pages from A. C. Nyland's out-of-date 1967 thesis "The Luminous Wheel: The Evolution of Malcolm Lowry's Style." Dr. Nyland's use of the word "style" is so broad as to be generally devoid of value, and there is an absence of the close textual analysis one would expect from her title. Instead all we are offered is a rather bland collection of impressionistic generalizations containing few original insights into Lowry's work.

Psalms and Songs contains various errors which demand correction. "Under the Volcano" is once again mistakenly presented as the original short-story around which Lowry built his masterpiece, even though scholars have pre-

viously observed that this much-anthologized story is nothing more than a 1941 draft of Chapter Eight of the novel. Anyone who cares to check this story against the 1940 draft of *Under the Volcano* on file at the University of British Columbia will see that it is undisputably posterior. As Brian O'Kill has pointed out, this is surely the part of the novel which Lowry explicitly extracted "as a short story" in March 1941 (*Selected Letters*, p. 39).

Dr. Nyland makes a similar mistake when she remarks that "The Elephant Follows You Around, Sir!" grew into *October Ferry to Gabriola*. In fact these chapters were removed for publication as a story long after Lowry had built up his narrative to the length of a novel through a complex process of accretion centred on a quite separate short-story.

"Enter One in Sumptuous Armour" is puzzlingly included as one of "the last stories" though it is almost certainly a Thirties piece, and the U.B.C. Lowry collection contains a copy of a letter from his agent's secretary dated June 24th, 1941, returning the story as unsaleable.

Finally, "China" is included without any indication to the reader that it has been printed from an incomplete manuscript and actually has one page missing just prior to the ending.

Psalms and Songs is essential for anyone interested in Lowry as a short-story writer or wanting to trace out the coherence of his career, but one suspects that most Lowry enthusiasts will already be acquainted with the bulk of the material here.

RONALD BINNS

ON THE VERGE

**** DONALD GREIGHTON. *The Forked Road: Canada 1939-1957*. McClelland & Stewart, \$14.95. HENRY FERNS AND BERNARD OSTRY. *The Age of Mackenzie King*. James Lorimer & Company. These two books should be read together, though Donald Creighton's *The*

Forked Road is a new publication, and *The Age of Mackenzie King*, by Henry Ferns and Bernard Ostry, is the reprint of a book originally published in 1955 and virtually ignored by the press of the day. Both are brilliant pieces of penetrative and not entirely unpartisan history, and both are devoted to the exposure of the faults behind the bland and somewhat sanctimonious masks that have so often concealed the real nature of Liberal leaders and policy makers in Canada. Ferns and Ostry are particularly illuminating on Mackenzie King's early public career and especially on his highly dubious activities as an expert in labour relations employed by the Rockefellers. Creighton charts out the last period of King's ascendancy, and the subsequent fortunes of the Liberal government until its downfall in 1957. He analyses brilliantly the special kind of smug arrogance that has been the strength and — periodically — the downfall of Liberalism in Canada, and he is especially good at penetrating the nice-guy persona behind which Lester Pearson hid his driving ambition and his considerable powers of political manipulation.

**** JOHN S. GALBRAITH. *The Little Emperor*. Macmillan of Canada. \$16.95. We have long needed a sound, readable biography of Governor George Simpson, the man who pulled the Hudson's Bay Company out of the chaos of the long struggle with the North West Company and laid the foundations for the present very different commercial empire. John S. Galbraith gives it in *The Little Emperor*. The book is well-written, well-researched, and wisely compact, avoiding the temptation to make, out of the vast amount of material relating to the Company in Simpson's time, a long, unwieldy Life-and-Times. Simpson comes out more in the round than previous writers have limned him, and an unpleasant character he emerges. Merely by telling the facts, without weighting them in any particular direction, Galbraith introduces us to one of The Great Canadian Cads. But if Simpson had been less personally ruthless, perhaps he would also have been less than a success in the public role he played with such arrogance and efficiency.

*** BRUCE HUTCHISON. *The Far Side of the Street*. Macmillan of Canada. \$15.95. Bruce Hutchison is one of Canada's best known veteran newspapermen, and he has also written books. His latest is *The Far Side of the Street*, a kind of autobiography. Newspaper-

men are trained for the short sprint, the hundred-yards races of writing, and they always seem to have difficulties with the big cross country efforts that producing a book involves. All Hutchison's books, after immediate success because of a certain journalistic brightness, have faded quickly owing to their essential insubstantiality, with the one exception of his geographico-historical account of a favourite river, *The Fraser*. And *The Far Side of the Street* is likely to have the same fate, for after a good start with a fine description of childhood and youth, based on vivid memories well-selected by the unconscious, it peters out into what the author aptly calls "rambling reflections", which reflect, perhaps most of all, the perturbations of the liberal mind that has lost its anchoring faith in reason and progress. A melancholy, honest book in sad need of the pruner's shears.

G.W.

STRANGER THAN FICTION

AUTOBIOGRAPHY IS NOT a genre which — outside the memoirs of politicians and the recollections of pioneers — has been greatly favoured by Canadians, and there are few outstanding examples of it in our literature. Among them — and one of the best — is the story of Claire Martin's youth, which she published in two volumes, *Dans un gant de fer* (1965) and *La Joue Droite* (1966). What Mme. Martin had to tell of a childhood tyrannized by a parental monster of hypocrisy and sadism, seemed so extraordinary that for her second volume she was awarded the French-language Governor-General's Award "for fiction", though this was a perfect case of truth being stranger. The two volumes were later translated by Philip Stratford, and published as a single volume by Ryerson Press in 1968, under the title, *In An Iron Glove*. It is good to see them now reappearing in the Harvest House French Writers of Canada series, in the original two-volume form, as *In an Iron Glove* and *The Right Cheek*. Philip Stratford's translation is a combination of faithful rendering and resonant English prose which could serve as a model for translators at the present time when an exchange of our literatures seems at last under way on a serious scale.

G.W.

THE DEATH OF A FRIEND

W. J. KEITH's article in *CanLit* about Roderick Haig-Brown, written after Haig-Brown died, made me want to say something about knowing the man myself. Because it seems that Mr. Keith did not know Haig-Brown personally, and I did, however slight the acquaintance.

I was at a "health lodge" in Strathcona Park on Vancouver Island in 1974, writing a piece about Jack Jackovitch, painter, ex-football player, fishing guide and high school teacher, etc. I intended to call it "Jackovitch and the Salmon-Princess" (yes, I have a dramatic turn of mind), but the editor of *Weekend Magazine* destroyed my title. Anyway, Jack knew Haig-Brown; so did another young writer working at the lodge; and so did "Jungle Jim" (that's what Jack called him, not me), who owned and managed the place. He was a god to them, having done so many things and containing all of them that perhaps they felt he was a bit beyond them. For Haig-Brown had written some twenty books, and was a world-respected authority on fishing. And for the past several years he'd been a magistrate at Campbell River, a very human magistrate. I believe the lumber tycoons found him quite a nuisance with his beliefs in a balanced ecology and the actions he took to support his beliefs. In fact I think both Jack and Jungle Jim were a little afraid of Haig-Brown, certainly held him in awe. Talking with them about Haig-Brown, Jim mentioned in a mood of levity that H-B was the kind of guy who put on a tie before he went to the toilet.

Of course I wanted to meet H-B, all these press agents producing an ache in my curiosity glands. Anyway, the three of us and our wives were invited to dinner at H-B's house in Campbell River shortly after, perhaps as a result of my curiosity. Or I may have phoned H-B — I can't remember. It was a good dinner, and I got an impression of H-B that stimulated my curiosity even more: of a man who'd lived an interesting life, as logger, prizefighter, trapper and bounty hunter, farmer, and now a magistrate at Campbell River. And I kept implying to Jungle Jim that I meant to relate his anecdote of the man who put on a tie before visiting the toilet to the man himself, being so amused by Jim's alarm in the presence of his god that I might repeat the story that he almost told it himself.

I was impressed enough at the meeting to decide to write a piece on H-B for *Weekend Magazine*, if he would hold still long enough. I came back a few weeks later, and talked with him for two consecutive afternoons. We sat beneath towering walls of books, and drank H-B's booze, good stuff too. And I made notes, a lot of notes. We got along well, and I was acquiring a friend without really being aware of the process.

In the beginning I had a feeling of slight unease with him, perhaps because of the propaganda Jack and Jungle Jim had pumped into me. And in all our conversation, I felt there was only time for him to chip off small edges of his knowledge about anything. H-B had assurance without it being in any way offensive; an orderly mind, one to which I began to attribute some varieties of wisdom. I felt he knew much more about life than I did. I had always gulped experience in rather frenzied fashion, whereas he had quietly been aware, always aware, of what was happening. I thought of H-B as a small brown man, despite him having been a

middleweight fighter, hunter, trapper, etc. But all the rowdy and physically exuberant things he'd done withdrew into the far background; he contained them, but they were only small parts of his total. Generally the life a man has led will leave visible traces in his character. I mean, you can generally identify salesmen as salesmen or farmers as farmers. But with H-B, all his varied activity had produced a different amalgam, and I began to understand some of the reasons for Jack's and Jungle Jim's respect.

I saw him a couple of times again. Later, when I went back and wrote the article for *Weekend*, I kept discovering the man H-B in my mind continually. I mean, I'd think of him at odd times, and not in connection with the article. It isn't possible to explain that entirely: but part of it was discovering his writing, of which I had had only a cursory acquaintance before, and read mostly for purposes of the article. But that isn't it either.

I thought he would live a long time, and that I would know him for many years. I corresponded with him over certain points in the piece I was writing; he explained them to me with only a slight degree of impatience. (I'd have felt much more impatience, if I'd been him.) In the couple of years since I've thought about him occasionally, and have written him during that time for unimportant reasons.

He's dead now. "—died with sudden grace in his garden" as George Woodcock says? Incredible. Earle Birney mentioned it to me in a letter. I thought: how could he be dead? I wrote a passage about him in my *Weekend* piece that denies demise a priori: "As well, there is a maverick quality about H-B, a refusal to be pigeonholed into anything, despite all the ruts and crevices we humans generally fall into. Once, having a drink with J. H. Bloedel, west coast lumbering tycoon, a man who collected all sorts of valuables, Bloedel said, 'I hear you're the

worst troublemaker on Vancouver Island.' I suppose the remark was meant to be humorous, but was said because of H-B's downright hostility to logging companies ravaging the land to naked membrane by razoring off the tall trees for timber and toothpicks.

"The awkward moment passed. Bloedel showed H-B his valuable collection of what-nots and what-ises. ('They're all collectors,' H-B said to me later, referring to all tycoons.) Then Bloedel asked H-B to do some writing on behalf of his lumber company. 'I don't want to be collected,' the writer told the tycoon. I like that."

I feel emotional about H-B's departure. Don't ask me why exactly, because I didn't know him closely, not on any day-to-day basis as Campbell River did. I had expected him to live longer than me (his grandfather died at age 92), and that I could see him again whenever I returned to his river town. And I will. I know him closely.

AL PURDY

SYMBOLISM AND IMAGISM

DURING A REVIEW of Alan Brown's translation of Anne Hébert's poems (*CL* 71) G. V. Downes poses the rhetorical question, "But in this century are we not all except for recent American (and, by seepage) Canadian poets, the children of Symbolism? Imagism, Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and particularly the critical work of the latter, have consciously or unconsciously become part of our accepted heritage."

For the moment I will leave aside the odd parenthesis here, and also the vexing question of whether criticism or dead poets can have a consciousness.

But surely we are not going to be very conscious of our heritage ourselves if we are going to accept the idea that Sym-

bolism and Imagism are mother and son? The main dictum of the Symbolists was that to name is to destroy. Hence allusion. Hence Eliot. The Imagists, on the other hand, were naming all the time. Hence Pound and H.D. The Symbolists said that nothing was either interesting or real except in that it made an oblique impression upon the soul; it was a kind of late Impressionism. Just the opposite, Imagism sought to present reality that would exist as if the human and interpreting mind were not there at all.

Imagism was a procedure opposed to Symbolism, though there were of course poets around who could borrow a little frisson of learning from either. In this century we are not all the children or even great-neices of Symbolism. Some of us have learned a little from Rimbaud and a little from Fletcher.

E. E. GREENGRASS

FICTION ABSTRACTED

Canadian Fiction: An Annotated Bibliography by Margery Fee and Ruth Cawker (Peter Martin Associates) is basically a study guide, and limited in its application, since it deals only with Canadian novels and books of short stories that are actually in print. It also includes books that provide general studies of Canadian fiction and books—though not articles—relating to individual authors. It is good of its kind, its comments are sensible and its abstracts well done, but it has obvious built-in limitations, since the “in print” requirement forces the omission of many interesting works of Canadian fiction that enterprising publishers may well bring back in a few years, at least in paperback. For its length—168 pages—it seems excessively expensive; the cloth edition costs \$15.00 and even the paperback a stunning \$8.95. And this defeats the purpose of such a book, which should not be relegated to the shelves of libraries, but should be on sale cheaply as a guide to what students should seek when they use the library.

A.A.

ABIDING ANXIETIES

The Search for English-Canadian Literature, published as a volume in the University of Toronto Press's Literature of Canada reprint series (\$5.95), is an anthology of critical articles gathered and introduced by Carl Ballstadt, and covering the pre-modern century of literature in Canada, from 1823 down to 1928. Apart from a first section on “The Early Realism”, the volume is presented thematically, and one senses a deliberate play of hindsight in this arrangement, since many of the sections reflect in their titles and their contents the kind of preoccupations that are still concerning those who debate on the destination of Canadian culture and Canadian literature. Indeed, one might say that it is really an anthology of literary sociology rather than of criticism, for it does not contain a single study of an individual Canadian writer. All the pieces are either surveys, dealing with certain genres in a local context, or discussions of problems that arise when writers in general encounter the culture as a whole. Still, it is salutary to be reminded that there is nothing new about our anxieties: section titles like “Cultural Economics and Canadian Philistinism”, “The Debate on a ‘National’ Literature”, and “The Advantage of Two Cultures” might be used for selections from the writings of Canadian critics in the present decade, and even the views which in these sections we find expressed by writers as varied as D'Arcy McGee, Sara Jeannette Duncan, Goldwin Smith and Pelham Edgar have an oddly familiar ring to those who have followed the cultural debate over the past decade. *The Search for English-Canadian Literature* is not only a valuable documentation of cultural attitudes in early generations, but also, in a sense, reassuring, since it shows us that the forebodings of cultural prophets may not always be well founded. For it seems that we have been enduring for well over a century the troubles which nowadays many assure us will spell the end of a distinctive Canadian literature, yet, it is evident for all who view the record with any degree of equanimity, this has not prevented the appearance of an increasingly rich and varied body of Canadian writing. It is often argued that the arts flourish best in circumstances of political chaos, and perhaps this applies also to the politics of culture. The arts in Canada may even survive Gerard Pelletier and Hugh Faulkner.

L.T.C.

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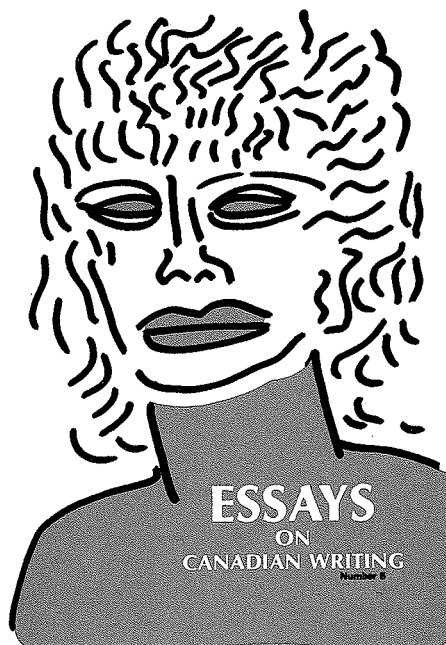
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