

REFLECTIONS IN THE CHARTROOM

THERE IS NO customary time for a periodical's coming of age; perhaps an adequate vitality at any time between birth and dotage is sufficient evidence of maturity. Yet in Canada the infant mortality of even lively magazines has been the rule rather than the exception, and that is why we still feel a certain satisfaction in being able to point out that with this issue *Canadian Literature* comes to the end of its third year of publication. No editor should be surprised at success; he would not begin work if he did not expect it. But he can still be allowed a legitimate pleasure — even a certain relief — at the absence of failure.

Canadian Literature has not pleased everybody; that would have been the worst of failures. But it has created a place for itself, as a distinctively Canadian critical magazine, in a literary world where no such periodical had previously existed; it has published at one time or another a high proportion of the best Canadian writers, young and not so young; it has gained and kept a steadily increasing list of subscribers. Finally, a recent sign of the seriousness with which it has been taken from the beginning was given when A. J. M. Smith, in selecting the essays to include in his anthology of criticism, *Masks of Fiction*, picked exactly half his titles from the first ten issues of *Canadian Literature*. *Canadian Literature*, we feel, has justified its own existence, and in the process has shown that an informed criticism is becoming an increasingly necessary process as writing in Canada broadens in volume and in variety.

In other directions also the study of Canadian writers and writing progresses. We learn that the massive, many-handed history of Canadian literature which is being prepared under the editorship of Professor Carl F. Klinck is now within measurable distance of completion, and we look forward to its appearance because — no matter what we may eventually think of the finished publication — it cannot fail to present an imposing compendium of views on what has been achieved up to the mid-century. It will also present, by its inevitable gaps, a kind

of history in negative of what has been lacking so far in our writing and our discussion of it.

Meanwhile, in the same field, we welcome the re-issue in revised and enlarged form of Desmond Pacey's literary history, *Creative Writing in Canada* (Ryerson, \$5.00), first published a decade ago. Dr. Pacey has worked over his old charts, and has mapped out as well the decade of the Fifties which had hardly begun when the original edition of his history appeared. His book is a study in extent rather than in depth, a guidebook rather than a detailed geography, and not everyone will accept its critical judgments as easily as its facts and its able sketch-maps of relationships, but it remains an extremely useful work in its delineation of the main currents of writing in Canada.

THOSE WHO AGREE with us in deploring the series of recent attacks on the freedom of literature in Canada will rejoice — but with due caution — over the Supreme Court decision which reverses the condemnation of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as an obscene book and allows its return to the book-stores. The general importance of such a victory cannot be stressed too much, but it would be unwise to forget how precarious it was. A bare majority of the judges — five against four — voted in favour of the decision, and the attitude of the prosecuting counsel, who can be regarded as representing the views of the Government in this instance, was disturbing in the extreme. The Obscene Publications Act was passed with the most emphatic undertakings on the part of the Minister of Justice that it would be used only against news-stand semi-pornography and not against serious works of literature. The very prosecution of a work of standing like *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and the persistence in that prosecution even after the book had been cleared by British and American courts, suggests that the Minister's undertaking was given principally to disarm criticism at the time. Certainly it has had no perceptible effect on practice, and the recent interference with the liberty of Canadians to read works by Henry Miller, published under the somewhat freer conditions that exist — in this field at least — in the United States, makes one fear that the attempt to impose puritanical standards is only at its beginning.

Even if one does not accept Miller's work or *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as great writing — and we do not — there is no possible doubt that they are entitled to be considered as serious works of literature. There is also no doubt that the machinery set up for dealing with literature or sub-literature of any kind under

the Act is primitive and ambiguous. As we pointed out in 1959, the definition of obscenity in the Act is dangerously vague, and events have proved us right; it is a happy hunting ground for moral bigots. Moreover, the fact that the Act, unlike the British Act, gives no special standing to expert witnesses — critics and writers — leaves a perilous amount of power in the hands of enforcement officers, prosecutors and magistrates who may not merely be unexpert in literature, but even positively ignorant.

The Supreme Court decision on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a battle won, not a campaign ended, and it does not lessen the need to obtain the revision of a law whose vagueness makes it a constant threat to the freedom of readers and writers.

THE DEATH OF Lorne Pierce last winter is regretted by all who remember the long decades in which he put into practice as far as he could his belief that Canadian writers should have the chance to publish their books in their own country. One may not approve of everything that Dr. Pierce did as chief editor of the Ryerson Press, for he had a strain of often misplaced generosity that led him to publish some of the worst as well as some of the best of Canadian books. One may not agree with his personal theories on the links between literature and national — even nationalistic — spirit. But his dedication to literature provides its own monument in the fact that it was through his efforts that so many of our best poets, from E. J. Pratt to Earle Birney and Dorothy Livesay, published their first books. It would be hard to think of any man who individually did more for the dissemination of Canadian writing in Canada.