

editorial

CELEBRATIONS OF HARVEST

THE WORLD OF CULTURE, like the world of primitive religion, moves in the ritual cycle of the year. Spring, fall and winter, seedtime, harvest and Yule, are the times when publishers and other farmers of the art perform their rites, with as much apparent faith in the magic of the seasons as any cultivator of the zodiac-ridden East. To complete the antique pattern, we observe also the higher rites of annual reckoning, when the Brahmins in their proper spheres award prizes, prepare anthologies and bibliographies, and grandly judge and celebrate the harvest of the year.

This year *Canadian Literature* plays its Brahminical role in the great ritual by assuming the responsibility of judgment for the University of British Columbia's Medal for Popular Biography. Unfortunately our reading of the biographies of 1961 produced a result which gives a tone of anti-climax to this announcement; we decided to make no award at all for the year. Those readers who remember our editorial of two years ago, "On the Cultivation of Laurels", will not be entirely surprised at this judgment. We have always contended that awards, when they are given at all, should be clear indications of exceptional merit. As the Canada Council recognized when it took over the Governor-General's Medals, to give an award merely for the best book of the year is pointless, since it may be a good deal worse than the fifth-best book of the preceding year. Without a continuing standard of excellence any award loses its meaning. This at least is the attitude we have taken. 1961 was a year of near-famine in the publication of biography, and we found no book among the lean and withered crop that stirred our collective admiration enough to regard it as exceptional. We can only hope that 1962's biographers will have cultivated their gardens more propitiously.

MEANWHILE CELEBRATIONS OF ANOTHER KIND, in the form of published estimates of the year's achievements, are proliferating in many directions. *The Canadian Annual Review*, published by the University of Toronto Press (\$15.00), has now appeared for a second year under the editorship of John T. Saywell, so that we can regard it as an established feature of annual publishing. It is an ambitious survey of many fields of Canadian life, from politics to sport, and roughly a fifth of its pages are devoted to cultural activities in a rather broad sense, including literature, music, art, theatre, radio and television. The *Review* has grown in size since its first year, but not uniformly in quality. In 1960, for instance, literature was admirably discussed by Milton Wilson, and there were intelligent comments on the quality of radio and television programmes. In 1961 the discussion of literature, no longer by Professor Wilson, has declined to factual narrative ruined by insensitive comment (the short works of Lowry and Salinger, we are told, "form one whole"!) And the accounts of radio and television have become almost completely concerned with the politics of broadcasting.

It seems, from looking through the rest of *The Canadian Annual Review*, that such fields as politics and the national economy have been far more comprehensively and capably dealt with than the arts and related subjects. This may well be because the editor himself is at home in these fields while — from his extremely spotty choice of commentators — he quite evidently is not at home in the world of culture. Perhaps what we still need is a good Year Book of the Arts run by people who really know about them, with a group of commentators chosen not merely for their ability to mug up facts, but also for their critical perception and their power to present lucid and brightly written accounts of significant happenings in their own fields. I suggest it to Canadian publishers as a suitable Rite of Spring for 1963.

IN FRENCH CANADA, something very near to what I am suggesting is being done in the field of literature. It is an annual critical survey of French-language books edited by Adrien Thériot; the first issue, *Livres et Auteurs Canadiens 1961*, priced at \$1, has just appeared, and I gather that it has had a wide sale of almost 10,000 copies, which emphasizes the comparatively greater interest that literary topics arouse in French as compared with English Canada. It is a substantial work, a hundred pages of magazine format, and it includes not only complete bibliographies, but also reviews by good critics of every book of literary significance published in French-Canada during the year.