

PERIODICAL PRECARIOUSNESS

PERIODICAL CRITICISM has always lived precariously in Canada. During the past decade or so there has been an apparent change, and one's mail has tended to contain an unwonted proportion of journals of literature and the related arts, and to a less extent of affairs and social sciences. But this has been a nurtured growth, which would hardly have been possible if it had not been for (a) the willingness of the Canada Council to support such publications and (b) the appreciation by many of our new universities and colleges of the prestige that accrues from allowing literary or scholarly journals to appear under their auspices.

I am concerned here not with the pros and cons of subsidized publication, though one cannot declare too often the need to regard with caution even the patronage one accepts, nor I am concerned with the larger question, which would need a whole issue of *Canadian Literature* to discuss adequately, of the dilution or distortion of quality that may come from excessive nurturing. I am interested rather in those magazines that have survived over decades without such institutional help.

Two such journals have recently been celebrating significant anniversaries. *The Canadian Forum* has reached its golden jubilee; *Saturday Night* has gone beyond even its diamond jubilee, for it is now 85 years old. A third notable survivor, *Maclean's*, according to my calculation, is 77. The University of Toronto Press has just published, under the title of *Forum* (\$7.50), a thick and generous selection of articles, poems and stories from the fifty years of *The Canadian Forum*, edited by J. L. Granatstein and Peter Stevens. A similar selection from the past of *Saturday Night* is due to appear some time this spring from new press, prepared by Morris Wolfe and Robert Fulford, who has been the maga-

zine's editor for several years. *Maclean's* has not announced any celebratory event, but the journal proclaimed its transfiguration into modernity a year or so back, when Peter Newman took over the editorship.

One of the reasons for the survival of journals which do not have a narrowly specialist public is usually, indeed, their power of transformation within fairly clear limits, their flexibility towards the currents of the times while at the same time retaining the loyalty of their own particular constituencies among the population. It is rarely, indeed, that a magazine, having established a readership defined by education and class, moves outside it, though it only survives if it adapts itself to the shifts in taste and attitude within that readership (to which of course it will have contributed, for the relationship between journal and readership tends in time to take on a symbiotic character).

Short of looking through the back files of *Saturday Night*, which is precisely what Messrs. Fulford and Wolfe have been doing on our behalf, it is difficult before the appearance of the projected *Saturday Night Scrapbook* to chart exactly the course which that journal has taken. But I believe, from what I remember of it in Sandwell's and Edinborough's days, and from dipping through *A Voice from the Attic* (the collection of Robertson Davies literary pieces from *Saturday Night* a quarter of a century ago now republished in the New Canadian Library), that it always attracted a well-read middle-class public, generally liberal in inclination, willing to have the arts explained to them, but perhaps more interested in political events and social changes; its base has always been eastern Canadian, and it has moved from a vague continentalism towards a fairly hard-edged nationalism as the people who read it have moved.

Maclean's, appearances to the contrary, has always been the journal of the lower middle-class non-book-reading public; it is curious to note that though under its new readership the journal has boasted that it is now employing *real* writers — writers are now figures embodied in national myth — it in fact does very little to tell its readers about the books those writers publish, and indeed in many issues contains no comments at all on recent books. Sports, the outdoors, popular politics, popular music, films, talk of doom, and gossip about Canadian celebrities: these still — in slightly changed forms from the past — loom large in its contents. On the other hand, the fiction which once occupied a considerable proportion of its space has vanished, owing to a process of long attrition during which its readership found their need for fantasy increasingly appeased by radio and television; their need for opinions and facts and true life stories, significantly, was not, for here print seemed still to give a needed validation. In another

important way *Maclean's* has changed with its readership; *Saturday Night* was always an urban journal, but *Maclean's* was largely read in the country, and then it had a fairly direct attitude towards rural matters. Now its readership has mostly migrated to the towns, and the life of the country has become in its pages a matter of nostalgia rather than of experience.

There are, however, two constant characteristics of *Maclean's* that have never fundamentally changed. One is its studious avoidance — which *Saturday Night* has never needed to follow to quite the same extent — of giving any appearance of intellectuality, of the highbrowism which makes its readers uneasy; if scholars or artists appear in its pages, it is for their controversial or romantic appeal, not for their scholarship or their art. The other is a Torontonians puritanism which appears and reappears in a Protean variety of guises. It was only ten years ago — astonishing as it may now seem — that Pierre Berton was dismissed from the staff of *Maclean's* for having expressed in one of his articles views, on current hypocrisies regarding sex, that were unacceptable to the readers. The attitude of readers has changed, and that of *Maclean's* with it; subjects that could not be discussed a decade ago are now fair game. Yet puritanism is an insidious thing, which always finds new guises. One of them in recent years has been the smugness of radicals and modish radical fellow travellers regarding the simplicity and honesty and purity of their own way of life as compared with that of others. A recent example of this so-called “new journalism” in which the writer uses his (or her) assumed superiority and sensitivity as a gauge by which to judge her (his) subject, was an article on Adrienne Clarkson by Melinda McCracken, which doubtless pleased many conservative readers because it “exposed the inconsistency” of those who live what they conceive to be a civilized life while embracing liberal causes. Others, however, were disturbed not because they were Adrienne Clarkson's partisans (many were far from that) but because the whole tenor of the article seemed an ominous symptom of the return of Malvolio (in jeans and scuffed sandals rather than cross-gartered) — and when Malvolio returns it is surely time to expect Savonarola!

The secret of *The Canadian Forum's* survival — as the material which Professors Granatstein and Stevens have collected amply displays — is that it has kept its faithful and very special public by fulfilling two functions, of the only continuing forum of opinion where anyone from radical conservatives to anarchists could write in a generally tolerant atmosphere, and of our one literary journal durable enough to last for fifty years. What the *New Statesman* and the *Spectator* were for Britain, *The Canadian Forum* has been for Canada — the

EDITORIAL

magazine where people of generally intellectual turn of mind could find the matters of contemporary concern that interested them freely discussed; the frame was always Canadian, and in its own way the *Forum* was always nationalist, or at least anti-imperialist and anti-continentalist. But, more than that, because it was the one literary journal of any significance that did survive from the early 1920's to the present, and because many of its founders and editors were critics and poets, its record has been intimately linked with the modern movement in Canadian poetry, beginning with Pratt and Scott and Smith and continuing to the younger poets of today. *Forum* — the anthology — is thus an invaluable introduction to the imaginative and intellectual life of our time and country, and astonishingly good value, since its broad three-column format gives room for three times as much material as the ordinary 400 page book. Every reader of the *Forum* will probably find favourite pieces left out, but it is a sign of a good journal if so large an anthology can be collected and seem incomplete.

A RECEPTIVE ATMOSPHERE and editorial enthusiasms are responsible for a number of new journalistic ventures which are worth mentioning briefly. From Fredericton comes the *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, of which each issue contains a group of short stories and fragments of novels in progress, and a balancing group of critical articles. It claims in its first issue to have "the finest sustaining collection of . . . Canadian criticism and reviews available"; eyebrows raised, one waits to see. *Ariel* ("A Review of International English Literature"), started in Leeds, has now moved to Canada and this year begins publication from Calgary; it has an interesting selection of articles, rather like that in the English *Critical Quarterly* and may well provide serious competition with the *University of Toronto Quarterly*. *Exile* is another quarterly of international pretensions, from York University, in which imaginative writers are — we are told — to be allowed to appear "without a praetorian guard of critics"; excellent idea, if we are allowed to see the imaginative creations of such writers, but when they become auto-critics by talking at boring and meandering length about their own work, as up to now they do in *Exile*, one sees a point in the professionals doing it for them. All these are quarterlies. *Northern Journey*, from Ottawa, appears to be an occasional periodical, containing an interesting variety of critical writing, journals, poems, stories, drawings, photographs, by contributors who vary from first-timers to established writers spanning the generations from Atwood to Livesay and from John Colombo to Barker Fairley.

G.W.