The Novelist as Teacher

WRITING OF THE KIND I DO is relatively new in my part of the world and it is too soon to try and describe in detail the complex of relationships between us and our readers. However, I think I can safely deal with one aspect of these relationships which is rarely mentioned. Because of our largely European education our writers may be pardoned if they begin by thinking that the relationship between European writers and their audience will automatically reproduce itself in Africa. We have learnt from Europe that a writer or an artist lives on the fringe of society—wearing a beard and a peculiar dress and generally behaving in a strange, unpredict-

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able way. He is in revolt against society, which in turn looks on him with suspicion if not hostility. The last thing society would dream of doing is to put him in charge of anything.

All that is well known, which is why some of us seem too eager for our society to treat us with the same hostility or even behave as though it already does. But I am not interested now in what writers expect of society; that is generally contained in their books, or should be. What is not so well documented is what society expects of its writers.

I am assuming, of course, that our writer and his society live in the same place. I realize that a lot has been made of the allegation that African writers have to write for European and American readers because African readers where they exist at all are only interested in reading textbooks. I don't know if African writers always have a foreign audience in mind. What I do know is that they don't have to. At least I know that I don't have to. Last year the pattern of sales of *Things Fall Apart* in the cheap paperback edition was as follows: about 800 copies in Britain; 20,000 in Nigeria; and about 2,500 in all other places. The same pattern was true also of *No Longer at Ease.*

Most of my readers are young. They are either in school or college or have only recently left. And many of them look to me as a kind of teacher. Only the other day I received this letter from Northern Nigeria:

> Dear C. Achebe,
> I do not usually write to authors, no matter how interesting their work is, but I feel I must tell you how much I enjoyed your editions of *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease.* I look forward to reading your new edition *Arrow of God.* Your novels serve as advice to us

young. I trust that you will continue to produce as many of this type of books. With friendly greetings and best wishes.

Yours sincerely,
I. BUBA YERO MAFINDI

It is quite clear what this particular reader expects of me. Nor is there much doubt about another reader in Ghana who wrote me a rather pathetic letter to say that I had neglected to include questions and answers at the end of *Things Fall Apart* and could I make these available to him to ensure his success at next year's school certificate examination. This is what I would call in Nigerian pidgin "a how-for-do" reader and I hope there are not very many like him. But also in Ghana I met a young woman teacher who immediately took me to task for not making the hero of my *No Longer at Ease* marry the girl he is in love with. I made the kind of vague noises I usually make whenever a wise critic comes along to tell me I should have written a different book to the one I wrote. But my woman teacher was not going to be shaken off so easily. She was in deadly earnest. Did I know, she said, that there were many women in the kind of situation I had described and that I could have served them well if I had shown that it was possible to find one man with enough guts to go against custom?

I don't agree, of course. But this young woman spoke with so much feeling that I couldn't help being a little uneasy at the accusation (for it was indeed a serious accusation) that I had squandered a rare opportunity for education on a whimsical and frivolous exercise. It is important to say at this point that no self-respecting writer will take dictation from his audience. He must remain free to disagree with his society and go into rebellion against it if need be. But I am for

choosing my cause very carefully. Why should I start waging war as a Nigerian newspaper editor was doing the other day on the "soulless efficiency" of Europe's industrial and technological civilization when the very thing my society needs may well be a little technical efficiency?

My thinking on the peculiar needs of different societies was sharpened when not long ago I heard an English pop song which I think was entitled *"I Ain't Gonna Wash for a Week;"* At first I wondered why it should occur to anyone to take such a vow when there were so many much more worthwhile resolutions to make. But later it dawned on me that this singer belonged to the same culture which in an earlier age of self-satisfaction had blasphemed and said that cleanliness was next to godliness. So I saw him in a new light—as a kind of divine administrator of vengeance. I make bold to say, however, that his particular offices would not be required in my society because we did not commit the sin of turning hygiene into a god.

Needless to say, we do have our own sins and blasphemies recorded against our name. If I were God I would regard as the very worst our acceptance—for whatever reason—of racial inferiority. It is too late in the day to get worked up about it or to blame others, much as they may deserve such blame and condemnation. What we need to do is to look back and try and find out where we went wrong, where the rain began to beat us.

Let me give one or two examples of the result of the disaster brought upon the African psyche in the period of subjection to alien races. I remember the shock felt by Christians of my father's generation in my village in the early 1940s when for the first time the local girls' school performed

Nigerian dances at the anniversary of the coming of the gospel. Hitherto they had always put on something Christian and civilized which I believe was called the Maypole dance. In those days—when I was growing up—I also remember that it was only the poor benighted heathen who had any use for our local handicraft, e.g., our pottery. Christians and the well-to-do (and they were usually the same people) displayed their tins and other metalware. We never carried water pots to the stream. I had a small cylindrical biscuit-tin suitable to my years while the older members of our household carried four-gallon kerosene tins.

Today, things have changed a lot, but it would be foolish to pretend that we have fully recovered from the traumatic effects of our first confrontation with Europe. Three or four weeks ago my wife, who teaches English in a boys' school, asked a pupil why he wrote about winter when he meant the harmattan. He said the other boys would call him a bushman if he did such a thing! Now, you wouldn't have thought, would you, that there was something shameful in your weather? But apparently we do. How can this great blasphemy be purged? I think it is part of my business as a writer to teach that boy that there is nothing disgraceful about the African weather, that the palm tree is a fit subject for poetry.

Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse—to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of that word. Here, I think, my aims and the deepest aspirations of my society meet. For no thinking African can escape the pain of the wound in our soul. You have all heard of the "African personality"; of African democracy, of the African way to

socialism, of negritude, and so on. They are all props we have fashioned at different times to help us get on our feet again. Once we are up we shan't need any of them anymore. But for the moment it is in the nature of things that we may need to counter racism with what Jean-Paul Sartre has called an anti-racist racism, to announce not just that we are as good as the next man but that we are much better.

The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact, he should march right in front. For he is, after all—as Ezekiel Mphahlele says in his *African Image*—the sensitive point of his community. The Ghanaian professor of philosophy, William Abraham, puts it this way:

> Just as African scientists undertake to solve some of the scientific problems of Africa, African historians go into the history of Africa, African political scientists concern themselves with the politics of Africa; why should African literary creators be exempted from the services that they themselves recognize as genuine?

I for one would not wish to be excused, I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them. Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure. But who cares? Art is important, but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don't see that the two need be mutually exclusive. In a recent anthology a Hausa folk tale, having recounted the usual fabulous incidents, ends with these words:

> They all came and they lived happily together. He had several sons and daughters who grew up and helped in raising the standard of education of the country.[1]

As I said elsewhere, if you consider this ending a naive anticlimax then you cannot know very much about Africa.

Leeds University, 1965

AWAY FROM LOST WORLDS: NOTES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CANADIAN LITERATURE

George Woodcock

THERE is a Lost World feeling about most of the minor English-speaking literatures. In remoteness, forms of expression that have passed away elsewhere still survive, or attitudes derived from England evolve in their own directions, as Georgian nature poetry has done—rather eloquently—in New Zealand. Anyone who has the courage to read what passed for Canadian literature in the early years of the present century, when Charles G. D. Roberts and Bliss Carman and Ralph Connor were still at the height of their reputations, may get the same feeling of antique forms blossoming nostalgically in isolation; even a 1920s figure like E. J. Pratt, whom most Canadian critics now regard as the pioneer of a native poetry, can be convincingly presented as a phenomenon of the literary Galapagos, a latter-day didactic poet recording in a massively constructed adaptation of Victorian and even Hudibrastic forms the epic stories that belong to a frontier society.

During the past quarter of a century, however, writing in Canada has passed beyond the Lost World phase. This is partly because of the recession into distance of the pioneer stage in Canadian social history; it is due also to the strains that arise in a society pulled by strong external influences and at the same time trying desperately to create and hold on to its own special identity. Culturally, as well as economically, Canada is largely dependent on the United States; what happens among writers in New York and San Francisco is likely to have some effect on what happens among writers in Toronto and Vancouver respectively, since cultural patterns in North America tend to run north and south like the mountains rather than east and west like the International Boundary.

Yet the link with Europe remains strong, and it has been

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somewhat reinforced during recent decades by the significant part which immigrants from Britain have assumed in the Canadian literary world. At the same time there has been a steady traffic on the part of Canadian writers to and from the literary metropolis; such novelists as Mordecai Richler, Norman Levine, and Margaret Laurence are at present living in England but still writing out of their Canadian experience.

What Canadian writers tend to seek in London, as their French-speaking compatriots do in Paris, is a concentration of writers—a complex and developed literary world—of a kind that does not exist in Canada. The absence of a native literary milieu (as distinct from the regional ambience that originally shapes a writer's consciousness) is due partly to geographical reasons; Canada has no cultural metropolis, and writers group themselves loosely in places as far apart as Fredericton, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. But it is equally attributable to the vast inflow of British and American books and periodicals that has made difficult the emergence of either a really competitive publishing industry (ready to struggle over as well as encourage emerging writers), or a press of the kind that keeps writers in practice and in the public eye; there are literary quarterlies in Canada but no literary weeklies.

The lack of a true literary world, of either a Bohemia or an Establishment, has tended to force Canadian writers into institutional settings. An exceptionally high proportion of them are in some way linked with the Universities. This applies particularly to poets over thirty, and even some of the more successful Canadian novelists of the past twenty years have been unable or unwilling to break their academic ties; Hugh MacLennan, for example, still teaches at McGill. The result is that academic influences are exceptionally pervasive. A case in point is that of Northrop Frye, Principal of Victoria College, Toronto, authority on Blake, and dean of Canadian critics. Frye's myth-based criticism, carried on for many years in periodicals like the *University of Toronto Quarterly* and *Canadian Forum* and expounded week by week in his university lectures and seminars, has not merely set its mark deeply on Canadian critical writing in its early stages; it was also largely responsible for the appearance of a whole school of mythopoeic poets, led by James Reaney, Jay Macpherson, and Eli Mandel.

Where Canadian writers do not retreat into the colleges, they are likely to turn towards the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Canada Council, both of which, though theoretically autonomous, are supported by government funds. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has consistently followed a policy of commissioning scripts from serious writers wherever possible, and has kept alive a series of high-calibre programmes in which original plays, short stories, and poems are regularly brought before a reasonably large public. Some of the best dramatic writing in Canada since the war has been for radio, including Earle Birney's *Trial of a City*, James Reaney's play, *The Killdeer*, and his operatic libretto *The Night-blooming Cereus*, George Woodcock's *Maskerman* and *The Floor of the Night*, and the many adept though rather didactic plays of Lister Sinclair. The Canada Council is the Canadian writer's substitute for the various private foundations which provide fellowships and other assistance to writers in the United States.

For all the good it has undoubtedly done, the Canada Council represents the final boxing in of Canadian literature by the structure of institutionalism. If we try to envisage an 'average Canadian writer', we can see him living near a campus, teaching at least part time at university level, mingling too much for his work's good with academics, doing as much writing as he can for the CBC and always hoping for a Canada Council Fellowship that will take him away for a year in Menton or the Greek Islands. The mixture of the ingredients may vary, and it is true that some of the best writers working in Canada during the past few decades have managed to keep largely outside the pattern. Malcolm Lowry went unrecognized by the institutions until after his death in 1957, when the academics brought up his manuscripts and the CBC began to broadcast programmes about him. And such novelists as Morley Callaghan, Brian Moore, Margaret Laurence, Mordecai Richler, and Ethel Wilson have at least avoided too close connection with the universities, though all of them have been to some degree involved with the CBC or the Canada Council, or both.

Yet the growing degree of institutionalism has not prevented the two decades following the end of the Second World War from being a period in which Canadian writing has acquired a variety, a sophistication, an ironic view of the world it presents,

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and a critical view of its own productions, which seem to mark it as a mature literature that has grown out of colonial tutelage and is beginning to interpret its own environment in an original way.

1945, the end of the Second World War, saw the major Canadian writers of the period between the wars passing out of existence or out of significant production. In 1944 Stephen Leacock died and Frederick Philip Grove, that fumbling giant among novelists, published his last important work, *The Master of the Mill*; he was to die in 1948. The best work of Morley Callaghan and E. J. Pratt was already in the past. The writers who appeared in the late 1920s and early 1930s as the pioneers of a new, cosmopolitan strain in poetry—A. J. M. Smith, F. R. Scott, A. M. Klein and Dorothy Livesay—were becoming elder figures in their turn, and during the war a group of poets who were to dominate the decade immediately after the peace had already begun to publish their work, either in volumes, or in periodicals; they included Earle Birney, Irving Layton, Louis Dudek, Raymond Souster, Anne Wilkinson, P. K. Page, and Margaret Avison. Two impecunious magazines played an extremely important part in introducing these poets to the small literary public of 1945. *Contemporary Verse*, edited by Alan Crawley from British Columbia, had begun to appear in 1941 and was to cease publication in 1951. *Northern Review* edited by John Sutherland in Montreal, emerged in 1945 from the amalgamation of two wartime little magazines, *First Statement* and *Preview*; it continued to appear until Sutherland's death in 1956. These two magazines published almost every significant Canadian poet and prose writer who was at work during the period when they were flourishing.

When we turn to the progress of particular literary forms in Canada during the after-war years, it is evident that the majority of Canadian novels published since 1945 can be classed as nothing better than 'popular' in the most inferior sense. Canadian publishers are still far too partial to the lady writers who fabricate the kind of colonial romance which Mazo de la Roche did very much better a generation ago. There are still too many pseudo-historical best sellers, and too many regional novels which rely on shoddily homespun dialogue and a grossly sentimental vision of the pioneer past. A more justifiable popularity attaches to the works of the two writers who, in terms of

reputation at least, can be regarded as the leading Canadian novelists of the post-war era. These are Hugh MacLennan and Morley Callaghan.

MacLennan is an academic and a classical scholar with a sense of mission towards Canadian nationality. He is preoccupied to the point of obsession with the fact of living at a time and in a country where a sense of separate identity as a nation is emerging; he is equally preoccupied with the danger to the new nation which he expounded in his novel *Two Solitudes*, the danger presented by the division of Canadians into two mutually unassimilated groups—the English-speaking and the French-speaking. Every novel MacLennan has written is marred by the didacticism which such preoccupations force upon him, and by the distortion of both character and action when they are bent to serve the prevailing argument. His best novel up to the present, *Each Man's Son*, is the least touched by MacLennan's nationalistic philosophy. It concerns a Cape Breton mining settlement shadowed by the distortions of a puritanical attitude towards life, and in its record of the downfall of a boxing professional brought up in this environment, the fatalism which MacLennan derives from his study of Greek drama serves well to render the Calvinist view of existence. MacLennan writes admirably on action (there is an extraordinary record of a gigantic explosion at Halifax in his earliest novel, *Barometer Rising*), but with a fatal embarrassment on anything remotely erotic; his recent and most ambitious novel, *The Watch that Ends the Night*, is ruined by the sentimental implausibilities of the central sexual triangle between a doctor who returns after having long been given up for dead in the Nazi concentration camps, his former wife, and the thin-blooded political commentator who has since married her and who narrates the novel.

Morley Callaghan is justly regarded as a good short-story writer, but a rather weak novelist, with a direct, lucid prose that at times lapses into a colourless banality. Since 1945 he has published few stories and only three novels—*The Loved and the Lost*, *The Many-Colored Coat* and *A Passion in Rome.* The first two, which Callaghan kept down to the simplicity of a *récit*, are almost up to the standard of his pre-war work, direct in approach and spare in construction, though marred by a rather mawkish pseudo-compassion for the adult babes

who wander in the dark wood of the modern city. *A Passion in Rome* is Callaghan's sole attempt at a complex, full-scale novel; it is a disastrous failure, structurally chaotic and written in a prose of appalling and gritty dullness. Callaghan's talent is lapidary in nature, not fitted for works on the grand pattern, and nothing he has produced since 1945 has equalled the best of his short stories of the 1930s.

The most vital Canadian fiction of the post-war period has in fact been written by people who, for various regional or traditional reasons, belong outside the main stream of ordinary Canadian life which writers like MacLennan and Callaghan seek to represent. There are, first, the immigrants. Probably the best novel to come out of Canada at any time has been Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, completed when Lowry was living in the little shack on the foreshore near Vancouver, which he inhabited during the fifteen years from 1939 to 1954. But *Under the Volcano* was conceived in Mexico and its first versions were written there. Much more truly Canadian were the short stories Lowry wrote on the basis of his experience in British Columbia. Published after his death in the volume entitled *Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*, these stories showed clearly that Lowry had lived his way into the Canadian environment and could render its spirit as admirably and with as much fantastic originality as he rendered that of the Mexican plateau in *Under the Volcano*.

Brian Moore, in his own way, fits just as elusively into the pattern of Canadian writing as Malcolm Lowry. He is Belfast-born and, like Joyce, he has carried his Ireland with him. The Irish, lonely in their own land, of his early novel, *Judith Hearne*, become the Irish, lonely as aliens, in *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, a tragi-comic tale of the misadventures of an Irish bounder in Montreal, which is easily the best of many novels that have attempted to give expression to the predicament of the immigrant in Canada. Moore has now left Canada for the United States, and his most recent novel, *An Answer from Limbo*, about Irish people lonely in New York, gives no hint of his Canadian experience and suggests that Moore still belongs to Ireland rather than to any of the lands where he may temporarily have settled.

Life abroad, of a different kind from that which shapes the attitude of the immigrant, has greatly influenced the work of one of the best of the recently published novelists of Canadian birth. Before she began writing, Margaret Laurence had lived for fairly long periods in Somaliland and West Africa, and out of her experiences in these lands she has written a number of fine short stories and a very evocative first novel about Africa, *This Side Jordan*. She has followed up with one of the very few good travel books written by a Canadian, *The Prophet's Camel Bell*. In her most recent novels, *The Stone Angel* and *A Jest of God*, she has turned to Canadian settings and themes, and dealt with them equally poignantly.

One of the most interesting literary phenomena in post-war Canada has been the emergence of a body of excellent writers from a Jewish community that is minuscule in proportion to the whole English-speaking population of the country. These writers, who include poets as well as novelists, would object to being lumped together in a 'Jewish school', since they are all strongly individualist in approach, but they write from a common background and they are all concerned in one way or another with the generation-by-generation progress by which a Jew in North America steps from his narrower traditional community into the wider community of the world; indeed, for many of them the Jewish youth at odds with his family or his neighbours is merely the aspect they know best of the general problem of the individual at odds with society as a whole. The best of the Canadian Jewish novelists are the poet A. M. Klein, who has written a single very moving allegorical novel of rather Zionist flavour, *The Second Scroll*, and Mordecai Richler. Richler is an iconoclastic novelist, nearer than any other Canadian writer to the British 'angry young men' of the 1950s, and very much concerned with the individual's self-liberation from his own as well as his world's hypocrisies. In such novels as *Son of a Smaller Hero* and *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* he mounts a nihilistic attack on current moralities, using a prose which at best is brutally alive and direct and at worst as flat-footed as a policeman's walk. Other Jewish novelists who rank high among Canadian writers are Adele Wiseman (*The Sacrifice*), Jack Ludwig (*Confusions*), and Norman Levine, whose best book to date is actually an autobiography-cum-travel book entitled *Canada Made Me*.

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Regional novels that rise above sentimental pseudo-history or amiable rusticity are rare in Canada. Many novelists have tried to encompass the life of the prairies, but nothing in this field has been written during the last twenty years to equal that admirable study of frustration in an elavator town, Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*, which appeared in 1941. Ross's own later work has not repeated this early triumph, and the best prairie novel of the years since the last war, W. O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind*, is spoiled by the rather weak comedy that breaks in constantly upon an otherwise sensitive reconstruction of a child's developing recognition of his environment and of the necessary presence of death.

Since the war Vancouver has tended to become a western centre of writing, as important, in its own way as Montreal and Toronto, with its own little magazines and fleeting publishing ventures. Apart from Malcolm Lowry's passing presence, it is the home of at least one major Canadian novelist, Ethel Wilson, who has woven the *données* of her environment into a series of highly sophisticated, ironical, and dry-humoured *récits*. Ethel Wilson began to write short stories in her forties; she did not start with novels until her fifties, and she published her first novel, *Hetty Dorval*, in 1947, at the age of fifty-six. She is still writing, in her seventies, with wry wisdom and an acute and careful sense of style. Her best novels, *The Innocent Traveller*, *Swamp Angel* and *Love and Salt Water*, are all set in the Vancouver region, where she has lived since she came from England in her childhood, but they are as universal in their intent as a good nature poem.

A series of good one-shot novels remains to be mentioned to complete the fictional harvest of Canadian writing in the post-war years. Earle Birney's *Turvey*, the tale of a Canadian Schweik in the Second World War, is a biting and very amusing satire on what happens to a democracy when it gets involved in the totalitarian manoeuvres of modern war; Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* is a good study of personal conflicts in rural Nova Scotia; Colin McDougall's *Execution* is an agonizing presentation of the conflict between human and military responsibilities among Canadian soldiers fighting in wartime Italy; Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* is technically one of the most sophisticated of Canadian novels, revealing with complex

allusiveness the hard underlying passions of life in a small British Columbian town.

Finally, one cannot leave fiction without mentioning the presence of a number of competent short-story writers who have kept writing despite the fact that there are very few magazines left in Canada which publish stories of any kind. Some of the story-writers, like Ethel Wilson, Mordecai Richler, and Jack Ludwig, have already been mentioned as novelists; others, like Hugh Garner, Alice Munro, and Henry Kreisel, are solely or mainly interesting for their stories. All of them are good writers with highly individual styles, but they get little encouragement, for the publishers are as reluctant as the popular magazines in Canada to handle short story fiction. However, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation still keeps up its policy of buying stories, and one of its executives, Robert Weaver, who is also editor of the influential *Tamarack Review*, has been assiduous in collecting anthologies of good Canadian short fiction—such as the recent Oxford collection of Canadian short stories—which give permanent form to at least some of the stories.

Canadian poetry has been rich in new trends and new poets since the last war, and here regional traditions and ways of speech, as well as the local influence of certain key figures, have all come into play. Montreal has been a strong centre of Canadian poetry since the 1930s, and undoubtedly the English-speaking poets in that city are stimulated to a certain degree by the presence of a vital French-Canadian verse tradition. F. R. Scott, A. M. Klein, Irving Layton, and Louis Dudek, the principal figures in the Montreal movement during the 1930s, are now becoming its elder poets, while younger writers like Leonard Cohen are moving into prominence. The Montrealers have always, in one direction, leaned towards a social realism that is linked with a politically radical tendency, while, in the other direction, tending towards metaphysical goals, varying from the Jewish mysticism of Klein to the Lawrencian vitalism of Irving Layton. Klein, the best of this group of poets, has published nothing since *The Rocking Chair* in 1948, and the centre of the Montreal stage has been occupied for the last ten years by Irving Layton, a prolific and chaotic poet who has published almost a score of volumes and brochures of verse since his first book, *Here and Now*, came out in 1945. Layton's

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chief fault is an almost total absence of self-criticism; his best poems have always to be dug out from between thick layers of rhetorical rubbish. But when he succeeds in his exuberant game of hit-and-miss he can present, as no other Canadian poet does, a joy in the glory of life or a devastating contempt of life's enemies.

Generally speaking, the poets who are centred on Toronto have been less socially inclined, more metaphysical, and more concerned with poetic craftsmanship than the Montreal group. These qualities were already evident in the work of the writers who carried over from the war period, such as Anne Wilkinson (*Counterpoint to Sleep*), Douglas le Pan (*The Net and the Sword*), and P. K. Page (*The Metal and the Flower*), but they have been developed more strongly by the mythopoeic group of poets, lately centring around the little magazine *Alphabet*, which arose under the influence of the critic Northrop Frye. The mythopoeic poets not only create mythological structures to illuminate the personal messages they wish to convey; they are also adept at a kind of wit which depends on the astonishing marriage of the ridiculous and the sublime, and at a rather recondite allusiveness. The best of them, Jay Macpherson (*The Boatman*), Eli Mandel (*Fuseli Poems*), and James Reaney, are among the most sophisticated and the finest poets writing in Canada today, though at times even their discrimination is dulled by a kind of intoxication with their own wit, so that their work is not of even quality. This applies particularly to James Reaney, who has experimented in many forms, and just as many moods, varying from the clotted Gothic melodrama of his early lyrics in *The Red Heart* to the allusive clowning of *A Suit of Nettles*, and the strange mixtures of farce and pathos, inanity and depth, that emerge when he turns to play, opera and masque.

Among the other poets active in the post-war period in Canada it is hard to find such clearly marked groups as have existed in Montreal and Toronto. Even among the Toronto poets Margaret Avison stands apart in metaphysical isolation. She is one of the most self-critical Canadian poets, as her single volume (*Winter Sun*) reveals, and one of the best. And, though there are a number of very distinguished British Columbian poets, it is hard to find a uniting thread. Earle Birney (*Ice Cod Bell or Stone*) writes a vigorous free verse, often satirical and richly allusive, while Roy Daniells (*The Chequered Shade*) is a fine sonneteer who handles spiritual subtleties with great wit and technical mastery. Wilfred Watson (*Friday's Child*) has a richness of image and vocabulary, but is still perhaps too much a follower of the English 1940s poets, while Phyllis Webb (*Even Your Right Eye*) writes with a honed-down intellectuality which is at times excessively chilling.

There remains two fields of writing in both of which the efforts of Canadians have, up to the last few years, been rather rudimentary. One is drama, whose practitioners have been constantly frustrated by the virtual absence in Canada until very recently of a regular theatre that would handle original plays. As a result, only one stage playwright of real consequence has appeared in Canada since the war. He is Robertson Davies, a writer of somewhat heavily satirical novels and of stage farces characterized by a rather donnish skittishness. As I have already said, it is for the radio that most of the best dramatic writing in Canada has been done over the past twenty years, and unfortunately little of this has yet been published.

The appearance of criticism is the sign of a maturing and self-conscious literature, and it is significant that only in the past decade have Canadians turned with any seriousness or depth to the critical consideration of their own literature. Much that passes for criticism is still mere appreciation, for the Canadian literary world is small and has always over-rated the virtue of mutual kindliness. But the general situation has changed considerably since 1945, partly through the example of Northrop Frye as a theoretical critic, and partly through the appearance of a number of critics trained in the more rigorous standards of the English literary world, such as Paul West and George Woodcock. Together with such younger Canadian critics as Milton Wilson, F. W. Watt, and Hugo McPherson, these writers have helped to create a more responsible view of literary criticisms—an attitude crystallized largely by the appearance in 1959 of the first Canadian critical quarterly, *Canadian Literature*.

I cannot end this survey without mentioning the literary reviews and little magazines which, given the restricted nature of commercial publishing facilities, have played an important part in the pattern of Canadian writing. When *Northern Review* disappeared in 1956, there was no real literary magazine left in

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Canada, but later in the same year appeared the first issue of *Tamarack Review*, edited by a group of Toronto *literati* which included Robert Weaver, Anne Wilkinson, and Kildare Dobbs (author of a fascinating semi-fictional autiobiography called *Running to Paradise*). It was followed by other new literary magazines—Louis Dudek's *Delta* in Montreal (1957) and Jan de Bruyn's *Prism* in Vancouver (1959). All these magazines continue. But the most extraordinary development during the past two years has been the great crop of little magazines, printed, offset, and merely mimeographed, which writers in their 'teens and early twenties have begun to publish all over Canada. Dozens of new poets and story writers are appearing in these magazines of whose eventual achievement, even of whose promise, it is yet early to speak. In this undergrowth of small periodicals new trends are appearing; there is a tendency away from the mythological and the metaphorical towards a preoccupation with speech rhythms and rather direct statement, and there is also a tendency to turn more towards current movements in the United States than has been evident among Canadian poets in the past.

What is perhaps most significant, however, is the sudden spurt of vitality that is channelling hundreds of young people towards literature with a determination that makes them impatient of the limitations of ordinary publications. As they print and actively circulate their magazines among steadily widening circles (one of several mimeographed little magazines in Vancouver goes out to 400 people), perhaps they are beginning to create that very literary world which Canadian writing has up to now lacked, and without which its best writers have often seemed so oddly unrooted.

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