

Such a world hardly existed in Canada before the mid-1960s, but the shifts in national consciousness that began during World War II were making it possible. In the 1940s the direction of Canadian fiction was changed by the appearance of two classic novels, Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* and Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*. Ross's book was a single triumph, a sensitive study not only of the frustration of life in small Prairie towns but also of the plight of the artist in a country only just emerging from a condition of pioneer philistinism. But *Barometer Rising* was the beginning of a distinguished career, for MacLennan dominated the late 1940s and the 1950s in Canadian writing with his didactic novels. They were popular because, like the quasi-epics of E.J. Pratt and the early poems of Earle Birney, they mirrored the preoccupations of a people conscious that they were coming to terms with their own land and no longer depending on any of their various "Old Countries". MacLennan novels like *Two Solitudes* (1945) and *The Precipice* (1948) in various ways gave fictional expression to an emerging national and nationalist consciousness, and they were widely accepted in spite of their conservative style and awkward characterization.

The Verbal Explosion

It is symptomatic of the change in Canadian writing that since the late 1950s no single figure has dominated any area in the way MacLennan then dominated fiction. This is due mainly to the rapid coming to maturity of Canadian literature during the past quarter of a century, and the notable variegation, in kinds of writing and in ways of writing, that has accompanied it. In 1976 the noted Canadian critic, Northrop Frye, remarked on the "colossal verbal explosion that has taken place in Canada since 1960." And whether one looks at the number of books published, the number of magazines in circulation, the number of publishing houses and bookstores in operation, or the number of Canadian books read by Canadians, there is no doubt that we have seen an enormous quantitative expansion in Canadian writing.

Let me give two examples. After *Northern Review* disappeared in 1953 with the death of its editor, John Sutherland, there was no literary magazine of any substance in Canada until *Tamarack Review* was founded in 1959. This year *Tamarack* ceased publication after a distinguished career; it could do so because there are now several dozen Canadian literary periodicals in existence. When I started to edit *Canadian Literature* in 1959, it was the only critical journal in Canada, and criticism as a literary genre hardly existed. Now there are half a dozen critical magazines dealing with various aspects of writing in this country. In the same year of 1959 twelve books of verse were published in Canada. By the end of the 1970s the yearly average was about ten times that number. And these books were being published by a whole underground network of small publishing houses that had come into being to meet the need of the many new, and often good, poets who were emerging.

The magazines and the publishing houses became part of that essential infrastructure of a literary world. Linked in a symbiotic way to the expansion of the literary world was the emergence of the Canada Council, the organization for the administration of public patronage without political strings. The Canada Council came into being as the result of a famous Royal Commission set up in 1949, under the chairmanship of Vincent Massey, later Governor General of Canada, to investigate the situation of the arts, letters and sciences. The Commission sensed the groundswell of interest in literature and the other arts that would produce Northrop Frye's "explosion" a decade or so later, and its recommendations led to the establishment of the Council, which since its foundation in 1956 has been encouraging the arts in many ways that have improved both the working situations of writers and their chances of presenting their works to a responsive public. Grants of various kinds have given writers much-needed time to work without financial anxieties in a country where few writers