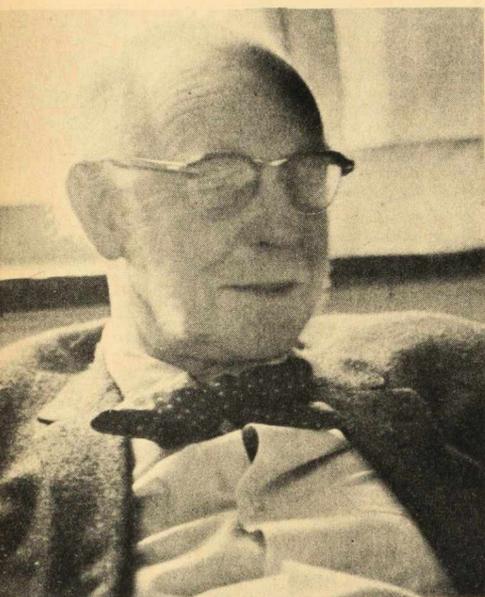


Earl Birney: Novelist, Poet, Professor.

The Writer's Future In Canada Today

"The younger generation in Canada are in revolt against the universities; the best writing in the country is coming from high school dropouts. They can't stand (campus English courses) because of academic emphasis."



By ROBIN ENDRES ASST. NEWS EDITOR AND PIERS GRAY, FEATURES EDITOR

ON THE WORTH OF CREATIVE WRITING COURSES:

THEY ARE A GOOD IDEA.

Educational philosophy in Canada has got to start or else it will be dead. The humanities set-up doesn't make sense unless creativity is there. If I could set up my own university, English literature would be useful fringes whereas now they are the core. The younger generation in Canada are in revolt against the universities; the best writing in the country is coming from high school dropouts. They can't stand it because of the super emphasis on academicism. The 16th Century stuff doesn't matter any more. Why spend time

UBC 20 years ago which was considered something Birney was allowed to do to humour him. It gradually built up because the students wanted more and more to get in on it. There was a long fight and battle with the English department which finally led to divorce. I resigned and then they hired me back as the head of the department of creative writing a small department which is rejected by the English department.

There are far more people in your age group, writing and publishing, than ever before; I mean more in proportion to the population. I would say the quality is going up too. It is the poets under the age of 35 whom I am reading and being excited by.

Some poets in Toronto were meeting at the Bohemian Embassy, sort of a coffee house. It's out now though because one

really: rather individual men in the publishing world. This is unlike other larger cities say London or New York. Through magazines I can meet writers and find out which are the best pubs to meet other writers. I don't know how to do that in Toronto. In Vancouver you would meet them by going out to the university at noon hour. It's a sacred tradition at UBC... no classes are held at 12:30. In Montreal you could find Louis Dudeque and through him you might meet Frank Scott.

ON POLITICALLY CONSCIOUS WRITERS

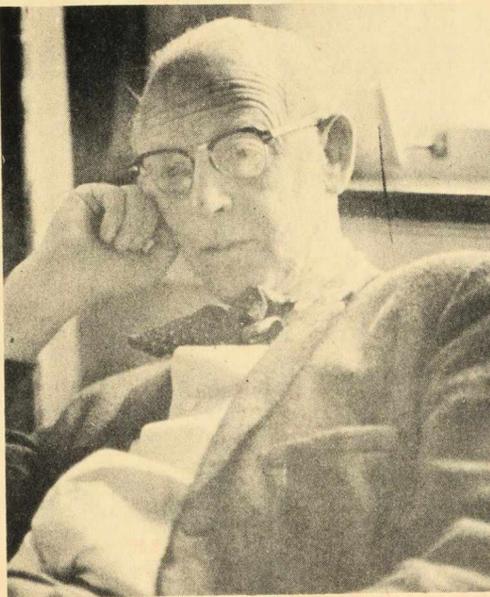
We have a pretty good standard of reporting on the higher levels. The leading by-line writers have a good standard of journalistic writing. But very little done in fiction by Canadian writers. Poets have shown a good deal of concern about international affairs. Poets of my generation are very concerned with politics. Irving Leighton is now a little right wing, although he had a period of semi-Marxism. He's right in there with the State Department now. However, Frank Scott writes penetrating and witty social and political satire. The poets have done better by this than the novelists. My second novel was about left-wing activities in Canada in the thirties, but I had trouble publishing it because he thought a book about Canadian politics wouldn't be read and he was right. My first novel had better success, but this one wasn't even reviewed, it was just ignored. There is more interest in this respect in nonfiction. Once there is a feeling of an audience it sparks the good writers. Who would have thought a few years ago that the all time best seller in Canada would be about churches.

There has been a continuation of Black Mountain movement but it is now over. This is now a new establishment.

Vic Coleman in Toronto, Pat Lane and Gerry Gilbert in Vancouver... most stimulating writers because they have got themselves stuck in a fairly formalized tradition. Joe Rosenblatt in Toronto writes in a neo-surrealist style you see a good deal of in England. There is a bit of that going on. The older writers have got themselves a little artery hardened. They are not experimenting enough. Most of the writ-

ON SURVIVING AS A CANADIAN WRITER

I am a frustrated writer, a weekend poet or a summertime novelist. However, I like to eat. I prefer to write though I am unable to make a living as a writer. I could have I suppose if I had more guts or better advice when I was young. I mean if I had avoided the academic rat race and gone out instead and started writing on my own. I would then have been a writer in my twenties. It is no world for a writer today. You have to be hip to make a living today. You must live in Montreal or Toronto; you can't exist without doing some free lance or T.V. work. But to live in Canada today you have to be able to



write for the U.S. market. A guy like Hayley wrote for the U.S. and became indistinguishable from an American writer. He reflected no deep ideas of Canada.

ON TRENDS IN CANADIAN LITERATURE

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Alfred Earl Birney was born on May 6, 1904. He was educated at the University of British Columbia and later at the University of Toronto where he took a Master's and a Ph.D. He has held various teaching positions in North America and Britain; among these being a teaching fellowship at the University of California and a lecturership at London University. From 1936 to 1941 he was a member of the faculty of University College, Toronto. His public literary endeavors started with the editorship of the Canadian Forum from 1936 to 1940 and the Canadian Poetry Magazine from 1946 to 1948. Since then he has been connected with numerous poetry magazines in Canada and has done free lance work for the C.B.C. In 1965 he resigned from the professorship, he had held at UBC since 1946. There he had created the first department of creative writing in Canada. His first published novel "Turvy" in 1949 followed by "Down the Long Table" in 1955. His poetry includes "David", and "Now is the Time", both of which received the Governor General's medals; and later "Street of Anian" and "Trial of a City". He is presently resident poet at the University of Toronto. A collection of his poems will be published this spring.

cost you any more. Some poets are beginning to realize this." now I can paint my poems." Ever since Gutenberg the poet felt he had lost some of the visual control of manuscripts. One of the contributions of the Black Mountain group was to make poets ask themselves "What is a line?" The theory emphasized breath and heartbeat and things like this. Concrete poetry. I don't see it happening in Canada. And there is a lot of fun with pop poetry and things like that which follow the trend in art. Found poetry. John Colombo's manuscript. Took parts from William Lyon McKenzie's speeches and arranged them in lines which emphasize the rhythm of speech. McKenzie used fairly original images. There is a tremendous rhythmic basis and when it is arranged it sounds like a found poem, but it seems to me more like found verse. We begin to get skeptical about the boundaries between the arts. What happens, for instance, when a sculptor writes a poem on his composition? A Harold Town in Toronto is making a huge unfinished canvas and having poets write poems on it to fit the picture. The painting will belong to all of them and the poems won't be used without the painting, since you can't use the painting without the poem. We have been for thousands of years so rigid about the concepts of the arts and now they are flowing together. Some poets are writing poetry with a background of electronic music. The poetry may have some relation to this music. Here is a way of controlling another medium in relation to your own. Before, jazz always defeated a poem: it was too strong and good in itself. Electronic music doesn't chop up a poet's work. It is blended to the poem.

I have been working on a found poem. I clip things from the Toronto Star, using different sizes of type... obituaries, headlines, comic strips... then I arrange these to make a satiric comment on journalism. Then I am going to work with a number of sculptors in Toronto and make a mobile out of it. They must invent a mobile which must have a form to match the poem. Now I have got a poem that swings! There is of course Conservatism in Canadian poetry because the older poets have got so satisfied... more than the painters.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF AMERICANS ON CANADIAN AUTHORS

The U.S. is important for economic reasons. The trouble is that most Canadian writers are holiday writers; most of them are teaching. As a result they write too little. To keep going you



have to free lance on the C.B.C. You see this time I came into the University of Toronto from the University of B.C. and took a sharp reduction in salary. I had to make a few extra dollars free lance. It is easy to make a few hundred this way but to be successful you have to work at it full time. There have been Canadian writers who have been successful as purely Canadian authors - Callaghan was able to do this. He has a good reputation as a novelist in Toronto, anywhere in Canada.

In the U.K. or the U.S. he is regarded along with Hugh McLellan as the most serious of the older Canadian novelists. But he has lived from genuine writing, although he did have a few lean years and had to go back to journalism.

ON MALCOLM LOWRY

He wrote one of the great novels of the twentieth century - UNDER THE VOLCANO - which started an enormous sequence of novels. He didn't live long enough to bring it to a conclusion and his method of writing was rather chaotic. The October Ferry to Gabriola is about the west coast, it is his Canadian novel, and the best that has probably been written. It isn't ready to come out yet, there are over 2,000 pages of manuscript. I started to work with Mrs. Lowry but dropped out because there was too much work, it would have been a life time job. The main job at first was to locate the various manuscripts in Vancouver.

I started to edit Lowry's work, the publishers wanted me to work on his collected manuscripts.

They were scattered all over the place but then I started to realize that I was going to be editing manuscripts and letters for the rest of my life. I was going to be known as the editor of my old friend Malcolm Lowry.

ON HALIFAX

I don't find much difference yet between here and the west coast. It is all part of Canada but it is nice to find a town with a paper that feels a tide chart is important. In Toronto there is no life in the Lake; but really I don't feel I'm a westerner who has come east but a Canadian who has come to Halifax. I don't think that easterners are as different as they think they are.

ON CULTURAL TRADITIONS IN CANADA

In B.C. there is a tremendous amount of writing coming up. There are five or six literary magazines floating around the city and the campus. TISH is known all over North America in young poetry circles. LIMBO is a neo-surrealistic magazine put out by one middle-aged man, PRISM, which is a magazine I was editing but I dropped off because it is hard to edit from 3,000 miles. It has an international slant. Then there is BLUE OINTMENT, which has a purple past, or I should say blue past. But the last issue was really exciting and contemporary, the sort of thing you see in London or N.Y. There are 125 students registered in Creative Writing courses at UBC.

GEMINI VI Fulsang: 'Pretty good for Canadian'

By STEPHEN POTTIE Gazette Staff

Last week, Peter Fulsang was the guest performer at Gemini VI, and while he was much better than I had expected I still had to rationalize that he was 'pretty good for a Canadian.' Peter, a native of Moncton if my usually unreliable source of information can be relied upon, is what a reviewer usually calls a COMMERCIAL folks singer; which is to say, he has neither technical nor emotional maturity enough to rise above the level of the inconsequential. I might have listened to Peter Fulsang hundreds of times before, but I would never have remembered him. Even a bland group such as The Brothers Four have their own SOUND, distinguishable from all others. Peter is what several million other amateurs would be like with more practice.

Peter Fulsang's singing is the result of listening to more records than his own voice, a cross between Joan Baez's introversion and the slickness of Peter, Paul and Mary. In the case of Miss Baez, he has none of her vocal range, innate beauty, or general charm. P, P & M on the other hand much more fluid and exciting. Perhaps it is unfair to draw such parallels, but Peter Fulsang's highly derivative style makes it unavoidable. For example, in the one show I saw he did no less than three times from the Baez albums - DONNA, MATTY GROVES, and EL PRESO NUMERO NUEVE - in almost strict copy of Joan's treatments. I don't mind his using the same versions, but no two people find the same interpretive meaning in the same song, three times.

His repertoire was as nondescript as his singing. Most of the songs can be heard on any one of three million records. I mean, how many times have you heard "BLOWIN' IN THE WIND"? Apart from the many songs that were so inconsequential that I can't remember anything about them, he did have a few good songs, such as Tom Paxton's THE LAST THING ON MY MIND, and the Baez package. However, nothing of any importance or uniqueness came from his mouth that wasn't important and unique four years ago. Because folk music is founded on old traditions it has to be extra careful that it remains fresh and doesn't stagnate with the same old songs. To top the evening, he sang the classic example of a hackneyed folk song, "HAVA NAGELA." Next to that, he could only have sung "CLEMENTINE" and ON TOP OF OLD SMOKEY."

Mr. Fulsang's accompaniment consisted of simple chording with a couple of fingering patterns. Proficient but not exceptional. Now I return to the thought that closed my first paragraph. As I left Gemini VI, I was asked how I liked the performance. With a great deal of hesitation I said that it was okay. To which came the reply, "C'mon, Support Canadian talent." No!

Catholic, Jewish, Moslem, Buddhist, or Mormon. As long as he knows how to make me enjoy what he has, that's the crux of the matter. Of course, there are more requirements, but that is the basic one.

Therefore, as I write this column I am thinking only of Peter Fulsang as a performer, not as a local boy who just needs more tips and lots of support. There are two coffee houses in town. The Topsider is for people who need time and support. Gemini VI is for professionals, and the professional who needs to be babied is not but an amateur.

Remember when in my first article on Gemini VI I said that the drinks, in particular the lemonade, were small. Well, I retract that statement - almost. The lemonade I HAD was small, but, as Marvin and Sonny were so happy to prove, that was a mistake. From now on, all lemonades in tall glasses. Hold them to their promise.

After all that verbosity, Peter Fulsang was okay. He knows some good songs, and can sing and play the guitar pleasantly. Just the thing for taking the favourite girl, talking about all the things you talk to the favourite girl about, looking across a dark table, watching the faces of the audience, listening to the silly pratter around you, and, oh yes, clapping when that fellow in the corner stops singing in the middle of the song or praising him aloud as he executes some hard guitar work always impresses the favourite girl. Now you're catching on.

Maid Marion says Dal-King's "jokes" were in bad taste

I'm sure all of you have read the front-page article on the Dal-King's rift in the last Gazette. This particular article gave a sample of Dal-King's "jokes" composed by the Freshman rep on King's Student Council.

I have no idea how many King's students were involved in the actual writing of the joke pamphlet. I am sure that those responsible are proud of their handiwork. I am equally sure that they have no reason to be proud of their creation.

About all that can be said for the jokes are that they are unique and even this must be qualified. All sick jokes share a common ancestry and certain family traits can be traced through the elephant, Tarzan, ethnic and, finally, Dal-King's jokes.

It is extremely difficult to declare something to be in bad taste while on campus. Immediately a dozen academicians pounce and demand a definition of "bad taste" which they declare, triumphantly, to be impossible to determine.



PETER FULSANG

I do agree that this point is valid to a certain extent. However, it makes me very uncomfortable to hear people say with an air of authority and conviction that no standards of any kind can be set. Surely there is some common basis for the measure of taste.

It's all very nice to declare oneself to be unconventional and ultra-broadminded. It is absolutely "out" to be conventional even while toeing the in-crowd line.

I am not protesting that the Dal-King's rift is a serious matter and, therefore, should not be spoken of lightly. On the contrary, a little humour in a heavy melodrama would be a very good thing. What I am protesting is the quality of the humour. I did not find them funny. Some of them struck me as being in bad taste, if I dare to use that term. But, for the most part, ho hum, they left me yawning with boredom.

They were described as lampoons. This implies sharp, penetrating wit. Actually, they were just the last in a tedious series of the unfunny jargon of "sick" jokes.

CANADA - continued from Page 1 - picked up prejudices in both areas."

He said, "The only hope for Canadian nationalism is for English-speaking Canada to absorb something from French Canada."

Mr. McCleave, a King's alumnus, said, "Mr. Diefenbaker didn't get along with the Frenchies because the Frenchies like to talk and so did Mr. Diefenbaker."

Regarding the Bomarc missile crisis he said, "Grant nowhere mentions one of the problems of that time that Canada was in a recession."

"He doesn't mention that Mr. Diefenbaker ended the St. Laurent feudalism in Dominion-Provincial relations."

Mr. McCleave called the controversial book, "a work of passion" but said it was "weakened" by ignoring other factors at work about the time of the so-called decline of Canadian nationalism.

The lively meeting then took the form of a question period. In answer to one question, Mr. Rawlyk said that Grant's point of view might be distorted because he "is looking at the problem from his Hamilton office, from the Niagara Peninsula."

When Gazette Editor, Terry Morley asked if there was some validity in the analysis that the government should give more economic direction, Mr. McCleave said that this was the philosophy of John A. Macdonald and Premier Stanfield but "the government can't just legislate one act, or one measure, very quickly."

Rawlyk compared Diefenbaker's nationalism to that of Nova Scotia's Joseph Howe. Howe had looked to Britain, not the U.S., as the protector of his type of nationalism. Rawlyk also mentioned regionalism in Canada and said, "Nova Scotians are Canadians... I think."

Mr. Morley mentioned that the people of the United States had found a "common denominator" to overcome sectionalism and added, "People in Ontario consider themselves to be Canada."

WEAKNESS - continued from Page 4 -

eux, we can help to make ourselves maitres chez nous.

Does this talk of "we" and "they" annoy? Is it so terrible to think of such chauvinism? Only when we speak of it. When they speak it, is it not forward looking, progressive, the quiet revolution? There is no animus here against the French Canadian. There is animus here against the prissiness of the type of English Canadian who will allow the lesser breed of Quebecois the human failing of striving for national identity but will not permit it for himself. It is time to DIGNIFY French Canada's demands, to recognize them as normal human demands, by making the same demands for ourselves. Harmonious interpersonal relationships can exist only among fully developed persons. The same applies, not metaphorically but strictly, to nations, whether they are within a single state or not.