

married more than two decades ago: "We were companions in all our struggles and we respected each other. He was the first man to ask me to organize and when I said, 'Do you think I can do it?', even though it was the only thing on earth I wanted to do, he said, 'Of course you can, as well as anybody else. There's nothing you cannot do.' Kent isn't afraid to stand alone, and having stood alone myself so often as a child, I

recognized and understood that ability."

The interviews are all of a high quality, but those of Kathleen by Myrna Kostash, Esther Warkov by Melinda McCracken, and Barbara Greene by Erna Paris are exceptionally good. The works of these five journalists and three novelists suggest that a very substantial number of Canada's best writers are, indeed, their own women.

## Quebec Literature Today

by François Ricard

Due to various social, economic and political factors, the literature of Quebec reached its current maturity around 1965. Today the province annually produces, in proportion to its population, perhaps the largest number of literary works in the world. Considering the relatively limited readership in Quebec, the literary life of the province is remarkably lively and intense. The literary industry, both in form and in substance, is centred in Montreal, a city which, unlike others of similar size in France and other Francophone countries, both looks and acts like a literary capital.

Of the numerous Quebec publishing houses, the most important are principally, if not entirely, devoted to literary works: L'Hexagone, Parti pris, Quinze, Leméac, Hurtubise H.M.H., Fides and so on. A multitude of literary and cultural magazines are produced (*Liberté; Etudes françaises; Voix et images; La Barre du jour; Critère; Jeu, cahiers de théâtre; Hobo-Québec; Livres et auteurs québécois; Stratégie; Brèches; Les Herbes rouges*). There are writers' associations, a system of scholarships and government assistance, which is one of the most generous and best organized in the Western world, and the *Rencontre québécoise internationale des écrivains*, which in the fall of each year brings together European, American, South American and Quebec writers.

But despite all the literary tools, Quebec literature still encounters serious problems, the most obvious of which is the sale of books. Although editors and writers are heavily subsidized, they still lack readers. The reasons for this are many: an inefficient distribution system in part in the hands of foreign distributors, the competition of books by French authors, the dumping of American books and periodicals, public indifference, the effects of television and, at times, the uneven quality of works published. Add to this the absence of foreign outlets, especially in France where a Quebec book hardly sells, and one arrives at the conclusion that despite its productive-

ness and apparent (but largely artificial) prosperity, Quebec literature remains marginal at best, supported in large part by the state but functioning more and more in isolation. However, this situation, which is common in the majority of Western countries, is perhaps less than desperate. The writers themselves are increasingly more conscious of this and are looking for solutions, like the recent founding of *l'Union des écrivains québécois*.

This being said, let us look at the current production in the fields of poetry, novels, theatre and essays.

The largest number of books published are volumes of poetry. These include works of established and internationally recognized authors, like Gaston Miron, Fernand Ouellette, Jacques Brault, Paul-Marie Lapointe, Roland Giguère, Rina Lasnier, and those of younger poets, like Pierre Nepveu, Michel Beaulieu, Nicole Brossard, Paul Chamberland, Michel Garneau, Renaud Longchamps, whose works explore all avenues of today's poetic life from the classical to the innovative, from protest to satire.

But it is the novel that has made Quebec literature known abroad, due in large measure to the works of great value published by Anne Hébert (*Kamouraska*), Marie-Claire Blais (*Une liaison parisienne*), Jacques Godbout (*L'Isle au dragon*), Réjean Ducharme (*Les Enfantômes*), Hubert Aquin (*Neige noire*), Jacques Ferron (*L'Amélanchier*) and Roch Carrier (*Le Jardin des délices*). Of the younger writers, there are several strong original novelists, like André Major (*Histoires de déserteurs*), Victor-Lévy Beaulieu (*Les Grands-pères*), Jacques Benoit (*Les Princes*) and Yvon Rivard (*Mort et naissance de Christophe Ulric*). The Quebec novel today is extremely diversified, both in form and content. French models are less admired than American or South American ones. And the view of Quebec which arises from these novels is that of a modern society, pluralistic, anx-