

those who have tried to master it. It is simply overwhelming. Except in small pastoral slices of southern Ontario and Quebec, the original wilderness of bush or prairie presses close to the suburban edge of every Canadian town. In summer the boreal lights, a shaking skyful of LSD visions, can remind the most urban of Canadians that they are a northern people, that winter will bring again its hundred-degree drop in the weather, and that their wilderness stretches straight to the permafrost, the ice pack, and the pole.

Nature dreadful and infinite has inhibited the growth of the higher amenities in Canada. The need to wrestle a livelihood from a cruel land has put a premium on some of the sterner virtues — frugality and caution, discipline and endurance. Geography even more than religion has made us puritans, although ours is a puritanism tempered by orgy. Outnumbered by the trees and unable to lick them, a lot of Canadians look as though they had joined them — having gone all faceless or a bit pulp-and-papery, and mournful as the evening jackpine round the edges of the voice, as if (in Priestley's phrase) something long lost and dear were being endlessly regretted. Or there are those who run — by car, train or plane (flying more air miles per capita than any other people), lickety-split as if the spirit of the northern woods, the Wendigo himself, were on their trails. Nature has not always been an enemy, but

she has rarely been something to be tamed either. At best we have exploited her quickly and moved on. No wonder the atmosphere of our towns still often suggests that of the mining camp or the logging drive, the trading post or the sleeping compound. If transportation has been crucial for Canada, and our main-street towns attest the worship of train and motor car, then communications (more telephone calls than anybody else), particularly radio and television (the world's longest networks), have been vital. It is no surprise when some of old Rawhide's Canadian characters become so addicted to the telegraph key that they can only talk in the dah-dah-dits of Morse code.

Survival itself is a virtue and a triumph. Images of survival abound in our popular mythologies.

But Canadians have also learned to live with nature and derive strength from her. It is not just the Group of Seven who came to terms with her terrible grandeur. From the first military surveyors and the C.P.R. artists down to the abstract expressionists of post-modern Toronto, our painters have been profoundly influenced by the Canadian landscape. 'Everything that is central in Canadian writing', says Northrop Frye, 'seems to be marked by the imminence of the natural world.' The American critic Edmund Wilson sees the most distinguishing feature of Hugh MacLennan's work as the unique way he places his

