

have ever lived from their literary earnings. They have enabled magazines to survive and to publish both creative and critical writing. They have subsidized publishers willing to bring out books without guarantees of quick profits. They have sustained theatres, which in turn have employed writers, with the result that Canada, which in the past had a fine radio drama tradition, now has a young but vigorous tradition of writing for the stage.

Of course, the relationship between art patron and artist is a complex one. Patronage can always guarantee the quantity of writing or painting, as it has done in some totalitarian countries, but quality is a different matter. That cannot be produced by financing or organizing the artists. On the other hand, the good writer or artist can be encouraged where he exists by removing some of the difficulties he experiences in producing or distributing his work. In the case of Canada, the foundation of the Canada Council at just the time when Canadian writing was moving rapidly forward and outward was a happy conjunction. The rapid growth of public patronage after 1956 did not cause the "verbal explosion", but it helped the best of the writers who appeared at this time — and some of the worst as well since no patronage system is infallible in its decisions — to have time for their work and the means of reaching an audience.

Literary historians in the future are likely to spend a great deal of time speculating why in the 1960s and 1970s there was not only a spectacular increase in the number of Canadian writers, but also a remarkable maintenance of quality. The literary landscape — once inhabited by a few isolated writers of real quality — has in the past few years become populated by scores of novelists and poets, of dramatists and critics of high, idiosyncratic talent.

Perhaps the most impressive novelist of the 1960s and 1970s was Margaret Laurence; if I had to pick a notable Canadian prose epic I would certainly choose her prairie tetralogy (for the prairies are the heartland of

her characters even when they wander) from *The Stone Angel* (1964) to *The Diviners* (1975). It has a breadth of vision, an historical sense, and a largeness of texture that are unique in Canadian fiction. Margaret Laurence is also important because she exemplifies how Canadian writers at this period were breaking out of the narrower patterns of the past. Some of her crucial years were spent in Somaliland and Ghana, and she perfected her craft by writing about Africa in her novel, *This Side Jordan* (1960), and her travel book, *The Prophet's Camel Bell* (1963), before she turned a very practiced hand to writing about Canada.

Margaret Laurence was not alone in this experience of leaving Canada and returning changed and culturally enlarged. It happened to older as well as younger writers, to Earle Birney and Dorothy Livesay, to P.K. Page and Irving Layton and Al Purdy as well as to Dave Godfrey (*The New Ancestors*, 1970), Audrey Thomas (*Mrs. Blood*, 1969) and Marian Engel (*Bear*, 1976). In the case of elder poets like Birney, Livesay and Page, the remarkable second careers on which they embarked after they returned from their times abroad have been as productive as their earlier periods as young experimental poets, as can be seen from Livesay's *Ice Age* (1976), Birney's *Collected Poems* (1975) and Page's *Evening Dance of the Grey Flies* (1981). Al Purdy, Canada's great poet of place, had already written eloquently on his native Ontario and on Canada from Newfoundland to British Columbia and north to the Arctic when he set out on his world wanderings; the distillation of this mass of global experience is to be found in *Being Alive* (1978), the most representative collection of his work.

In maturing literary cultures a related phenomenon to the travelling writer is the expatriate, who goes and stays away because only thus can he get a real perspective on his native world. The Englishman Malcolm Lowry and the Irishman Brian Moore were two expatriates from other countries who came to Canada and enriched its literature with books like Lowry's *October Ferry to Gabriola* (1970) and Moore's *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (1960). Among the Canadians