

## Sparse attendance

# Canadian literature focus of fourth Encounter

By ANNE CAMOZZI  
an encounter

is a strange  
and wonderful thing  
presence  
one person to another  
present  
one to another  
life flowing  
one to another

Jean Vanier, Tears of Silence, Angel Press, 1970

Last week Vanier council hosted its fourth annual Encounter, and this year's topic was Canadian literature.

Eli Mandel, the poet and York professor who closed the week's activities, called the

week-long symposium "valuable and important, because it gave us a chance to encounter ourselves and to hear what poets, novelists, publishers, and critics have to say."

And the week was just that, starting dynamically with an evening of readings by Michael Ondaatje, poet and Glendon professor, W.O. Mitchell, novelist from Calgary, and Irving Layton, poet (over 20 books published) and York professor.

Ondaatje's manner and voice were quiet and unassuming, and at times the tone of his rarely changing voice became boring. Nonetheless the energetic words of his poetry were important and, as Mandel described them, "moving to the clear".

Mitchell, who is currently reading to between 1,000 and 2,000 school children in

Winnipeg once a week, showed the crowd his tremendous skill in captivating an audience. He read two uproariously funny prose pieces, The Day I Committed Treason Against My Country, and one about his first encounter with syphilis as the age of 10.

Mitchell described his art as "lowering the bucket into the well of himself" so that there would "be explosions of recognition from the cues of your childhood"; he proceeded to do just that as he took everyone into his own marvellous world with vivid images and expressive reading.

Layton's loud and passionate voice spat poetry from several of his books into the microphone, evoking powerful emotions, violent, sensual and controversial.

The three diversified readers and a well-timed 90-minute programme avoided creating the ennui which so often afflicts reading exercises. Ondaatje's soft, almost apologetic presentation of his work, Mitchell's snuff-stained fingers pushing up \$7.95 reading glasses he buys at Woolworth's, and Layton's swaggering, booming vitality, led the audience into a partnership and understanding of the writer as a person it could relate to.

The audience of about 125 people was kept rapt and excited and this feeling of seeing the artist in a new and clearer way pervaded the whole week.

Participants in Tuesday's seminars included Toronto's short and pot-bellied Hugh Garner, who shared his experiences in journalism (which he disliked but pursued for economic reason). Clark Baise, short story writer now at Sir George Williams University in Montreal, expressed a bitterness about the state of a writer in Canada, saying "it is not glamorous" and "only if you're lucky can you live on it".

Of his 40 published short stories, only 12 have been published in Canada, and even then at pitiful sums of from "\$40 to \$80 each". Blaise said the "great fault of Canadian

culture is that it has no magazine with the readership of, say, Macleans, that publishes short stories".

Novelists Matt Cohen, Graeme Gibson, and David Godfrey, held a lively discussion in one corner of the Open End coffee shop, and got involved in a semantical discussion of fiction which might have been more enlightening had those present not had to fight such powerful egos challenging each other.

I asked one student why he came to Encounter and he said "to see what a writer looks like". It became evident that many of the myths and mystiques surrounding writing are due to the lack of knowledge most Canadians possess about their writers and the state of writing in Canada.

### LONELY BRIDGE

Mitchell said the "art experience is a bridge from one lonely bridge to another." This lonely desire for communication and understanding was evident in Wednesday's folklore evening in the Open End, which was licensed and crowded with a happy Mariposa-like atmosphere. York humanities professor Carole Henderson spoke on folklore and opened the evening of music and story-telling, while Basil Johnson, an Ojibway who now works at the Royal Ontario Museum, spun Ojibway tales for the crowd. The audience was actively involved, singing and tapping coins on the tables; at times the awe of people listening and enjoying filled the air.

Friday's session was short. Eli Mandel talked of what it is "to encounter this land and this people" and shared slides of his trip to his home of Estevan, Saskatchewan this past summer. He talked of how one "encounters Canada" in a "haunting way" when one visits the past. Painter and York fine arts professor Ron Bloore spoke of the "superb positive spirit" during the Encounter week and the "audience's rapt attention". He related poet to painter as now "isolated" and in need of communication. His slide presentation, although not nearly long enough, raised such questions as, "Will the TD Centre make as glorious a ruin as the Parthenon?"

Encounter should have been shorter and much better advertised, and the activities were marred by late dinners, non-functional mikes and lights, and last minute cancellations. It is significant, though, that most people found that the content superseded organizational hassles. Bob Fowler, Vanier's resident tutor, when asked for a comment at Friday's reception, smiled and said simply, "The week speaks for itself."

Barb Crotchley, fourth year math and psychology major, thought the week was "interesting, entertaining, a worth-while experience and handled well." Wendy Pickard, a second year fine arts student who came because of a "curiosity and interest in Canadian literature," thought it "was on the whole very good".

One suggestion was "to make it three evenings instead of five" but the main criticism was directed toward the poor attendance (about 150). While part of this could be attributed to "advertising hassles," one student perhaps more truthfully stated that the "turn-out was indicative of the feelings felt by the natives for Canadian literature — small and informal."

Encounter was small and informal, but strange and wonderful. Somehow amid York's concrete towers and tunnels — the den of what Mitchell termed "the mole people of York" — there was a very alive and exciting happening.



## Publishers struggle for stability, control

By ANNE CAMOZZI

Encounter's Thursday evening was devoted to the question, "Is there an indigenous Canadian publishing industry in Canada?"

The programme drew a small audience of about 35 people, probably due to the fact it was Hallowe'en; but as organizer Sue Kilgour said, "Who's thinking of Hallowe'en in June?"

Despite the small audience, and the fact that the lights went out spookily at the beginning of the discussion and never came on again, the panel chaired competently by York professor Ramsey Cook, was both provocative and lively. Panel members included Victor Coleman from Coachhouse Press, Linda McKnight from McClelland and Stewart, William Darnell from McGraw-Hill-Ryerson, and James Lorrimer from James, Lewis, and Samuel.

Lorrimer, president of Independent Publishers of Canada, as well as a lecturer in citizen advocacy at Osgoode, felt "there is no indigenous publishing industry" and "writing is an underground culture in Canada." He explained this exists "not because people aren't writing or that there isn't publishing", but because writing is "virtually without recognition from the official sources."

In the Toronto Public Library system, he cited, only 10 per cent of the books are Canadian; in the children's section the figure is only 5 per cent; and on the paperback racks from Garfield's stands to your corner store there are only 2 per cent Canadian books. Lorrimer explained this as the result of Canadian work "disappearing in the flood of American material" brought in by "American branch plants that come into Canada to make as much as they can."

William Darnell unwittingly substantiated Lorrimer's statements by revealing how much McGraw-Hill-Ryerson, an American branch company well known for its take-over of the Canadian company, Ryerson Press, is making — somewhere in the vicinity of \$14 million. Darnell felt that "there is a good solid indigenous industry in Canada" and that "companies have to be larger to overcome problems," with those comments, he set himself up as the primary target for attack for the remainder of the evening. Ramsey Cook's competency as chairman was demonstrated as he urged Darnell to respond to the criticism, even though there were times when Darnell

would have rather let the subject alone.

McKnight from McClelland and Stewart, Canada's prominent Canadian publisher, agreed that "there is an indigenous publishing industry," although she "disliked calling it an industry". She added however, that "publishing in Canada is small, speculative and a helluva financial risk."

She attributed this to the lack of a "built-in market," "impulsive book purchasing which rides on the waves of the media" and particularly the "lack of library support." She described publishing as a "great guessing game, based partly on intelligence, partly on knowing the market, and partly on having a sixth sense to know what is good."

Coleman from Coachhouse Press, a small independent publishing company, and a poet in his own right, "publishes books at a loss" which he stated was "the basic difference between Coachhouse and McClelland and Stewart." However, he said, this situation allows "Coachhouse to publish what they want to publish."

Coleman also said that "all the people in the publishing industry work for much less than they're worth," something with which all the panelists agreed except for Darnell, who remained silently doodling. Coleman reiterated Lorrimer and angrily challenged Darnell and his company's position.

The questions from the attentive audience

dealt mainly with reform ideas; further criticism was directed at Darnell, challenging the profit-making nature of his company and charging that this profit is mainly from selling American or "adapted" material. (Adapted materials are basically American products that have been "Canadianized".)

Darnell admitted that many of these adaptations were "token," but vehemently defended his company's position in Canada.

Lorrimer suggested "content change in school curriculums" and Canadian content requirements in bookstores, and said he is struggling to "make book publishing done only by Canadians," which would involve getting rid of American branch plants (McGraw-Hill is only one of many.)

The Independent Publishers are beginning an educational sales co-operative which has three salesmen as opposed to McGraw-Hill Ryerson's 12. One member of the audience suggested royalties for writers—each time their book is borrowed from the library, and Lorrimer replied that this is being and has been investigated.

Despite the ghostly atmosphere created by lack of lights and a horse curiously shod in sneakers which galloped through the dining hall in the middle of the discussion, the few who attended left with a new awareness of the struggle of Canadian publishers for economic stability, recognition and control.

## Encounter organizers disappointed by response

Vanier's fourth annual Encounter would never have happened without the commitment and work of two Vanier assistant dons and council members.

Marg Creal, a third year humanities and anthropology major, and Sue Kilgour, a fourth year political science major were approached last June by the college's academic advisor, Terry Boyd, who suggested they handle Encounter.

Creal said the idea for having Canadian literature as a topic arose from the "wealth of resources at York in this field" and the "attempt to integrate cultural instead of social activities within the confines of a budget." (The budget for Encounter was a low \$3,800.) "The whole point of the exercise," said

Creal, "was to get people involved," hence, the symposium was planned early in the year and at night. The design was "purposely small, personal and informal," although Creal said "there were people who wanted to make it much bigger."

The week's activities were a "broad spectrum of things, not a focus," but Creal hoped this Encounter could "lead to more focused things".

To get Encounter going, they consulted with York professors and friends and Shirley Gibson of Anansi, who were all a "great help". However, Creal admitted that her own "personal interests influenced choice." Some of those who were invited but couldn't participate were Dennis Lee, Margaret Laurence,

Al Purdy, Hugh MacLennan, Northrop Frye, Alice Munro, and Miriam Waddington.

Creal said "advertising was the biggest hassle and a nightmare, despite help from Joanne Bury and Stewart Kallia, the fine arts student who designed the Encounter poster."

Organizers and participants alike expressed disappointment in the lack of interest; Creal found it "interesting that student response was less for more demanding things." Daniel Sharp, a first year fine arts student, suggested a "Canadian art Encounter next year" and pointed out the poor attendance of York faculty.

"If profs don't think it's valuable, students won't come," he said. "The profs should endorse Encounter in their classes."