

Take 45 varsity poets and authors. literary establishment. Stir in If nothing happens, what the literature in (We'll have to wait and

By Jon Whyte
Seminar Director

It's easy enough to compile the arguments for not having a literary seminar, and I'm contrary enough to want to present the negative side first.

Why bother to bring together a group of writers and critics to talk with each other and a group of students from all parts of this most diversified country when those students are likely to learn more about those authors and their writings in particular by a careful perusal of those works?

It's uneconomical, particularly when for roughly the same amount of money the authors' total writings could be given to each of the students who will be brought here.

And why should we bother these busy people who are probably better off in the lonely jobs of sitting over their typewriters attempting to

Are we responsible for improving the image of Canadian Literature? That's so close to Madison Avenue reasoning that we suspect immediately that it's specious.

And yet . . . yet in a nation still young in spite of its being older than most of its fellow countries in the United Nations, a nation that has had incredible difficulties establishing an identity unique and sufficiently capable of being distinguished from a large, powerful, and defined society such as that of the United States, in such a nation a conference such as we shall be holding during Second Century Week cannot be completely void of value.

A nation's debt to its authors is usually retrospective. After they are dead and have been proved marketable, then they may be stuffed in the libraries and foreign embassies of the country. Travel through Shakespeare's England! See Dante's Italy! Take Chaucer's route to Canterbury! Have a picnic at Walden Pond! Folk

Too much respect can dull them, but too many can starve for our respectability.

Therefore we bring them together for Second Century Week.

But there are more important reasons. Canada is a diverse country, and a fairly unimportant one, a nation young enough that it still keeps track of its birthdays. I don't know that I want Canada to be important. Russia, China and the United States are important and see what we think of them.

However, in spite of our own unimportance, and if we are insignificant in our mass, how much more are we diminished when we start being factionalists about our region, our language and our national origin, there may yet be something of moment happening.

And if there is something happening, then we should know about it now. Why do we have to wait for Edmund Wilson to write *O Canada!* before we realize that there is a valuable and provocative French Canadian literature? Why do we have to wait for the east coast to recognize that there is a distinct school of Pacific Coast poets before we know about them in Alberta?

So, being sociological, we can say there is a dreaded communications problem in this country. The Second Century Week Literary Seminar is another attempt to create a communication which, wrong-headed in McLuhan's terms (we ought to be sending data around rather than people—it's cheaper), might make of this country a more unified diversity.

Who's coming?

About 45 student writers, editors, poets, and the like. Roughly one per campus from across the country and full representation from Quebec. The Quebec students, I feel, have a good deal more to tell us than we have to tell them. They are in touch with their writers, and their writers are in touch with them. There is no intellectual gap between the artistic community and the academic community as there is in the rest of Canada, and the French-Canadian experience is one that will have a great effect on all of us who live in Canada, not because it is violent but because it is meaningful.

The guest writers and critics include Earle Birney, probably the best known product of Calgary there is. Poet, playwright, and novelist, Earle Birney taught at the Univer-

sity of British Columbia until quite recently.

For the past year and a half he has been the Writer in Residence at the University of Toronto. He has taught medieval literature (Chaucer, in particular) and creative writing. More than just the author of "David", Earle Birney has to mind been as successful as any Canadian writer in seeing Canada as a part of

A word to the wise

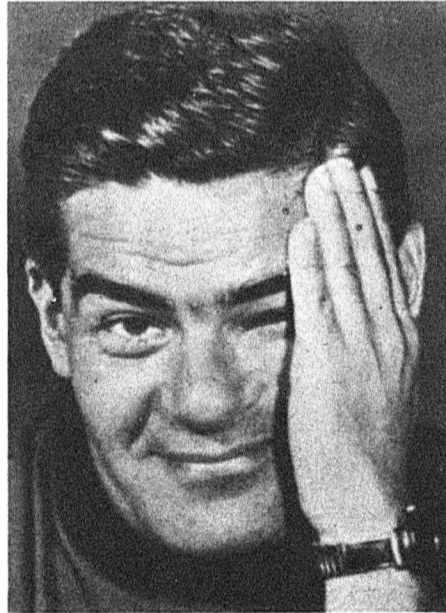
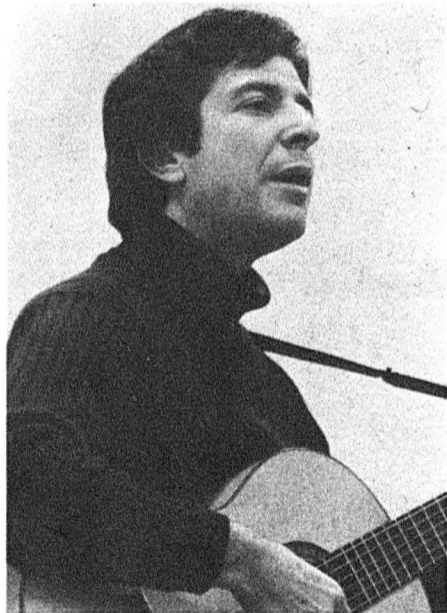
The literary seminar meets March 7-11 in St. Stephen's College auditorium at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Admission is free, and all those interested are encouraged to attend any of the sessions.

the world. Anyone who has looked at his *Selected Poems*, published last summer, can see his attempts to relate all of his experience into a global experience.

Jack Ludwig, born in Winnipeg and now teaching at the State University of New York, is a novelist and at one time shared the editing responsibilities for *The Noble Savage* with Saul Bellow. He has a new novel coming out sometime this year, and his earlier novel *Confusions* established a following which respects his sardonicism and violent satire of the middle-class Jew's "upper mobility." (Ludwig is, of course, a Jew, and he was invited partly for that reason, principally because he is an expatriate writer. In the good old days of Morley Callaghan they went to Paris for the summer, they now spend their summers at Harvard. Plus ca change, plus ca change.)

James Reaney, poet and playwright, now teaches at the University of Western Ontario. His *The Kildeer and Other Plays* is one of the great contributions to English Canadian dramatic writings. His play *Colours in the Dark* will premiere at the Stratford Festival this summer in a production directed by John Hirsch for the Avon Theatre. His writing seems wry, but at the same time it is exotic, and it can be dazzlingly humorous while it is being subtly profound.

Naim Kattan is literary editor of



LEONARD COHEN AND JACK LUDWIG
... both are vital Jewish-Canadian authors

write? We shouldn't disturb them, and we have no right to expect them to be glistening public personalities, incomparable public speakers, spell-binding raconteurs, or even necessarily good provocative educators.

What can they say that we can't hear them say on the CBC, read in the press, or discover in our classrooms? And why should we attempt to confuse the relationship between the author and his works that we have also been attempting to straighten out for the better part of this century?

Festival at Stephen Leacock's place in Mariposa! Collect a crumb of Malcolm Lowry's cabin!

While they are living, authors are not generally accorded respect until they are either gone in the teeth, or their madness, which provoked them to fantastic flights, has mellowed into senility. (I think of Robert Frost and the lionization at the Kennedy inauguration.) Maybe it's a good thing, this lack of respect. It can keep an author on his toes, or keep his fingers on his pen, keep his eyes where they need to be set.