

# FRENCH CANADIAN LITERATURE COMES OF AGE

GUY SYLVESTRE\*

THE literary life of a people is no way limited to the publication and assimilation of the works of its most popular writer, and it is not necessarily the most representative books of the native authors which are the most widely read and constitute the spiritual nourishment of the community. While foreign works provide a seasoning for the native culture of great countries the works of native writers generally are the main diet of the public. But in such countries as Canada which are the inheritors of previously established cultures, the general public often reads and discusses the works of the mother countries' writers in preference to those of native authors. Since our early days—and this is a fairly normal development—we French Canadians have always looked to Paris, rather than to Montreal, as you English Canadians have looked to London, for nourishment for the mind.

For some years, however, and particularly since the last war, we French-Canadians have been less indifferent to the efforts of our own writers. In isolating us from Paris, the war had the effect of forcing us, almost in spite of ourselves, to take more thought of our national values. The unprecedented success achieved recently by some of our writers in France and the United States gives reason for hope that their works will be accorded as much attention at home as abroad.

Yet it is still true that the general French-Canadian public prefers the works of great, and sometimes lesser English, French and American authors to even the best works of our own writers. Although French-Canadian literature has recently been enriched with several works that have achieved very good sales at home and abroad, we must not forget that publishers and booksellers in Montreal, as in Toronto and elsewhere in Canada, produce and sell many more European books than Canadian.

In French-Canada, the general public reads much more now than it did ten years ago, while Canadian literature has considerably increased in popularity, so also that of France and other countries. And strange to say, French letters have never been so widely read in Canada as during and since the time we have been isolated from France. In 1939, for instance, Canadian bookstores were selling a few dozens or, at the most, a few hundred copies of the most successful French books. During and after this last

\*Of Ottawa, Ont.

war, French-Canadian publishers and booksellers have republished and sold thousands of copies of the best contemporary French novels and books of poetry.

Now, these preliminary remarks are not intended to intimate that we should hitch our literary wagon to the star of France and invite our writers to imitate blindly their confreres in Paris. I shall have an opportunity a little later of declaring the stand I have taken in the long and interesting debate which agitated the literary life of French-Canada four years ago, and in which not only some of our best known authors but also some of the most distinguished French writers have taken part. The subject debated was whether our letters should be patterned after the present trends in France or be the expression of our own Canadian experience and inspiration.

It is beyond question that we should endeavour to become more and more familiar with English-Canadian, French and other contemporary writers, who are true interpreters of the ideals and feelings of our time, rather than to confine our curiosity to those who have been the witnesses of days gone by. But, if we have much to learn from the outstanding French, English, Russian and other authorities, we must assimilate only what suits us and refuse what is unsuitable. If we are to create a great and distinctive literature, we must learn not to retire within ourselves nor to swallow blindly whatever comes from abroad; but we must discover and express what has a universality of appeal in our distinctive Canadian present-day life. If our literature is at once profoundly human and profoundly Canadian it will succeed in becoming part of the cultural birthright of our western civilization.

Our French-Canadian literary life has recently made considerable progress in quality and quantity. Not only has the average production improved a great deal, but the general public has become much more conscious of the exigencies of the art of writing. Our papers and magazines dedicate more space than ever before to the discussion of our literary works and problems. Our Clubs and salons witness many more literary debates than at any time in the past. The French section of the Royal Society of Canada now holds public meetings and publishes the text of the addresses delivered on the occasion of the reception of new members. Five years ago, Victor Barbeau announced the foundation of a French-Canadian Academy—"l'Académie Canadienne Française"—to be composed of twenty-four members, sixteen of them creative writers and eight essayists. The collaboration o

rivalry of these two national literary societies will undoubtedly contribute toward the development of a more acute literary consciousness in the general public and a creative emulation among our writers. It is obviously too early to give an opinion on the achievement of our Academy, but I sincerely hope that it will play a leading part in the development of our literary ideals and also in the solution of our linguistic problems to which it pledged itself to dedicate an important part of its efforts.

I may add that we are now witnessing a welcome phenomenon of decentralization of our literary activity. Trois-Rivières, Sherbrooke and smaller cities are now trying to compete with Montreal, Ottawa and Quebec in the various fields of literary life. I would also mention here the progress achieved in recent years by the Little Theatre movement in the province of Quebec. If very few plays of distinction have been written by our dramatists, our theatrical companies have produced most successfully many plays by classic, romantic and contemporary French and English authors. Le Caveau, l'Equipe and les Compagnons and other companies have attained high levels in the production of major dramas and comedies. Finally, many of our good writers produce radio sketches and plays which, in my opinion, are comparable to what is done anywhere else. In a word, French-Canadian literature is advancing with giant strides and is coming of age.

This outer growth is accompanied by an inner crisis. Its most obvious symptom has been this long and interesting debate I referred to a moment ago, in which two schools of thought have come to light; the first maintaining that our writers should endeavour to enlist themselves in one or another of the various French schools; the second urging us to find in ourselves the necessary powers to create literature of our own. This problem of the French influence on our letters has frequently been discussed in the past century, but never at such length and so seriously as in the past two years. Accordingly it seems advisable for me to emphasize the broad lines of this debate, before engaging in the survey of the most noteworthy achievements of our native writers in the past fifteen years.

In the first issue of *Poesie 46*, a French review republished in Canada, René Garneau, then book reviewer of the Montreal daily newspaper *Le Canada*, expressed his personal views on the present condition of the French-Canadian author. His article, entitled *Le Solitaire et sa solitude*, posed the problem clearly and aroused a general debate. The main spokesman of the opposing

group was the novelist Robert Charbonneau, whose stand has, in turn, been disputed by many French writers. Both Garneau and Charbonneau have the support of many confreres. This has given rise to two schools of thought which, in my opinion, deserve comment in appraising recent achievements of French-Canadian letters.

René Garneau considers that "the literary position of French-speaking Canada is more tragic than ever" and that "France, which was already far from us in 1939, is still farther now, and instead of being behind Paris as we were before, we are a world, a war and a revolution late." He then adds that "Canadian poets and novelists are lost, unable to attain success either in France or in the United States." I wish to state now that this assertion has been contradicted by the facts. Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'Occasion* (the English translation of which is known as "The Tin Flute") has been greeted in the United States and in France as no other French-Canadian novel in the past. The sale of its English translation now numbers hundreds of thousands of copies, and republished in France it was awarded the "Prix Fémina" and has been widely read there too. Another French-Canadian novel, Roger Lemelin's *Au pied de la pente douce* has also been translated into English, under the title "The Town Below". A third novel, Germaine Guévremont's *Le Survenant*, has also been awarded a French literary prize and has received high praise from the most distinguished French critics.

Even if Garneau were right in stating that our writers cannot obtain success abroad, I would still disagree with him. He claims, indeed, that for French-Canadian authors the success consists in gaining a place in a Parisian school or movement. This seems impossible to him because "we have not gone through the school of the Resistance" and because "our French language is that which was spoken and written in France prior to the first government of the Populaire." What Garneau has to say about the isolation of the French-Canadian author is not entirely groundless; for it is true that, generally speaking, the French and American writers and public take no interest in our literature. But it is by no means essential that our literature should be a mere province of the French letters and that our writers should enlist in one or the other of the various literary schools of France. If the French public does not want to read our best novels and poems, it is entirely free to refrain from doing so. It is not up to us to tell them what they should or should not read. But if a poem, a novel or a play is a masterpiece, it is a success in itself, whether or not it is acclaimed as such in Paris, New York or elsewhere.

René Garneau's position is based on an intellectual colonialism, which in certain circles of our intelligentsia has survived despite Canada's political coming of age but from which some of our writers now strive to free themselves. Garneau's position is now superseded by the new trends in French Canadian letters.

Robert Charbonneau, in contrast with René Garneau is a firm "autonomist" which does not mean that he is anti-French. During the war, he was the guiding light of the publishing house, *Les Editions de l'Arbre* and of the review *La Nouvelle Relève*, where he proved that he was a staunch defender of the truest French values. He does not ask that his confreres disregard their French fellow-writers nor that they close their eyes to present trends in France; but he urges them to extend their curiosity to all great literatures and, above all, to find in themselves and in their environment the material and the inspiration for their books.

Separated from France since the middle of the eighteenth century, French-Canada is not, as has been so often maintained a branch of the French tree. It is as Etienne Gilson put it very recently, "a tree of the same species as the French tree, but an independent tree." Sharing Gilson's views, Charbonneau could not help being filled with discontent when he read, over the signature of les frères Tharaud that our literature was a clear proof of the vitality of the French spirit. Charbonneau—I agree with him on that point—cannot see in our letters anything but a proof of the vitality of our own Canadian spirit.

Speaking the same language, our writers are truly closer to the French authors than to any others; yet by means of this language, which we have inherited from our common ancestors, we have to express realities, events, individual as well as collective feelings and ideals profoundly different from those of our European fellow-writers. It is obviously not possible for us to silence in a day our European heredity, but three hundred years of life on this new continent, a different climate and the closeness of over one hundred million Anglo-Saxons have made us a people in many respects dissimilar to the French nation.

It is less in imitating others than in developing to their maximum our own values, in being deeply conscious of our own problems and in approaching them in our own way that our writers will create a literature authentically ours and, if I may say so, taken from our flesh, blood and soil. The enthusiasm which greeted the recent publication in Canada, in France and in the United States of some of our best novels clearly proves that, with

themes and approaches distinctly Canadian, our writers can attain a universality of appeal which is the distinctive mark of all truly great works of art. The time has come for us to stand on our own feet and to speak for ourselves.

Let us now come to the second part of this survey. I wish to say right away that I cannot, in the space allotted to me, do more than glance at the most representative books published in the past ten years. I will furthermore have to limit my comments to creative writing, which for convenience, will be considered in two separate groups: poetry and prose. Let us start with poetry.

French-Canadian poetry, now a hundred years old, has remained for the most part an offshoot of French poetry. This is, on the whole, a natural phenomenon, for the pioneers of our poetry, unable to rely on any native tradition, obviously had to learn from the French masters how to express their feelings, inspirations and ideals. Unfortunately, their poetic efforts were too closely patterned after the European masterpieces and they too often contented themselves with transplanting to Canadian soil, not only the technique of the French verse, but also the vocabulary, the feelings and the themes. These, which grew up naturally under the sun of France, died from exposure under our northern skies. But more and more of our poets have succeeded in finding personal modes of expression in harmony with our Canadian soul and landscape.

Admittedly, French-Canadian poets owe much to their French confreres and French influence is still strong on our poetry. Hugo, Lamartine, Alfred de Musset and Leconte de Lisle have, however, been superseded by Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Rimbaud and, more recently, by Verhaeren, Claudel, Valéry and Eluard. But we must note that this influence is more and more confined to the technical aspects of poetry and that the younger poets are striving to develop a poetry more directly inspired by Canadian reality. Nevertheless our poetry remains diversified and unique, which perhaps adds to its richness and interest.

Unfortunately, most of our poets, who, in the course of the past twenty-five years, showed signs of great promise, seem to have given up poetry and to have taken refuge in a sterile silence. Such is the case with poets like Guy Delahaye, Paul Morin and René Chopin. As for some others, such as Alfred DesRochers or Robert Choquette, if they have not ceased to write poetry, they have not collected their poems in book-form. As for Saint-Denys Garneau, he was carried off in the prime of life, and his tragic death prevented him from fulfilling the promise shown in his

*Regards et Jeux dans l'espace.* With his first book of poems, this young man proved himself a marvellous craftsman, creating with the simplest words and the humblest means a world of dreams and games, from which the innocence of youth did not exclude gravity. The only poets who, so far, have fulfilled their promise are Alain Grandbois, Roger Brien, and Francois Hertel, whose later works will be commented upon besides those of the newcomers: Clément Marchand, Rina Lasnier and Anne Hébert.

Throughout the rather short history of our poetry, there has been a strong romantic trend, inherited mainly from Victor Hugo. Its most important representatives were successively Louis Fréchette, William Chapman, Charles Gill and Robert Choquette. This tradition is still very much alive today. Its most distinguished representative is Robert Brien, who celebrates in sonorous lines and ambitious poems, the eternal themes which have always haunted the imagination of the romantic poets. His last poetical undertaking *Cythère* is the good side of a complex vision of which his first poem, *Faust aux enfers* was the evil side. After short digressions on our flora and history, this poet has now reverted to the universal themes of death and sin and the quest of truth and happiness.

While Roger Brien is a deeply Christian poet who responds to the universal spell of Holy Writ, Clément Marchand has found personal means of expression for the experiences, aspirations and ideals of the two largest groups of the Canadian community: the peasantry and the proletariat. There are in his works three main veins: a rural vein, an urban vein and a fusion of the first two, which expresses the conflict in the soul of the poet between the country from which he comes and the city to which he gave himself.

In the rural poems are reflected the tranquility, the steadiness and the full life of the peasants who live in harmony with nature. These peaceful visions of order and happiness are contrasted with short poems inspired by the daily joys, sufferings and habits of the common people toiling in dusty and noisy factories, wandering in narrow streets and frequenting smoky taverns. Marchand's most moving poems belong to the third group, in which he puts in opposition the pure joys and dreams of his rural childhood and his discovery of the sufferings of the city dwellers, who, "from daybreak to sunset, give their flesh to the teeth of machines." Instead of indulging in fruitless lamentations the poet tries to create a sound Christian brotherhood which could allay their sufferings and make their life worthwhile. It is in these poems, in which he expresses his experience of human grief

and his dream of universal love that the poet attains to the peak of Canadian poetry.

The poems of Roger Brien and Clement Marchand are the most important contributions to the survival of the romantic and realistic traditions in French-Canadian poetry. They are written in regular metre. Most poets of the new generation are however experimenting in new forms and are trying to free their art from the rigid rules established by the classicists. Alain Grandbois and Saint-Denys Garneau were pioneers in this new trend. They have been followed by two highly gifted poetesses, Rina Lasnier and Anne Hébert. Although they have by no means disappeared from our poetry, the traditional schools seem to be at least for some time, eclipsed by new tendencies inherited from symbolism, Claudel and surrealism.

While most of our poets have expressed clear and easy feelings and ideas, the last four mentioned appeal to voices which are obscure or dormant in us but which ask to be brought to light and to human language. From the surrealists, they have taken the revelations of the unconscious, though rejecting the automatic writing practised by their European confreres.

Alain Grandbois does not, in fact, belong to the new generation of poets, but his major poetical work, *Les Iles de la nuit*, was published only five years ago and is in harmony with the new trends in our native poetry. Alain Grandbois' poems cannot be explained in prose. They are an esoteric expression of the quest for eternity and happiness in an ephemeral and anguished world. They are tragic in essence and obscure in style. They are, if I may say so, voices in the night, while Rina Lasnier's poems are voices in the sunshine.

This poetess summons all beings to appear before her so that she can offer them all to God in a song of joy and thankfulness. Her poems are expressions of a soul filled with admiration at the spectacle of this world of beauty. She sings her exultation at the sight of the creative forces of nature, with which she endeavours to harmonize her voice. Rina Lasnier is essentially a religious poetess as may be seen for example, in her *Madones Canadiennes*, a series of forty poems inspired by Canadian Madonnas. Her latest poem *Le Chant de la Montée*, which is her best achievement to date, is inspired by the love of Jacob and Rachel. She tells this biblical story in a modern style after the pattern of the great biblical poems of Paul Claudel.

Reverend Gustave Lamarche is also a religious poet, who draws many of his themes from the Bible, while Francois Hertel



writes of his inner adventures in lines unfortunately filled with prosy, philosophical words. His poetry, though not lacking in originality, is too abstract and bookish to be deeply moving. Anne Hébert, on the contrary, sings like a bird. Her subtle and light verse is filled with the most charming dreams and games of childhood and she is a true disciple of Saint-Denys Garneau.

Recent French-Canadian poetry is, as one can see, widely diversified, not belonging to a single trend or school. While some of the poets of the new generation are closely connected with traditional French schools, others are experimenting in new directions. Notwithstanding its short-comings, this brief survey establishes clearly, I hope, that our best poets deserve more attention than they have yet been given at home and abroad. Some of the most finished poems published in the past ten years have a universality of appeal and a true distinction in style and inspiration.

Let us now come to the novelists and short story writers. From the beginning of our literature to the years which preceded the last war, poetry was always on a higher level than the novel. The novelists Phillippe-Aubert de Gaspé, Antoine Gérin-Lajoie and Joseph Marmette did not, on the whole, constitute as imposing a group as did the poets Octave Crémazie, Louis Fréchette, Pamphyle Lemay and William Chapman. Similarly, a generation later, the novels of Laure Conan, Napoleon Bourassa and Jules-Paul Tardivel did not reach the high standard attained in the best poetical works by Alfred Garneau, Nérée Beauchemin and Emile Nelligan. The disparity between the two groups decreased progressively though it was still noticeable twenty years ago when the novels of Jean-Charles Harvey, Harry Bernard, Robert de Roquebrune and Pierre Dupuy were not quite in a class with the poems of Paul Morin, Guy Delahaye, Alfred DesRochers and Robert Choquette.

But with the successive publication of *Un homme et son péché* by Claude-Henri Grignon, *Les Engagés du Grand Portage* by Leo-Paul Desrosiers, *Menaud maître-draveur*, by Felix Antoine Savard; and *30 arpents* by Ringuet, the novel forged ahead and, notwithstanding the remarkable poetical works mentioned a moment ago, kept the balance in its favour, thanks to novelists such as Germaine Guevremont Gabrielle Roy, Roger Lemelin, and Robert Charbonneau.

Like most poets of their generation, the novelists Claude-Henri Grignon, Felix-Antoine Savard and Robert de Roquebrune, have not published any novels in the past ten years. On the other hand, Michelle LeNormand (Mrs. Leo-Paul Desrosiers), after

minor romances and short stories, put out a charming novel about the friendship of four ladies, *La plus belle chose du monde*. Rex Desmarchais, after a rather mediocre beginning, has given us what might be considered as our most remarkable ideological novel, *La Chesnaie*. It is the story, severe and pessimistic, of the failure of a revolutionary movement to establish a dictatorship in the province of Quebec. At the conclusion the author says that, even if the hero is dead and the secret society broken up, all is not ended because the idea survives. The main fault with this novel is that the author intervenes too often in the narration. In spite of its shortcomings, *La Chesnaie* is a strong and original novel.

Ringuet whose *30 arpents* is one of the masterpieces of our letters, has never again reached the level attained in his first novel and *Fausse monnaie*, published later is just a long short story written in a conventional style about an ordinary week-end spent by a group of young people in the Laurentians. Francois Hertel, for his part, after a first novel inspired by life in a boarding-school, has put out a trilogy of decreasing interest which is more a collection of metaphysical and psychological tales than three actual novels. The three books do not lack in originality, but the author forces his talent a little too much. The only novelist of that generation who has so far achieved many novels of distinction is Leo-Paul Desrosiers, our best historical novelist.

Desrosiers believes that the history of all nations is "the best and the greatest of all romances, provided we read it with some imagination." His first narrative, *Nord-Sud*, was but a succession of sketches of the customs of the French-Canadians in the middle of the last century. *Les Engagés du Grand Portage*, on the other hand, was not only a large, coherent and lively fresco inspired by the adventures of the "coureurs des bois" and the strife of the fur-traders in the North-West Territories in the first years of the nineteenth century but it was also a thorough study of the development of cruelty and pride in the soul of an ambitious man. The plot of this novel is well planned, the narration strongly built and the characters finely animated. The same qualities are found again in a later historical novel *Les Opiniâtres*, which re-creates the adventures of the first settlers of Trois-Rivières. This great work is animated by the virtues and high ideal of these pioneers who took possession of this great country of ours, mastered its wilderness and were the first to bring to this part of the new world the birthright of western civilization.

Two young novelists, Pierre Benoit and Marcel Trudel, have followed Desrosiers' example, but they have not yet reached his

excellence. Most of the best novelists of the new generation, such as Germaine Guèvremont, Roger Lemelin, Robert Charbonneau and Gabriëlle Roy, have taken, on the other hand, their themes from contemporary life in Canada.

It is not without significance that, up to five years ago, our best novelists were more attracted by the simple manners of our country people and the picturesque scenery of our old French villages— than by the common atmosphere of our cities and the ordinary lives of our townsmen. Only recently have a few Canadian novelists endeavoured to analyse thoroughly the complexities of the human soul in psychological novels. The French-Canadian novel is traditionally simple and rustic, and this tradition is brilliantly perpetuated to-day by Germaine Guèvremont who, in my opinion, surpasses all her predecessors in that field.

Guèvremont's only novel, which is in two volumes, *Le Survenant* and *Marie Didace*, constitutes a highly poetical description of the life of the French-Canadian peasantry. In her work, the landscape is not merely a background incidental to her characters but both are in harmony. No other French-Canadian novelist, except Gabriëlle Roy, has, in my opinion achieved as yet such a unity of atmosphere and action, a style so distinctly Canadian. The behavior of her characters is closely connected with their environment, their conversation is in tune with their daily actions, and the newcomer himself is fully in harmony with the small rural community which his short stay throws into confusion. The novel of Germaine Guèvremont is a major contribution towards the development of a distinctly Canadian style.

It is worthy of mention here that the two remarkable and two most deeply human novels of recent years have been produced by women. While *Le Survenant* has a rural setting, Gabriëlle Roy's *Bonheur d'Occasion* is a realistic description of the difficult life of the common people of a Montreal suburb. The most important plot deals with a poor waitress who, forsaken by an ambitious young man with whom she has fallen in love, marries a buck private who is embarking shortly for overseas, so that her child may have a father. The novel is true in all its details. Destitution, disease, under-nourishment, lack of heat, frequent moves and all kinds of bereavements brought about by the pre-war depression, are not called up by the novelist with the view of supporting a thesis. They have all been observed by the author and none of their actions is praised to the skies or harshly blamed. The author never intervenes in the narration and *Bonheur d'Occasion* is thus a species of reporting but it is so true, so alive and so human, that

it ranks among our greatest novels. Gabrielle Roy's style is terse, familiar, poor in imagery; but the accumulation of true and moving circumstances is deeply impressive. *Bonheur d'Occasion* was the first masterpiece of a sincere and talented author.

The first novel of Roger Lemelin, *Au pied de la pente douce* is also a description of the prosaic daily life of the common people in a poverty stricken parish, but it lacks the unity of atmosphere and style which contribute so much to the greatness of *Bonheur d'Occasion*. The two parts of this novel are, indeed, almost separate, the second drawing our attention to the rivalry of two young men for the conquest of the same girl, while the first is a brilliant satire of the whimsicalities of some devout people. Like *Bonheur d'Occasion*, Lemelin's novel is realistic, but it is in no way serene or plain. It is uneven; in its best parts it is highly picturesque. Episodes such as the parade of the parish band, the wrestling match, the meeting of the political club, the parish bingo, the high mass and so on are very finished satire of the parochialism which survives in some parts of Quebec. The main qualities of the novel are the animation of the narration and the coloring of the dialogue.

In their novels, Germaine Guévremont, Gabrielle Roy and Roger Lemelin stress the life of a whole community in preference to that of an individual character. Robert Charbonneau's novels are, on the other hand, studies of the inner man. Roger Lemelin for instance, confesses that when he starts writing he feels himself "in front of a shapeless body, a species of nebulous ball," of which he tries to discern the essence, the veins, the organs, the living strengths, and from which he forms characters. In spite of their personal peculiarities these characters remain parts of the whole atmosphere of his novel. Robert Charbonneau seems to proceed differently, and to draw from the mind of his principal character a drama which remains inward, even if his hero is at strife with his environment. In Charbonneau's first two novels, hardly anything happens, but a succession of psychological changes in the two or three principal characters. There are, of course, in *Fontile* two or three incidents, which lead to an unexpected *dénouement*; but his second novel as "*Ils posséderont la terre*," is an analysis of a mind filled with hesitation, uneasiness, fruitless meditations and projects. Charbonneau's characters are "*des inadaptes*," that is "misfits", handicapped by complexes and restraints developed by a backward education at home and at school. The insight of the author makes up for the lack of animation in his novels, but unfortunately, while too many of our

novelists content themselves with descriptions of the outward manifestations of their characters, Charbonneau devotes his attention too exclusively to the exposition of inward impulses and struggles.

Before bringing this brief survey of recent French-Canadian literature to a close, I would like to mention a few other young authors who have made promising beginnings in the course of the last five years. First, Pierre Baillargeon, who has produced three satirical books of portraits and maxims and who is more an essayist than a creative writer. Also, his French-born wife, Jacqueline Mabit, whose first novel about the friendship of two schoolgirls, is remarkable, but entirely European in style, atmosphere and setting. Then, there is Felix Leclerc, a story-teller endowed with a delightful fancy, but lacking in craft and correctness of language. Then, too, there is Jean Simard, author of *Felix*, a fine book of satire in which a naughty child makes merciless observations about the prejudices and manners of a conventional society. And last, but not least, Yves Thériault, whose *Contes pour un homme seul* is the most morbid book published in recent years in French-Canada. The author is obviously obsessed with death and sex, and his characters are motivated more by primitive instincts than by conscious feelings. His style, though faulty at times, has strange powers to cast a spell upon the reader. Thériault is undoubtedly one of the most promising new-comers in our literature.

I hope that notwithstanding its shortcomings this survey indicates that French-Canadian letters are coming of age and that they can enrich the spirit of English-Canadians, just as English-Canadian literature can enrich ours. In conclusion, I would like to say a few words about literature and national unity.

At a time when the world is emerging from a conflict which has stained the four corners of the globe with blood, men of good will sense the greater and greater need of sincere collaboration between nations, to assure not only peace but the progress of civilization and culture. That is why great thinkers, such as Paul Valéry and T. S. Eliot, have hailed the most intensive interchange of ideas and opinions between the different nations which form the human commonwealth. A similar need applies in a country like ours where two ethnic groups live side by side. Such exchanges can take place in various ways: interprovincial meetings, bilingual reviews and papers, the translation of the better works of one language into the other, and the organization of lectures such as this series. While material interests can divide nations and groups, the higher interests of the spirit and civilization can

lead to a mutually respectful unity amid legitimate diversity. In Canada, natural meeting-ground of the Anglo-Saxon with the Latin world, it is altogether fitting that any movement towards "rapprochement" should be greeted with enthusiasm. To the international aspect of the problem of peace and progress is added here a cultural tradition. Occupying a common territory, our two ethnic groups should know one another in order to understand one another. The hour has come to work towards a union of the cultures, with a view not to the absorption of one by another, but to a free and loyal collaboration. A country which has inherited the culture of Shakespeare and the culture of Racine would be ill-advised to repudiate either. A better knowledge by each group of the literature of the other could not but have happy results towards the achievement of national unity, the common goal of all Canadians worthy of the name.