Another Preface to an Uncollected Anthology:

Canadian Criticism in a Commonwealth Context

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MOST Canadian literature studied at University appears in Canadian literature courses. But in about half of the thirty courses offered in Commonwealth literature there is a sprinkling of Canadian texts. Some of these are anthologies which, together with anthologies of Australian, African and Indian writing, make up a sort of multi-volume anthology of Commonwealth literature. There is no single anthology of that literature in existence, although there are anthologies such as Howard Sergeant's and W. H. New's of Commonwealth poetry and stories.

Responding to criticism of the use of anthologies in university courses (during the ACUTE programme at the Learned Societies meeting), R. E. Watters reminded younger teachers that when the *Canadian Anthology*[1] first appeared in 1955 it was the only available source for much of its material. It seems that a discipline in the making needs a primitive tool like the anthology. How that tool assists the process is indeed a fascinating area of study, as Alec Lucas has recently remarked.[2] Equally fascinating in Commonwealth literary studies is the way a development in one national literature will recur later in another, and in the general discipline now aborning in those thirty (or so) courses. The itch to anthologise is beginning to infect teachers of Commonwealth literature, and while we are not likely to break out in a rash of an-

thologies we are certainly casting round for a model we can imitate. At which point Klinck and Watters enters Commonwealth literary studies not as a text to be used in our courses but as a form more advanced than any available in other national literatures. Not only does it include poetry and prose; it is a prime teaching text because it adds a full bibliography and "Recent Selected Criticism." Its form tells us something about the shape an anthology of Commonwealth literature might assume.

Let our model be *Canadian Anthology*, and now let us turn to the question of which Canadian criticism would be selected for a Commonwealth anthology. Ignoring the business of which literature or bibliographical entries would be carried over from the *Canadian Anthology* (or any other Canadian anthology), let us see how we would go about selecting from the growing mass of Canadian criticism in order to place that selection in the context of Commonwealth literature and literary studies — a context in which the criticism at least has not so far appeared.

The grounds for our selection would determine our choice of articles and extracts, and establishing our criteria is more interesting than following it. We appear to have two criteria. Most editors assure us in their prefaces that they follow one criterion only: they have chosen the best; then they cite the awkward realities that made their selection fall short of its noble goal. But since we are contemplating a hypothetical — perhaps even a mythical — anthology, we can ignore practical considerations. Indeed, given the mass of Canadian critical writing listed in Klinck and Watters and noted by Brandon Conron, our most practical first step would be to find a way through the forest to the tall timber.[3]

Our first criterion appears to be that of all editors: we can select the best Canadian criticism of Canadian literature, the canonical pieces whose status is attested by the frequency of their reprinting in existing anthologies of Canadian criticism and their common citation in studies and theses. Lacking a history or survey or even a single

competent study of Canadian criticism, we probably need a computer to discover those pieces; and we might end up with the critical equivalent of "In Flanders Fields" or "The Cremation of Sam McGee."

The second criterion would be to select that Canadian criticism of Canadian literature which illuminates at one and the same time the national literature and Commonwealth literature as a whole and which appears to be talking about Canadian literature but to the discerning eye is *applicable* to Commonwealth literature. Our two lines of choice, then, appear to be determined by a canonical or a comparative criterion. But that is an illusion: the best Canadian criticism — and this is why it is the best — is talking ostensibly about Canadian literature but really about Commonwealth literature.

Such an assumption is the first premise of Commonwealth literary studies—that there is a Commonwealth dimension to the better writing, creative and critical, in any national literature in English. It may even derive from early Canadian critics; certainly it has been occasionally entertained by them. From the industry of Commonwealth scholars in Canada today we can trace a direct line back to Claude Bissell's "A Common Ancestry: Literature in Australia and Canada"[4] which was prompted by a visit Down Under but inherits (possibly unawares) W. D. Lighthall's tentative and gorgeous comparison of Australian and Canadian poetry: "Australian rhyme is a poetry of the *horse*; Canadian, of the *canoe*."[5] At the recent ACUTE programme on "Canadian Literature in Commonwealth Anthologies" Clara Thomas pointed out that Sir John G. Bourinot felt a similar relationship between the two countries in the 1880's, a relationship expressed in Lighthall's terms, "daughter-nation" and "sister-dominion."

This intermittent consciousness of kinship has blossomed into the studies of Commonwealth literature by R. L. McDougall, R. E. Watters, John P. Matthews, Edgar Wright, D. G. Killam, Margaret Laurence, Bruce Nesbitt,

Grant McGregor, Patricia Morley, Adrian Roscoe, Barry Argyle, W. H. New and others, all of which have been produced in Canada in the last fifteen years. Such industry springs from Lighthall's unprepossessing acorn; but the habit persists of referring occasionally to a Commonwealth parallel in order to make a point about Canadian literature. Northrop Frye in his Conclusion to the *Literary History* referred to an extract from George Lamming's *Pleasures of Exile* which appeared in the West Indian number of *Tamarack Review* in order to make a point about the rapid development of genres in Canadian literary history.[6]

This habit (if we may call it that) is a matter of necessity. There is no other literature which shows the similarity the critic needs in order to support his contention about a particular aspect of Canadian literature. For Commonwealth literary scholars it is a reassuring habit: it suggests on the one hand that there is a latent awareness of the Commonwealth dimension of Canadian literature and literary studies waiting to be stimulated, and on the other that it may be just as valid in Commonwealth studies to find the support we need for our contentions in Canadian criticism, which is thus the prime reason for including it in our Commonwealth anthology. And if all this sounds as if the subtitle of this article should be "Canadian Cousins," even for that quaint term we have Frye's precedent in the "Preface to an Uncollected Anthology" when he suggested that Tom the Cat from Zanzibar is "the Canadian cousin of Roy Campbell's flaming terrapin."[7]

More important, however, for our immediate purpose of establishing the ground-rules for selecting Canadian criticism are not the publications of Commonwealth scholars in Canada or the teasing allusions by Canadian scholars but two other aspects of Canadian criticism which give it a paramount position in all Commonwealth literary studies. These are the formal and conceptual models which are applicable to those studies.

The title of this paper imitates that of Frye's "Preface" and thus alters its nature from that of a standard piece in Canadian criticism to that of a formal model in Commonwealth studies. Similarly the *Canadian Anthology* serves as a formal model to frame up our ideas about a Commonwealth anthology, and the fact that Frye's "Preface" appears in the *Anthology* suggests that both the form of and the ideas expressed in the critical selections in the *Anthology* may serve as two kinds of models for a Commonwealth anthology.

The reason for accepting our formal and conceptual models from Canadian and not from Australian or other criticism — that is, the justification for asserting the paramountcy of Canadian criticism in Commonwealth studies — lies deeper than the happy accident of Frye's "Preface" appearing in Klinck and Watters anthology. That anthology is probably derived from models in the United States, and, as the *Literary History of Canada* imitates the form of the *Literary History of the United States,* the reason for the imitation lies in the absence of such models in British literary studies and practice. The American model and the Canadian imitation are New World responses to New World literature, and the imitation in turn of a Canadian model is appropriate for an anthology of New World literature in English, which is what our Commonwealth anthology would be in part.

It should be noted that the *Canadian Anthology* has also become a model in Canada. Its innovation in including critical material in the second revised edition of 1966 was a response to the "remarkable growth" in scholarly attention paid to Canadian literature since 1955 as the editors noted in their preface (as well as being, as I contend, an imitation of an American model.) And that innovation (and that growth) is reflected in two recent anthologies, *The Evolution of Canadian Literature in English* edited by Mary Jane Edwards, George Parker and Paul Denham, and the *Oxford Anthology of Canadian Literature* edited by Robert Weaver and William Toye.

Both of these anthologies offer different formal models. The first is in four volumes; the desperate Commonwealth anthologist, trying to cope with the geographical spread and diversity of his material, is tempted by a multivolume solution. The second ignores chronology in favour of an alphabetical order of authors, and this too would solve some problems in a Commonwealth ordering. But the critical selections in each also touch on Commonwealth concerns and thus qualify as conceptual models we could possibly include in our anthology. The *Evolution* anthology includes (in the third volume) W. P. Wilgar's essay "Poetry and the Divided Mind in Canada" (1944) which is an early statement of the "divided mind" found elsewhere in the Commonwealth. It is, indeed, a Commonwealth phenomenon: the greater response of young students in Commonwealth countries to American than to British poetry, a change of taste that has affected the writing as well as the reading of poetry throughout the Commonwealth in the post-war years. The *Oxford Anthology,* the latest in a long list of services performed by that Press for the national literatures of the Commonwealth, contains Frye's preface to *The Bush Garden,* a title Frye says is taken from Margaret Atwood's *Journals of Susanna Moodie* and ultimately from Mrs. Moodie, a Canadian writer whose proper dimension is obviously the colonial period of Commonwealth literature where she joins Lady Barker, Lady Anne Barnard, Mary Fullerton and many others in delineating the frontier experience of the English-speaking people in the nineteenth century which is the historical basis for considering Commonwealth literature as a single body of writing. The term "bush," after all, is pure Commonwealth, not mere Canadian; the kinship in the use of the term gives us a sort of composite of Moodie, Frye and Tutuola that would read "Roughing it in the Bush Garden of Ghosts."

The conceptual models we are seeking in Canadian criticism may well be found in the formal models we propose to imitate, provided we can show the applicability of

those concepts to Commonwealth literature. The 1966 edition of the *Canadian Anthology* contains twelve pieces in its "Recent Selected Criticism." At first sight the general rather than the particular essays seem more apt to our purpose, which decision would exclude those on Callaghan, Pratt, Leacock and others. And on Sarah Binks? Here we should be careful. The particular essays are useful to the Commonwealth reader in grappling with Pratt or Leacock but the reader would have to see their Commonwealth dimension for himself. Paul Hiebert, on the other hand, is describing a Commonwealth phenomenon, and the Commonwealth reader greets it with a shriek of recognition.

Sarah Binks is a fable in the form of a satire of the local poetess and the local literary historian, of F. R. Scott's Miss Crotchett and Hiebert's Miss Drool. Given its double Commonwealth dimension, it is the latter which is the more interesting since it is comic where the fate of the local poetess is tragic — witness Sarah's end. Hiebert satirizes the two prime assumptions of the local literary historian; the first is that Sarah lived in "the halcyon days . . . the golden days" of a perfect post-pioneer period, the curious moment of rest after the labour of settlement that is common to all national literatures in English and probably most finely used by Katherine Mansfield. In *Sarah Binks* it is a short period of thirty years which the local historian generally calls an "era"; this magnification is commonly recognised in Commonwealth studies as "the Mariposa syndrome." The second assumption reinforces the telescoped historicity of the first: that Sarah is "a product of her soil . . . an expression of her environment," which is the easiest and most obvious way of validating the magnification. We know the distant source of that validation — through Taine back to Buckle — and we feel there is something to it but we hesitate to assert it as confidently as Sarah's editor. Nevertheless, every assertion of national identity in all early national literary studies will be found to depend on this assump-

tion. It is thus common in Commonwealth literary studies but it has another applicability; *Sarah Binks* is the Awful Example of the Double Standard in operation, about which graduate students ambitious of becoming, say, the Heavysege man in Amcan are still warned by their professors of Renaissance Studies.

Sarah Binks also illustrates the conditions of local literary studies. We have all had to deal with our Horace B. Marrowfat, B.A., Professor Emeritus of English and Swimming of St Midget's College, but nowhere else has he been so gloriously pilloried. And we have all worked in the local equivalent of the Binksian Collection of the Provincial Archives. What Sarah's editor says of his labours is both wildly funny and sadly true of Canadian and Commonwealth studies: "The papers which have appeared from time to time have been fragmentary . . . much inference has been published as fact. Many of the details of [the] life are still vague and have to be filled in."[8] (Which sounds very like pre-Spettigue Grove.) In both its generous assumptions and its portrait of preposterous activity *Sarah Binks* is the ultimate and artistic portrait of all early Commonwealth studies. It is, indeed, the magma of our discipline and the Commonwealth editor ignores its message at his peril.

In another way Marshall McLuhan is just as magmatic to our discipline. Klinck and Watters reprint McLuhan's "Culture Without Literacy" (1953). Such a title in the hands of, say, A. D. Hope would immediately suggest an attack on the so-called culture, including the literature, of Australia, since both terms are heavily loaded in critical discussion in that country. The title would seem to describe the milieu of an Australian Sarah. McLuhan of course has a very different argument, so different as to be revolutionary in a Commonwealth context. Including both Hieber's introduction and McLuhan's article would thus have different effects in a Commonwealth context: the first would demonstrate the affinity of Canadian critics with their Commonwealth cousins; the second would

show the difference and support the argument for the paramountcy of Canadian critics in the family or tribe.

But neither applicability or relationship quite illustrates what I mean by a "conceptual model" — an idea which would stimulate critical thinking about Commonwealth literature if we simply substituted "Commonwealth" for "Canadian" wherever the latter term occurred in the model article. If we look deeper into McLuhan's "Culture Without Literacy" we can see two ways in which he is "magmatic" to our subject. His argument about the effect of imposing a literate book and print medium on an oral culture amounts to a thesis about the first two stages in the process of making national literatures: in the first they were imposed on and largely obliterated the native oral culture wherever they settled (although not always permanently); in the second stage their first intention and reason for existence was to rescue and preserve in literate form what was circulating in oral fashion — as I believe *Sarah Binks* first circulated. Again, McLuhan reminds us that the bothersome diversity of the literatures that make up Commonwealth literature is an aspect of the multilateral diversity that McLuhan insists is a consequence of an instantaneous communications medium.

It would be dangerous, of course, simply to borrow McLuhan directly in Commonwealth studies. Perhaps the best effect of including an extract from his work as a conceptual model in our anthology would be that through him we can meet the Canadian thinkers who made McLuhan possible — George Grant, for instance, who is represented in the *Evolution* anthology, Innis and Cochrane — and who in turn form the core of an exciting Commonwealth critical anthology, Eli Mandel's *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*.[9]

We would have to include Mandel's introduction to his anthology because of its very innocence of a Commonwealth context to Canadian criticism; it outlines a formal model and summarizes the conceptual models inside that form, and in both respects demonstrates the applicability

of the best Canadian criticism to Commonwealth literature. The most fruitful hypothesis about the making of *Commonwealth* criticism, as distinct from criticism of a national literature, is in the relationship of Mandel's three contexts to form a field or total context for a Commonwealth criticism.

Of Mandel's three contexts, the first ("Social and Historical") obviously offers a Canadian equivalent or model to Commonwealth literary study and the theory of Commonwealth literatures. It has given rise to a whole school of Australian critics who in turn are opposed by a formalist group who emphasize the literary nature of Australian literature as against the Binksian environmentalists. Mandel's second context ("Theoretical") shows how to escape this fruitless antagonism by rethinking the nature of literature. Thus the selection from Frye, McLuhan and Sparshott which constitutes Mandel's second context offers also certain conceptual models for rethinking the nature of Commonwealth literature, such as along mythopoeic lines. If we were to include Mandel's selection in a Commonwealth anthology it would afford a third dimension in addition to those of literature and of Canadian literature. From this stems the relevance of Frye and others to that middle ground of Commonwealth literature, the immediate family of literatures which is the context of Canadian literature.

Mandel's most interesting context is the third, "Patterns of Criticism." Until we can objectively study what affects or determines the response of the national literary critic to his subject matter (and see those responses as constituting both a national and general pattern), then the whole body of critical writing on individual writers as well as all the general commentary remains unexamined. It is mainly for this reason that the critical section of our Commonwealth anthology should contain not the best articles on White, Curnow, Achebe, Gordimer, Lamming or Narayan but those general papers whose ideas would stimulate

thinking about Commonwealth literature and thus make the anthology a tool in the evolution of the discipline.

In reaching through the *Canadian Anthology* to the *Contexts of Canadian Criticism* we recognise that the former has performed one of the services an anthology offers, that of introducing us to the subject it represents. But it is more important to see that the form of the model is itself a theoretical statement, a conceptual model, and not just a convenient pattern to imitate. This is not to dismiss the value of studies of individual writers or general commentary on a whole national literature, such as the Frye "Preface." We can find conceptual models in both kinds of criticism but also in the critical act performed by the editor of an anthology. And we would thus expect our Commonwealth anthology also to make a statement about Commonwealth literature by virtue of the shape or form or order it eventually adopts.

Our Commonwealth anthology, then, would not be a slavish or knavish imitation of the *Canadian Anthology* but a reflection in Commonwealth studies of the achievement of Canadian scholars in using the anthology to shape statements or hypotheses about the nature of their literature. In return, it is possible that some benefit would flow to Canadian scholars from their inclusion in our anthology. The strategy Frye uses in the "Preface" (and elsewhere) is to begin with a general proposition about literature, demonstrate its value for the Canadian matter under consideration, and conclude with the reverse demonstration — the relationship of that matter to literature. In his deft moves from one pole to the other one senses the lack of a middle range or resting point, a body of literature larger than Canadian yet showing an affinity to or possessing a cousinship with it wherein Frye's ideas and conclusions could be tested. This, indeed, is a missing dimension in Canadian criticism as a whole and when found it could settle the whole business of identity. The discussion of identity is not dead nor will it die until identity can be defined within its true context, that of Common-

wealth literature. And that move might correspond to the political reality of our time as Canada finds its world identity as a nation assuming the leading role in the Commonwealth of Nations.

NOTES

[1]C. F. Klinck and R. E. Watters, eds., *Canadian Anthology* (Toronto: Gage, 1955).

[2]Alec Lucas, "The Anthology, A Notable And Unacclaimed Achievement in Canadian Literature," *The Literary Half-Yearly* 13, No. 2 (1972), pp. 111-19.

[3]Brandon Conron, "A Bountiful Choice of Critics in English Canadian Literature," *The Literary Half-Yearly* 13, No. 2 (1972), 44-55.

[4]*University of Toronto Quarterly*, 25, No. 2 (1956), 131-42.

[5]W. D. Lighthall, Introduction to *Songs of the Great Dominion* (1889), repr. A. J. M. Smith, ed. *Masks of Fiction* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962), p. 20.

[6]Northrop Frye, Conclusion to *Literary History of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 846.

[7]Northrop Frye, "Preface to an Uncollected Anthology," in Klinck and Watters, eds. *Canadian Anthology*, p. 523.

[8]Paul Hiebert, Author's Introduction to *Sarah Binks* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), p. xix.

[9](Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).