CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

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I.i. The Canadian Novel : A Brief Resumé

Phase I:

The first phase of the Canadian Novel, which runs parallel with that of the British Novel during the Victorian Age, paves a path for the later mature Canadian novel written in the Modern Age. Literary historians and critics believe that Frances Brooke's The History of Emily Montague(1769) is the first Canadian novel. Though the novel enjoyed little encouragement, it explored the way to English Canadian fiction. The novel, which deals with the North American life, aims at the English reader but focuses upon the experience of British north America, giving it an identity of its own. However, it was published in London.

St. Ursulas Convent or, The Nun of Canada, (1824) by Julia Catherine Beckwith Hart is the first novel published in Canada and written by a native born writer. "Two of the better known works, Susanna Moodie's Roughing it in the Bush: or Life in Canada and Catharine Parr Traill's Canadian Gusoes, Were published first in London and subsequently by several others elsewhere"[1]

Some good works were brought forth by the trend of publishing outside Canada. For instance, John Richardsons' Wacousta (1832) is one of the important mentions in this regard. It was published by two publishers in Britain and pirated in

America. James De Mille's A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder (1888) is another novel of interest, also published outside Canada. As rightly pointed out by Anisur Rahman, "the fashion of publishing outside Canada caught the imagination of the novelists but it created a reading public in Canada as well."[2]

Many outside influences on Canadian novelists during this phase are to be noted. For instance, the most important of the influences has been seen in the form of Sir Walter Scott. The other writers who influenced the Canadian writers are James Cooper, Honour de Balzac, Charles Dickens and Mark Twain. These novelists served as the models, the teachers and the masters for the Canadian authors. Apart from this, many of the Canadian novelists were also influenced by the land and the people outside Canada. An internationalism is marked in the works like James De Mille's The Dodge Club *(1869),* Sara Duncan's An American Girl in London (1891), and His Honour and a Lady (1896).

A Significant trend at this time was that of dealing with the major historical events. The wellknown works in this category are John Lesperance's The Bastonnais Tale of the American Invasion of Canada in 1775-76 (1877), Francis Gray's The Cure of St. Phillipe: A Story of French-Canadian Politics (1899), John

Richardsons' The Canadian Brothers (1840), Charles Beardsley's The Victims of Tyranny (1847) and Agnes Maule Machar's For king and Country: A Story of 1812 (1874). Examining the emergence and development of the novel in Canada is a matter of underlining the significance of a few novels and themes. The Golden Dog, Canadian Crusoes, Pierre and His People, Emily Montague, *Wacousta*, and The Canadian Brothers may be taken as the landmarks since the beginning to 1900.

Phase II:

The second phase of the Canadian novel reflects new Challenges and new hopes experienced by Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was the beginning of a prosperous age in economic terms and a time of assertion in literary terms. "More freedom in attitude, theme, and range of expression is evident in the works of Canadian writers after 1900"[3] The writers of this phase on the whole followed the Victorian models and tried to grapple with their own conditions and sought their way in idealism and morality. They dwelt more carefully on their own locations and tried to develop their own view of the social ethos.

The beginning of the new age saw a return to the local images which contributed ultimately to the process of national

myth-making. The past and the present of Canada itself came to catch the writers' attention and to be viewed in a revised perspective. Quebec, Gaspe, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Labrador, Ontario, and Newfoundland turned into virile metaphors of the new Canadian novel. Alice Jones, G.D. Roberts, Gilbert Parker, Basil King, Lucy Montgomery, Hiram Cody, Ralph Connor, Robert E. Knowles, Marian Keith, W.A. Fraser, Sara Duncan, Robert Barr and Stephen Leacock are some of the novelists known as "local colorists", because they concentrated on exploring the shades of the land and the smell of the soil. Some of the novels that bear this impression in the first two decades of 20th century are Gilbert Parker's The Money Master (1915), Jean McIlwraith's A Diana of Quebec (1912), Alice Jone's The Bubbles We Buy (1903), Norman Duncan's The Way of The Sea (1903), Robert Knowles' St. Cuthbert's (1905), W.A. Fraser's The lone Furrow (1907), and Basil King's In the Garden of Charity (1903) and The High Heart (1917). These efforts seem to reiterate the image-making concern of the novelists. It appears that indirectly they were asserting their self and trying to impart an identity to the Canadian novel during this period. The novels followed an almost well-defined paradigm of a neatly woven plot with the central character as the prime mover. The generally found pattern is that the hero falls in love and controls his emotions, moves

from episode to episode with confidence, and seeks a resolution at the end. This was the traditional structure of the novel written elsewhere before the twentieth century but the Canadian novel was learning to acquire its own techniques of story-telling. As rightly pointed out by Anisur Rahaman,

> The novels before the twentieth century and the novels in the first two decades of this century show the great difference in apprehension of material and way of execution. While the earlier novel was more story-oriented, the new novel was, apart from being story-oriented, technically more innovative.[4]

This phase saw the emergence of the short story writers. During 1880-1920 many of the Canadian writers published short stories which were characterized by the emphasis upon situation, action, static character, and atmosphere – predominate in much of their long fiction. In this respect Gordon Roper notes:

> After 1890 the number of Canadians who wrote fiction increased rapidly. The number of volumes of new fiction doubled in the eighties and quadrupled in the nineties. Technical competence became common subjects, tone, and treatment became more diversified. The work of a number of Canadian

> writers became well known in the English speaking world, in America, British, and Canadian editions, and through translation in many other countries. Canadian writers created images of Canadian life that still linger in Canada, and persist even more firmly abroad. [5]

Writing within the social and literary milieu more than 400 Canadian writers published over 1,400 volumes of fiction during 1880-1920. Eight kinds of fiction were predominant in their work – the local colour story; the action or adventure story; the historical romance; the animal story; the mystery, detective, or crime story; novels of ideas or of social criticism; and the sensational society story. They wrote most of their society stories in the eighties, and most of their local colour fiction in the nineties and 1900's. They wrote historical romances of various kinds in growing number in the eighties and nineties. Their writing of action stories and mystery stories increased in number after 1900. They wrote a variety of problem novels during 1880 – 1920; some dealt with political scene; some with labour strife; some with education. Along with these a few philosophical novels also appeared during this period. Some fictions picture farm life, lumbering camps, horse-racing, rail roading, college life and banking. Novels dealt with missionary life in the northwest or in

the Orient, and the interest in religious fiction led to the writing of more than a dozen biblical or classical historical romance. For example, Charles G.D. Roberts, Gilbert Parker, Robert Barr, James Oxley, Theodore Roberts, Margaret Marshall Saunders, William Alexander Fraser, Alice Jones, Susan Jones, Hiram Cody, Basil King, Lily Dougall, William McLennan, Frank Packard, Norman Duncan, Marian Keith, Ralph Connor, Robert Stead, Stephen Leacock, Emily Weaver and others wrote during this period.

The fiction written by Canadian writers before 1880 presents scenes of Canadian life in only a few isolated spots in an unknown country. By the time of the First World War, the whole known area of Canada had been sketched in, and the pluralistic localness of Canadian life in those years had been mirrored in novels. The Minas Basin, North shore, Cape Breton, and land on both sides of the bay of Fundy, and The New Brunswick woods are explored in greater detail. The Southern Ontario part expands greatly and the life in settled rural areas and villages, along the Ottawa is pictured in certain novels. Some novels picture college life in Cobourg and in Toronto; a few picture city life in Toronto and Ottawa.

After 1800 the Ontario scene became more prominent than the Quebec scene. The Ontario that emerges from the fiction of

these years is predominantly a projection of the countryside in which its writers grew up. It centres in some locality north of Lake Ontario, or Lake Eric, or along the Ottawa, either in a small town, a cross roads village, or on a near-by farm. The tone of these fictions is that of the narrator recapturing his or her past, usually with some affection. Major writers of this period are: Grant Allen, Robert Barr, Sara Duncan, Horatia Parker, Lily Dongall, Margaret Saundess, James Oxley, Thamas Jarvis, Charles Roberts, Edward Thompson, Ralf Connor, Earnest Seton, Willian Fraser, Arthrur Stringer, Framcis Grey, Alice Jones, Dr. Wilfred Grenfell, Theodore Boberts, R.E. Knowles, Marian Keth, Nellie McClung, Lucy Mantgomery, Martin Gruinger, Bertrand Sinclair, Hiram Cody, and Stephen Leacock.

These writers were different in place of birth, in nature, in temperament and in experience, but they did hold in common certain assumptions about the writing of fiction, about the reading public, the nature of fiction, and about their relation to their local Canadian scene. Their fiction was not personal, subjective or inward searching but it was communal, written for an audience for whom fiction essentially was "story". According to Gordon Roper:

> The Canadian fiction writers between 1880 and 1920 were read more widely by their contemporaries because they wrote in the grain of the dominant

feeling of their Anglo-North American world, their fiction had a significant reciprocal relation with their times. [6]

Phase III:

This phase of the Canadian novel is characterized by the transition from romanticism to realism. The following next two decades, i.e., the thirties and the forties, saw the emergence of another aspect of the Canadian novel in which the region was well explored and the novelist now decided to turn inwards. Some of the significant novelists of this period (1920–40) began the process of turning the eyes of readers and fellow–writers from a fabled past or a romanticized present towards the actual conditions of Canadian life. But the great majority of the novelists of this period made no such effort. Most of them wrote the novel and the short story merely as media of light entertainment and contented themselves with providing some form of romantic escape. The most popular types of escape literature were: the historical romance and the regional idyll.

Historical romances during this period deal with almost every phase of human history produced in Canada. British, French, Scottish and Roman history all found their exponents during this period. The most popular Canadian historical subjects

were the French regime in Quebec, and the early history of the West. Historical romances continued to dominate Canadian fiction in quantity though not in quality. For example, E. Barrington, H.J.O. Bedford-Jones (1887-1949), Leslie Gordon Barnard (1890-1961), Alexander Maitland Stephen (1882-1942), Frederick Niven (1878 - 1944) Laura Goodman Salverson (b. 1890), and "Jane Roylat" (E. Jean McDougall) were the writers of such novels.

The Regional idyll, or novels of local colour and sentiment were as popular as historical romances. The term regional idyll is the most fitting phrase to apply to these novels, for they aim at portraying the life of a small area of Canada, usually of a rural or semi-rural area. The emphasis is always on domesticity, the little events of everyday life, and the tone is optimistic.

Well before World War-I, the regional idyll had established itself in Canada and it steadily declined in importance during this period. Mazo de la Roche (1879 - 1961) brought the form to its climax of popular fame. Edith J. Archibald (1854 - 1934), Frank Parker Day (1881 - 1950), J.F. Herbin (1860 -1923), Maurice B. Caron, Clara Rothwell Anderson, Ethel Chapman, Fred Jacob, Alexander Knox, John Mitchell (1882-1951), Fred Jacob (1882 - 1926) were the other important novelists of this type and they covered most of Canada.

Urban realism was a very unusual commodity in Canadian fiction between the wars. The prairie writers like Robert J. C. Stead (1880 - 1959), Martha Ostenso (b. 1900), and Frederick Philip Grove (1871 - 1948) began the systematic transformation of Canadian fiction from romance to realism. Region had well been explored and the novelists now decided to turn inwards. They dealt with the immigrant life, psychological tugs, moral pressures and a variety of social issues.

After the prairie novelists, we come across a good number of historical fiction writers. Mazo De la Roche, John Elson, Mabel Durham, John Mitchell, and Margaret Duley fall in this category. As Anisur Rahman states, "these novelists trace the family saga, the spatial depth, and man's relationship with time in general."[7]

During the second half of the twentieth century an air of authenticity is imparted to the Canadian fiction, particularly, during the period from 1940-1960 by the novels of Buckler, Callaghan, Hugh MacLennan, Mordecai Richler, Ken Mitchell, Robertson Davies, Sinclair Ross, Ethel Wilson and Watson. This period has seen the publication of some of the important Canadian fiction like As for Me and My House (1941), The Mountain and the Valley (1952), The Double Hook (1959), and The Watch That Ends the Night (1959) by Sinclair Ross, Earnest Buckler, Sheila Watson, and Hugh MacLennan respectively.

PHASE IV:

Apart from the major novelists mentioned above, the period since the sixties has seen the emergence of another group of novelists. They are Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Mavis Gallant, Alice Munro, Michael Ondaatje, Robert Kroetsch, Norman Levine and others. This period has been the most prolific and the most rewarding as it saw the fiction firmly established. "The novel since the sixties chose its own catchment area of experience as did the earlier novel. This period may be identified with the flowering of experimental fiction, minority fiction, feminist fiction, satiric fiction, childhood fiction, regional fiction, and popular fiction."[8]

A large number of novelists, some known while others not so wellknown appeared on the scene. Margaret Laurence, who is more than a regional writer, is the most important novelist of this period. She has a feminist reference and paves the way for other feminists like Margaret Atwood, Jane Rule, Margaret Gibson, Audrey Thomas, and others. In spite of being a writer with clear feminist tendency, she displays her social responsibility and relates to her times. She combines the private and the public world by representing her own vision of life in her novels, The Stone Angel (1964) and The Diviners (1974).

Rudy Wiebe is another significant modernist novelist in Canadian literature. His "Jesus Vision" imparts a didactic touch to his fiction but he emerges essentially as a modernist. His The Scorched-Wood People (1977) is probably the best novel which presents a view of historical revisionism. In his novels Peace Shall Destroy Many (1962), First and Vital Candle (1966), The Mad Trapper (1980), and My Lovely Energy (1983), Wiebe has tried to integrate his religious-historical vision. To express his view of history, he uses his discovering and experimental form, which is new to Canadian Novel.

Margaret Atwood is one of the most remarkable names in modern Canadian literature. She is a novelist, a poet, and a critic. Her seminal text Survival, a thematic guide to Canadian literature, is an indicator of her own stance as an artist. In almost all her novels, the basic themes of alienation and exploitation are reflected through her female characters. Her women, like their creator, are sure of their words and of their pronouncement. Her novel Surfacing (1972) is very famous and receives maximum critical and popular attention. It is concerned with the enigma of Canadian identity in the face of an American cultural onslaught.

After Margaret Laurence and Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro is another woman novelist of great significance. She has a place for men alongside the women and the two compose the outline of

an easily identifiable place or area. Why Do You Think You are? (1978) and Lives of Girls and Women (1971) reveal her simple story telling genius. She composes her story around simple people overpowered by complex emotions. She shows the evolution and growth of a girl's mind through her adulthood, her secret desires and her shyness, in these novels. Alice Munro is an artist with a clear perspective and looks at her world in a clearly defined way.

Robert Kroetsch, a poet, is also a novelist. His novels The Stud-Horse Man (1969), Gone Indian (1973), Badlands (1975), and What The Crow Said (1978) represent him as a post-modernist in Canadian fiction. Michael Onadaatje, another poet to make his place as a novelist, is remarkable for his novel In The Skin of a Lion (1987).

Many other novelists who contribute their works in recent times may be mentioned for all their worth but the works of Matt Cohen, Clark Blaise, Marian Engel, Timothy Findley, Andrey Thomas, Helen Weinzweig, Leonard Cohen and others contribute a lot to the making of fictional identity of Canada. Variety of identity patterns are represented by them such as survival, isolation, new hero / region, woman as hero, religious vision, etc. The Canadian fiction definitely shows a line of development from Emily Montague to the recent works.

Fiction in Canada, especially in the modern times, seeks its vitality from its own past and invents an idiom suitable to contain this experience. Margaret Atwood's pre-natal history, Margaret Lawrence's personal mythology, Matt Cohen's genealogy of a family farm, Alice Munro's forays into personal memory – all go to support this statement.

I.ii : Matt Cohen : An Introduction

Matt Cohen was born on 30 December 1942 at Kingston, Ontario. In early Childhood, he moved with his family to Ottawa and attended grade school and high-school, from which he graduated in 1960. After graduating from high school, he went on to the University of Toronto, where he graduated with a B.A. (honours) in 1964. He became post graduate with an M.A. in political theory from the same university in 1965. The subject of his thesis was the French novelist and political maverick Albert Camus. Though his parents were Jewish, he was not brought up very religiously.

Matt Cohen began his brief academic career as a lecturer in the Department of Religion at McMaster University in 1967. He has always been careful to explain that he was not teaching theology, but the sociology of religion. His academic preoccupations have found their places in his writing, for political

theory provides the central thematic cord in his futurist novel The Colours of War, and religion, observed as a force in society, plays a high role in Flowers of Darkness. He abandoned his teaching career in 1968 to take up full time writing. He was writer-in-residence at the University of Alberta between 1975 and 1976. He was Visiting Professor of creative writing at the University of Victoria between 1979 and 1980. He was writer-in-residence at the University of western Ontario in 1981, and Visiting Professor at the University of Bologna in 1984.

After leaving McMaster, Matt Cohen lived briefly in Toronto and in 1970 retired to write on a farm near Godfrey, in the country north of Kingston. Later he returned for a while to live in Toronto, though rural Ontario has always drawn him back. At the Coach House Press he worked as fiction editor and prepared the second volume of Coach House's anthology The Story So Far, which appeared in 1973.

Matt Cohen has worked in a variety of genres. He has written a radio play and two television plays; he has done sporadic book reviewing. He wrote an ironic poetry of Peach Melba (1974); and children's fantasies Too Bad Galahand (1972) and the Leaves of Louise (1978). But mainly he is known as a writer of fiction, and this has been his real literary vocation.

Cohen wrote a number of novels. His first novel, Korsoniloff which appeared in 1969, tells the story of a schizophrenic teacher of philosophy. It is derived a great deal from the author's experience of university life. But his later works show him as a mainly inventive writer, rather than one who derives his material from direct experience. They began with the fantasy novella Johny Crackle Sings, which appeared in 1971. Then he went on to the series of substantial novels, less overtly experimental than his first books yet based largely on the manipulation of time flows, that began with the publication of The Disinherited in 1974, and carried on with surprisingly regular intervals through Wooden Hunters (1975), The Colours of War (1977), The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone (1979), Flowers of Darkness (1981), and The Spanish Doctor (1984).

All these novels – except Wooden Hunters and The Spanish Doctor – take place in the country north of Kingston where Cohen has spent so much of his time in recent years. Several of his stories, as well as the four rural Ontario novels, are centred around an imaginary town named Salem. His short stories have been published widely in Canadian magazines and have been collected in four volumes: Columbus and the Fat Lady and Other Stories (1972), Night Flights: Stories New and Selected (1978), The Expatriate: Collected Short Stories (1982), and Café Le Dog

(1983). At the age of twenty-one he won a writing prize for short stories.

Writing novels or stories is an inseparable part of his life. In an interview to Graeme Gibson, when he was asked in what way writing was important to him, Cohen answered:

> Writing is part of the process of me staying alive and growing. As an external activity, it is the most interesting one to me that I've been able to come up with. It's also important to me because it gives me an entrance into the reality arena, which I want, and I have no particular illusions about a lot of people reading my books and changing their lives, but it is a means for me to articulate my own world and externalise it rather than having to turn in against myself.[9]

According to him novels do so many things in a society. One of the things is to explicate what is considered normal. In the same interview he said,

> I think most novels tend to explicate what is conventional. I think people use them that way, whether or not it's a part of the writer's intent. I think some writers should write about what is

actually happening, because, an awful lot of what is actually happening in a country is invisible.[10]

Cohen is basically a regional writer as he himself said in his interview, "I think I'm a regional writer and that's obviously the Ottawa Valley."[11]

Cohen has lived briefly in the Queen Charlotte Islands off the coast of British Columbia; a Canada council grant in 1977 took him to England. Among his other travels, he spent a period in Spain in 1980 and more recently in 1985, he has spent a period in Paris. At the time of writing, he lives as much as he can on his 170 acres of rocky farmland at Verona, north of Kingston, with intervals in Toronto.

Recently Matt Cohen has won the prestigious Governor-General's Literary Award for Fiction for his novel Elizabeth and After in 1999.

[Source for biographical details :

Woodcock, George. Matt Cohen and His Study. Ontario: ECW Press n.d.]

I.iii: Review of critical literature on Matt Cohen:

Matt Cohen's larger novels and his second book of stories, Night Flights: Stories New and Selected (1978) have been largely

reviewed by many critics. But so far there have been few long and intensive studies of his work. They are confined only to the introductions by John Moss to the New Canadian Library editions of The Disinherited and Wooden Hunters and George woodcock's essay "Armies moving in the Night : The fictions of Matt Cohen". There are some brief essays on Cohen's work by Norah Story in the Supplement to the Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature (1973) and by Frank Davey in his From There to Here : A Guide to English-Canadian Literature since 1960 (1974). Graeme Gibson and Alan Twigg published his interview in Eleven Canadian Novelists (1973), and For Openers (1981) respectively.

When Cohen published his full-length novel - The Disinherited in 1974, it received a wide critical attention. David McFadden called it "old fashioned, traditional, naturalistic and psychological and yet experimental"[12]. It is a regional novel. Cohen tries to define region from different perspectives. John Moss comments Cohen's Regionality as, "Cohen seems to define a region not only with facts and events but from different perspectives, seeing it in different ways, in different dimensions of narrative reality, with each work in what have come to be known as the Salem novels"[13].

Matt Cohen is basically a regional writer. In this respect while commenting on The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone, John Moss Says:

> Cohen describes with uncanny fidelity the hard, undisciplined beauty of marginal farmland north of Kingston. What makes him the best regional writer Canada has yet produced in the conviction with which he populates that region: through the interaction of his characters with each other and with the environment, over generations of time, he brings the region alive as a part of our own experience.[14]

Cohen's characters are perfect as it becomes difficult to forget them easily. Roy MacSkimming, a great critic, while discussing about Wooden Hunters remarks Cohen as "a novelist with a rare gift" who "takes us inside his characters as few writers can and renders them, in a finely pitched prose, exactly and vividly on their own terms"[15]. Jack Batten, a reviewer, claims that Wooden Hunters was better than The Disinherited. He praises Cohen's ability to get inside his characters' heads.

Cohen's second book of stories, Nights Flights, receives more attention than his first book of stories, Columbus and the Fat Lady. All the reviewers remark on the variety of approaches.

Michael Thorpe in Books in Canada, attempts to separate what is common to all:

> Cohen's style is highly polished. His openings deftly establish setting, atmosphere or central situation, often through a symbolic gesture or an action that serves as a pointer towards the core of significance the reader must seek out. His transitions can be abrupt, but they are not arbitrary and sustain a swift, clean movement. Where his intelligence rather than his sympathy is uppermost, the effect can be slick; in the more memorable stories – at half the collection, an unusually high count – the control and irony are the servants of a compassionate intelligence.[16]

His Flowers of Darkness is well received by the critics. For instance, Ken Adachi remarks that Cohen's prose is flowing, elegiac and supple, and there is nothing soggy about it. He is not simply an entertainer but he has a view not only of rural life but of its social attitude. Douglas Hamilton feels there is more didactic tone in Flowers of Darkness. George Woodcock in his review notes the element of melodrama in the novel and remarks that:

> "actuality is never quite like this".... But is the actual always the real? That, perhaps, is the great question the art of fiction is always set to pose. And the answer lies, surely, in how far we become willing hostages in the country of the mind a novel creates.... For it is the consistency of the imaginative construct, rather than the likeness to anything in what we oddly call "real life", that we in fact seek in fiction. And that kind of consistency, it seems to me, Matt Cohen has achieved.[17]

Mark Abley in his review of The Spanish Doctor remarks, it is an audacious book. According to him the hero Avram Halevi in the novel is one of the strongest characters Cohen has even created. Alberto Manguel comments that the plot is gripping but the characters seem less vivid. Ken Adachi in his review says The Spanish Doctor is a grandly, almost quixotically ambitious project.

The present dissertation attempts to study the following novels of Matt Cohen with particular reference to the regional thematic aspects taken into account by the novelist:

1) The Disinherited (1974)

2) Wooden Hunters (1975)

3) The $weet $econd $ummer of Kitty Malone (1979)

All these novels are set in a Southeastern Ontario countryside. In the countryside loyalists, American immigrants and the migrants from British cleared the great forest and built their towns of stone and farmhouses. They developed permanent and prosperous family economy which seemed eternal. This economy remained more than hundred years until it was turned into an anachronistic flow in the industrial pattern affected by machine technology and urbanization.

The major themes in these novels appear to be sexuality and violence. Hence I have made a modest attempt to study theme and place Matt Cohen in the tradition of the Canadian novel.

Notes and References

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17. George Woodcock, "Shady Leaves of Destiny", Rev. of Flowers of Darkness, Books in Canada, March 1981, p. 12.