

Carl F. Klinck, Pathfinder In Canadian Literature

Nearly fifty years ago, when he published *Wilfred Campbell: A Study in Late Provincial Victorianism* (1942), Carl Frederick Klinck emerged from what was then an unfashionable area of scholarship into what has since become the mainstream of Canadian criticism.¹

Though *Wilfred Campbell* (originally written as a Columbia Ph.D. thesis) concerns a writer whose work spans the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Klinck's particular interest over a long career as critic and scholar was the writing done in the English language during the period before Confederation in what are now Ontario and Quebec. His contributions in this area, through the discovery of unnoticed material and the establishment of its authorship, have been invaluable; he brought long inaccessible texts to light, and, providing illuminating critical introductions that place them soundly in their North American context, presented them to a wide reading public. Yet Klinck never accepted the arbitrary boundaries of period or genre. As a pioneer biographer of E.J. Pratt and William "Tiger" Dunlop; as co-editor of *Canadian Anthology*, one of the first comprehensive collections of our country's prose and poetry; as co-creator of the pioneer reference work in biography and criticism, *Canadian Writers / Ecrivains canadiens*; as the careful investigator in volumes like *Tecumseh* and *The Journal of Major James Norton* of the Indian element in our historical literature, and as initiator, general editor and contributor to *Literary History of Canada*, he manifested not only an impressively wide scope of interest, but also a flexibility of response that made him sensitive to virtually every aspect of Canadian literary life.

A graduate at nineteen of Waterloo College (then affiliated with the University of Western Ontario), Klinck completed his M.A. two years later at Columbia University, which was a fortunate choice in view of the later development of his interest in Canadian writers and writing. In 1928, after finishing his initial graduate work at Columbia, Klinck was appointed Instructor of English at Waterloo College, and during the next four years — with a rapidity that would stagger a contemporary Promotions and Tenure Committee — he had hurdled the intervening ranks to full professor. In this early academic period he displayed an extraordinary combination of industry, competence and versatility. While carrying a full teaching load, he found time to act as college librarian from 1936 to 1942, and when he served as Dean of Waterloo College between 1942 and 1947, the year he came to the University of Western Ontario, he maintained a substantial lecturing commitment that ranged into virtually every major period of English and American literature.

Klinck's second important contribution to Canadian literary history was the biographical section of *Edwin J. Pratt: The Man and his Poetry*, published at the time when he was leaving Waterloo for London, where he lived until his death in 1990. Because it was

derived so largely from first-hand contact with the poet's own autobiographical account, read in manuscript and heard in conversation, *Edwin J. Pratt* will continue to serve as an invaluable authentic basis for subsequent studies of Pratt, especially in relation to his early life.

The University of Western Ontario had pioneered in giving courses in Canadian Literature ever since the early 1920's. As Head of the English Department here from 1948 to 1956 Carl Klinck continued to promote such studies. After his long stint in administration, though, he was not initially enthusiastic about retiring from the headship. But Murdo Mackinnon and I, then ambitious young associate professors, persuaded him that his talents could best be used if he devoted himself to teaching and scholarship as a Senior Professor of Canadian Literature, while we ran the department. In the mode and language of a Godfather movie, we "made him an offer he could not refuse!" Our action, although not altruistically motivated, ironically directed Carl back into his proper m_閏ier.

About this time one of the most urgent needs for those who taught and followed courses in Canadian Literature was a suitable anthology.

In collaboration with R.E. Watters, who was then working on the first edition of his *Check List of Canadian Literature and Background Materials, 1628-1950* (1959), Klinck developed the kind of book that seemed best fitted for the purpose. The result of these joint efforts was *Canadian Anthology*; published in 1955, revised and expanded in 1966 and in 1974, it has, with its judicious selection of writers, its excellent biographical introductions and its bibliographical aids, played a considerable part in making courses in English-Canadian literature possible and even — ultimately — respectable.

Klinck had long been fascinated, in a more special field, by the exploits of William "Tiger" Dunlop, which were related admiringly by Robina and Kathleen Lizars in their late nineteenth century book, *In the Days of the Canada Company, 1825-1850*, and in the late 1950's he became curious about references to Dunlop in *Fraser's Magazine* and in *Blackwood's*, to the latter of which Dunlop had actually contributed. Out of these investigations emerged *William "Tiger" Dunlop: Blackwoodian Backwoodsman* (1962), a careful biographical and critical study which not only provided an understanding of Dunlop's early career and of his international reputation, but also revealed his hitherto unsuspected influence on the development of literature in Canada.

Another of Klinck's persistent interests was first aroused by the Columbia lectures on the Indian in American literature which were delivered by Hoxie Fairchild, later the author of *The Noble Savage*. Klinck's desire to know more about the part played by the Indians in the early history of Ontario led to his publication of *Tecumseh: Fact and Fiction* (1961) in which he performs a notable synthesis of English, Canadian and American records of the Indian leader. Originally designed as a text book of primary source material for undergraduate term papers, the book in fact illuminates not only the career of the Shawnee chief, but his entire period as well.

Even more extensive researches into early Canadian Indian history than those involved in *Tecumseh* went into Klinck's preparation, with the historian James J. Talman, of the fine Champlain Society edition

of *The Journal of Major John Norton* (1970). Led by his search for the writings of the Mohawk chief Joseph Brant, Klinck discovered Norton's hitherto unpublished journal in the library of an English nobleman, and immediately recognized the value of this account of North American Indian life during the early nineteenth century. The background information copiously and carefully assembled in Klinck's Biographical Introduction and in Talman's Historical Introduction combines with the actual substance of the *Journal* to make this a publication of considerable importance in terms of Canadian cultural and political history. In many ways it offers fresh evidence to substantiate a concept long nurtured by Carl Klinck: namely, that Canadian and American literatures are both North American continental in their orientation, but in different ways. They have many parallels because they are often inspired by similar or even the same material, but their developments have been different because political and social attitudes, especially in such directions as law and order and immigration, have been different.

Among the many articles which Carl Klinck wrote should be mentioned his excellent introductory essays to the New Canadian Library editions of Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1961), Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* (1962), "Tiger" Dunlop's *Upper Canada* (1967), Major John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1967) and Rosanna Eleanor Leprohon's *Antoinette de Mirecourt* (1973). These imaginative essays are models of the process by which critical perception and broad scholarship combine to reinterpret and revitalize an earlier age. Also notable is Klinck's introduction to the Alcuin Society's 1970 reprint of Abraham S. Holmes' spicy early Victorian tale of seduction in Chatham, Canada West, *Belinda: or, The Rivals: A Tale of Real Life* (1843).

Yet perhaps Carl Klinck's most important work lay in the synthesizing of Canadian literary history. His first work in this field was a development of Lorne Pierce's *An Outline of Canadian Literature* (1927), which for years had been the standard reference work on Canadian writers in English and French. During the early fifties, Pierce urged Klinck to undertake a revision and updating of that book, and, although it was not until after Pierce's death that the project was completed, *Canadian Writers/Ecrivains canadiens* (1964, rev. 1966) was dedicated to his memory and fulfilled his aims. In this work I collaborated with Klinck and with Guy Sylvestre, author of *Anthologie de la poésie canadienne française, Panorama des lettres canadiennes-françaises* and numerous literary essays, and a critic well qualified to treat the French Canadian writers in their own language.

Doubtless the most impressive of all Carl Klinck's contributions to Canadian literature was the initiation and co-ordination of *Literary History of Canada* (1965), and his personal contributions to that volume. Originally conceived in a conversation with Northrop Frye, the *Literary History* was actually initiated in 1957 when the University of Toronto Press accepted Klinck's proposal that it should be a work of various hands. He then gathered together Alfred G. Bailey, Claude Bissell, Roy Daniells, Northrop Frye and Desmond Pacey, all of them leading authorities on diverse phases of Canadian literature, to assist as contributing editors, and twenty-nine other scholars as contributors. This huge task of survey and assessment, reaching almost 1,000 pages in length, "had two principal aims: to publish a comprehensive reference book on the (English) literary

history of this country, and to encourage established and younger scholars to engage in a critical study of that history both before and after the appearance of the work." Its translation by Maurice Lebel, *L'Histoire littéraire du Canada* (1970), made this valuable compendium equally available to French Canadian readers.

The *Literary History* establishes that there is plenty of good writing in this country for which neither boosterism nor apology is needed. Without Carl Klinck's inspiration, patience and industry the extent of this legacy could not have been recognized so soon in such clear perspective. Nor without the enthusiastic and tireless support of his wife Margaret in all his scholarly endeavours could he have accomplished so much.

Carl Klinck started publishing creative evaluations of Canadian writings in an age when few of his fellow academics took their own country's literature seriously and there was little encouragement for any kind of scholarship at all. Familiar with both English and American traditions, he was well qualified to study Canadian writing within the context of universally accepted literary criteria. From the first his critical attitude was both historical and comparative. His interpretations reflect meticulous research of a work's entire background and period, and invariably clarify influences and relationships which would have been missed in the old *belles lettres* cavalier treatment. A path finder in the application of this systematic approach to Canadian history and culture, Klinck with his perennial enthusiasm and sensitive scholarship encouraged an increasing number of followers, including myself, to explore and chart the various regions of our country's imaginative landscape. For his personal interest and friendship, many of his students and colleagues will always be grateful.

Professor Klinck's scholarly contributions did not go unrecognized. In 1973 he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada, and the following year was given an Honorary D.Litt. by The University of Western Ontario. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, he was awarded the Lorne Pierce Medal in 1978. In 1990 The Carl F. Klinck Professorship in Canadian Literature was established at U.W.O., and the second edition of volume 4 of *Literary History of Canada*, edited by Professor W.H. New, was dedicated to him.

After retirement from Western in 1973 Carl's productivity continued unabated until a couple of years before his death. In addition to supervising the 1975 revision of the *Literary History* and turning out scholarly articles, he published *Robert Service* (1976). Professor Sandra Djwa has edited some of Carl's personal reminiscences as *Giving Canada a Literary History: a Memoir of Carl F. Klinck*, which should illuminate his scholarly insights and methodology. His patient and informed sleuthing of obscure source material, his shrewd sifting and thoughtful analysis of various clues to identity or meaning in their proper context, and his ability because of his breadth and range of interests to synthesize our literary heritage made Carl Klinck the many-sided historian-scholar-critic appropriate to our Canadian situation and needs.

1. Some portions of this article appeared in an earlier form in *Canadian Literature*, No. 65 (Summer, 1975), 65-73.

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