

Canadian Short Stories

Second Series

Selected by

Robert Weaver



SECOND SERIES

CANADIAN
SHORT
STORIES

Selected by
ROBERT WEAVER

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INTRODUCTION

This book is the successor to a collection of stories by Canadian writers that I edited for publication in the World's Classics series in 1960 and that was reprinted as an Oxford in Canada Paperback in 1966. The historical approach to writing in this country had a good deal to do with shaping that earlier *Canadian Short Stories*. It was intended to be comprehensive, and it followed a traditional pattern to the extent that it began with stories by E. W. Thomson, Charles G. D. Roberts, and Duncan Campbell Scott and ended with a story by Mordecai Richler, who was then still in his twenties.

In this new anthology I have concentrated on writers whose work belongs to the 1950s and 1960s; almost all the stories were first published during the past dozen years. There are, however, two writers in the book—Morley Callaghan and Ethel Wilson—who stand somewhat apart from the generation of the fifties and sixties. (Morley Callaghan's 'Ancient Lineage' is the only story that was first published before the Second World War.) Mr Callaghan and Mrs Wilson have a creative link with other writers in this anthology, in spirit and through their influence; indeed, their influence has been publicly acknowledged by some of the other writers who appear here. Morley Callaghan is not only the first and most important of the modern short-story writers in Canada;

he was also for many years almost the only writer of fiction in this country who gave continuing evidence that the spirit of contemporary literature could exist here. Ethel Wilson, who began to write seriously and to publish in middle age, brought a civilized and stylish quality of her own to Canadian fiction after the end of the Second World War.

Some of the writers have been represented by two stories, and there are several stories reprinted here that would not usually be found in anthologies because of their length. One characteristic of recent Canadian short stories is that a few of the most successful examples of the genre are quite long, almost novels in miniature. By not attempting to be comprehensive I have been able to include some of the most impressive of these longer stories.

In this Second Series of *Canadian Short Stories* we can observe the extent to which short-story writers of the postwar period in Canada have shifted from a rural to an urban sensibility. This change in attitude, or in the sources of inspiration, parallels the change from a rural to an urban society that has been a major factor in Canadian life during the past two decades. I do not mean that all the stories in this collection take place in big cities: Hugh Garner's 'Hunky' is set in rural southwestern Ontario, Mavis Gallant's 'My Heart Is Broken' takes place in a construction camp in northern Quebec, and Dave Godfrey's two stories are very remote from urban life. But it seems clear to me that the sensibility that informs these stories is as urban and contemporary as the sensibility that informs, say, Mavis Gallant's story of Montreal, 'Bernadette'; the Montreal stories of Hugh

Hood, Jack Ludwig, and Mordecai Richler; and David Helwig's description of hippies in Toronto's Yorkville area, 'Something for Olivia's Scrapbook I Guess'. The stories as a group are not, however, restricted in their settings to Canada. The writers of this period have accepted the modern world (in this too Morley Callaghan is their great predecessor) and several of them write quite naturally about places outside their own country. There are stories set in Egypt (Ethel Wilson), in Israel (Mordecai Richler), and Africa (Margaret Laurence); there might have been an African story by Dave Godfrey or a story set in France by Mavis Gallant.

The international outlook of contemporary writers is reflected also in the places where their stories were first published. Several appeared in the United States: Shirley Faessler's in *The Atlantic*, one of Margaret Laurence's in *The Saturday Evening Post*, Mordecai Richler's 'Some Grist for Mervyn's Mill' in the American literary quarterly *The Kenyon Review*; and of course Mavis Gallant made her reputation as a frequent contributor of fiction to *The New Yorker*. Any good writer must feel privileged to publish in leading periodicals in the United States and England, but the fact that Canadian short-story writers frequently publish abroad reflects in part the notorious difficulty of finding enough markets for fiction in Canada. For the record, original Canadian sources of stories in this collection include the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *Saturday Night*, *The Canadian Forum*, and *The Tamarack Review*. (*Prism*, *Chatelaine*, *Queen's Quarterly* and perhaps one or two other periodicals also publish fiction.)

The few magazine markets in Canada present a con-

tinuing problem for writers, but something more encouraging should be mentioned. A surprising number of impressive collections of stories by individual writers have been published in the last ten years. Books by writers in this anthology include *Morley Callaghan's Stories* (1959), *Ethel Wilson's Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories* (1961), *Hugh Hood's Flying a Red Kite* (1962), *Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (1963), *Margaret Laurence's The Tomorrow-Tamer* (1963), *Mavis Gallant's My Heart Is Broken* (1964), *Dave Godfrey's Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola* (1967), and *Alice Munro's The Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968).

The appearance of these books shows the great interest there is in the modern Canadian short story. It also indicates the really substantial body of work that short-story writers in the postwar period have produced—and its quality. The high standard of their work was made strongly apparent to me as I considered selections for this book. My admiration for the particular stories I have chosen will, I hope, be equalled by the pleasure they give others who read them.

Toronto, Ont.
August 1968

RW

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

'Ancient Lineage': reprinted from *Morley Callaghan's Stories* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1959), by permission of Mr Callaghan.

'Haply the Soul of My Grandmother': reprinted from *Mrs. Gollightly and Other Stories* by Ethel Wilson (1961), by permission of The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, Toronto.

'Hunky' and 'E Equals MC Squared': reprinted from *Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1963), by permission of Mr Garner.

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'The Voices of Adamo' and 'A Gourdful of Glory': reprinted from *The Tomorrow-Tamer* by Margaret Laurence (1963), by permission of the Canadian publishers, McClelland and Stewart Limited, Toronto, and Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London.

'Some Grist for Mervyn's Mill': reprinted from *The Kenyon Review*, by permission of Mr Richler.

'This year at the Arabian Nights Hotel': reprinted from *The Tamarack Review*, by permission of Mr Richler.

'Flying a Red Kite': reprinted from *Flying a Red Kite* by Hugh Hood (1962), by permission of The Ryerson Press, Toronto.

'Getting to Williamstown': reprinted from *The Tamarack Review*, by permission of Mr Hood.

'A Woman of Her Age': reprinted from *The First Five Years*, edited by Robert Weaver (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1962), by permission of Mr Ludwig.

'The Peace of Utrecht' and 'The Dance of the Happy Shades': reprinted from *The Dance of the Happy Shades* by Alice Munro (1968), by permission of The Ryerson Press, Toronto.

'River Two Blind Jacks' and 'Newfoundland Night': reprinted from *The Tamarack Review*, by permission of Mr Godfrey.

'Maybe Later It Will Come Back to My Mind': reprinted from *The Atlantic Monthly*, by permission of Mrs. Faessler.

'Something for Olivia's Scrapbook I Guess': reprinted from *Saturday Night*, by permission of Mr Helwig.

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MORLEY CALLAGHAN

ANCIENT LINEAGE

The young man from the Historical Club with a green magazine under his arm got off the train at Clintonville. It was getting dark but the station lights were not lit. He hurried along the platform and jumped down on the sloping cinder path to the sidewalk.

Trees were on the lawns alongside the walk, branches drooping low, leaves scraping occasionally against the young man's straw hat. He saw a cluster of lights, bluish-white in the dusk across a river, many lights for a small town. He crossed the lift-lock bridge and turned onto the main street. A hotel was at the corner.

At the desk a bald-headed man in a blue shirt, the sleeves rolled up, looked critically at the young man while he registered. 'All right, Mr Flaherty,' he said, inspecting the signature carefully.

'Do you know many people around here?' Mr Flaherty asked.

'Just about everybody.'

'The Rowers?'

'The old lady?'

'Yeah, an old lady.'

'Sure, Mrs Anna Rower. Around the corner to the

left, then turn to the right on the first street, the house opposite the Presbyterian church on the hill.'

'An old family,' suggested the young man.

'An old-timer all right.' The hotel man made it clear by a twitching of his lips that he was a part of the new town, canal, water-power, and factories.

Mr Flaherty sauntered out and turned to the left. It was dark and the street had the silence of small towns in the evening. Turning a corner he heard girls giggling in a doorway. He looked at the church on the hill, the steeple dark against the sky. He had forgotten whether the man had said beside the church or across the road, but could not make up his mind to ask the fellow who was watering the wide church lawn. No lights in the shuttered windows of the rough-cast house beside the church. He came down the hill and had to yell three times at the man because the water swished strongly against the grass.

'All right, thanks. Right across the road,' Mr Flaherty repeated.

Tall trees screened the square brick house. Looking along the hall to a lighted room, Mr Flaherty saw an old lady standing at a sideboard. 'She's in all right,' he thought, rapping on the screen door. A large woman of about forty, dressed in blue skirt and blue waist, came down the stairs. She did not open the screen door.

'Could I speak to Mrs Anna Rower?'

'I'm Miss Hilda Rower.'

'I'm from the University Historical Club.'

'What did you want to see Mother for?'

Mr Flaherty did not like talking through the screen door. 'I wanted to talk to her,' he said firmly.

'Well, maybe you'd better come in.'

He stood in the hall while the large woman lit the gas in the front room. The gas flared up, popped, showing fat hips and heavy lines on her face. Mr Flaherty, disappointed, watched her swaying down the hall to get her mother. He carefully inspected the front room, the framed photographs of dead Conservative politicians, the group of military men hanging over the old-fashioned piano, the faded greenish wallpaper and the settee in the corner.

An old woman with a knot of white hair and good eyes came into the room, walking erectly. 'This is the young man who wanted to see you, Mother,' Miss Hilda Rower said. They all sat down. Mr Flaherty explained he wanted to get some information concerning the Rower genealogical tree for the next meeting of his society. The Rowers, he knew, were a pioneer family in the district, and descended from William the Conqueror, he had heard.

The old lady laughed thinly, swaying from side to side. 'It's true enough, but I don't know who told you. My father was Daniel Rower, who came to Ontario from Cornwall in 1830.'

Miss Hilda Rower interrupted. 'Wait, Mother, you may not want to tell about it.' Brusque and businesslike, she turned to the young man. 'You want to see the family tree, I suppose.'

'Oh, yes.'

'My father was a military settler here,' the old lady said.

'I don't know but what we might be able to give you some notes.' Miss Hilda spoke generously.

'Thanks awfully, if you will.'

'Of course you're prepared to pay something if you're going to print it,' she added, smugly adjusting her big body in the chair.

Mr Flaherty got red in the face; of course he understood, but to tell the truth he had merely wanted to chat with Mrs Rower. Now he knew definitely he did not like the heavy nose and unsentimental assertiveness of the lower lip of this big woman with the wide shoulders. He couldn't stop looking at her thick ankles. Rocking back and forth in the chair she was primly conscious of lineal superiority; a proud unmarried woman, surely she could handle a young man, half-closing her eyes, a young man from the University indeed. 'I don't want to talk to her about the University,' he thought.

Old Mrs Rower went into the next room and returned with a framed genealogical tree of the house of Rower. She handed it graciously to Mr Flaherty, who read, 'The descent of the family of Rower, from William the Conqueror, from Malcom 1st, and from the Capets, Kings of France.' It bore the *imprimatur* of the College of Arms, 1838.

'It's wonderful to think you have this,' Mr Flaherty said, smiling at Miss Hilda, who watched him suspiciously.

'A brother of mine had it all looked up,' old Mrs Rower said.

'You don't want to write about that,' Miss Hilda said, crossing her ankles. The ankles looked much thicker crossed. 'You just want to have a talk with Mother.'

'That's it,' Mr Flaherty smiled agreeably.

'We may write it up ourselves some day.' Her heavy chin dipped down and rose again.

'Sure, why not?'

'But there's no harm in you talking to Mother if you want to, I guess.'

'You could write a good story about that tree,' Mr Flaherty said, feeling his way.

'We may do it some day but it'll take time,' she smiled complacently at her mother, who mildly agreed.

Mr Flaherty talked pleasantly to this woman, who was so determined he would not learn anything about the family tree without paying for it. He tried talking about the city, then tactfully asked old Mrs Rower what she remembered of the Clintonville of seventy years ago. The old lady talked willingly, excited a little. She went into the next room to get a book of clippings. 'My father, Captain Rower, got a grant of land from the Crown and cleared it,' she said, talking over her shoulder. 'A little way up the Trent River. Clintonville was a small military settlement then —'

'Oh, Mother, he doesn't want to know all about that,' Miss Hilda said impatiently.

'It's very interesting indeed.'

The old woman said nervously, 'My dear, what difference does it make? You wrote it all up for the evening at the church.'

'So I did too,' she hesitated, thinking the young man ought to see how well it was written. 'I have an extra copy.' She looked at him thoughtfully. He smiled. She got up and went upstairs.

The young man talked very rapidly to the old lady and took many notes.

Miss Rower returned. 'Would you like to see it?' She handed Mr Flaherty a small grey booklet. Looking quickly through it, he saw it contained valuable information about the district.

'The writing is simply splendid. You must have done a lot of work on it.'

'I worked hard on it,' she said, pleased and more willing to talk.

'Is this an extra copy?'

'Yes, it's an extra copy.'

'I suppose I might keep it,' he said diffidently.

She looked at him steadily. 'Well . . . I'll have to charge you twenty-five cents.'

'Sure, sure, of course, that's fine.' He blushed.

'Just what it costs to get them out,' the old lady explained apologetically.

'Can you change a dollar?' He fumbled in his pocket, pulling the dollar out slowly.

They could not change it but Miss Rower would be pleased to go down to the corner grocery store. Mr Flaherty protested. No trouble, he would go. She insisted on asking the next-door neighbour to change it. She went across the room, the dollar in hand.

Mr Flaherty chatted with the nice old lady and carefully examined the family tree, and wrote quickly in a small book till the screen door banged, the curtains parted, and Miss Hilda Rower came into the room. He wanted to smirk, watching her walking heavily, so conscious of her ancient lineage, a virginal mincing sway to her large hips, seventy-five cents change held loosely in drooping fingers.

'Thank you,' he said, pocketing the change, pretend-

ing his work was over. Sitting back in the chair he praised the way Miss Rower had written the history of the neighbourhood and suggested she might write a splendid story of the family tree, if she had the material, of course.

'I've got the material, all right,' she said, trying to get comfortable again. How would Mr Flaherty arrange it and where should she try to sell it? The old lady was dozing in the rocking-chair. Miss Rower began to talk rather nervously about her material. She talked of the last title in the family and the Sir Richard who had been at the court of Queen Elizabeth.

Mr Flaherty chimed in gaily, 'I suppose you know the O'Flahertys were kings in Ireland, eh?'

She said vaguely, 'I daresay, I daresay,' conscious only of an interruption to the flow of her thoughts. She went on talking with hurried eagerness, all the fine talk about her ancestors bringing her peculiar satisfaction. A soft light came into her eyes and her lips were moist.

Mr Flaherty started to rub his cheek, and looked at her big legs, and felt restive, and then embarrassed, watching her closely, her firm lower lip hanging loosely. She was talking slowly, lazily, relaxing in her chair, a warm fluid oozing through her veins, exhausting but satisfying her.

He was uncomfortable. She was liking it too much. He did not know what to do. There was something immodest about it. She was close to forty, her big body relaxed in the chair. He looked at his watch and suggested he would be going. She stretched her legs graciously, pouting, inviting him to stay a while longer, but he was standing up, tucking his magazine under his arm.