

# Review Article

## NEW LITERATURE: OCTOBER 1970

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The tractate literature inspired by the constitutional problems between Ottawa and Quebec falls roughly into two categories. The tracts that appeared before the October crisis of 1970 were polemical and philosophical, with pretensions to historical interpretation. After that date their character changed. They became apologetic and brutally partisan. The discussion passed out of the world of theory into the theatre of practice. Once restricted to polite argument, to disputants who ironed out the more abstruse points of their theories of statecraft lucidly, the tracts grew much more concrete. They became overnight an exercise for stating a point of view with direct relevance to the active political sphere. Hardly a book has appeared on the October crisis that does not also suggest how the country can be ruled. Brian Moore's latest novel, *The Revolution Script* (McClelland and Stewart), delivered in bad taste to book reviewers with mock *FLQ communiqués* announcing its publication, and Denis Smith's *Bleeding Hearts . . . Bleeding Country* (M. G. Hurtig Ltd.), recently released, are true to the post-October pattern. They attack while they debate.

Neither of these books will change the direction of Canada's one long, deep stream of political tractate writing, or of Canadian and québécois literature in a creative sense. The current of Canadian political problems is stronger than any one of the tracts it inspires. One looks in vain for a summary tractate statement that will typify the whole lot, and that might alter the nature of the statement itself. The value of *Revolution Script* and *Bleeding Hearts* remains nevertheless high for obvious reasons. The first work in question is the only English Canadian novel out on the subject (it makes a number of precise observations about the age generation of the members of the *Front de Libération du Québec*); and the second work is frankly academic: its annotations suggest how long and how deeply the conflict of October, 1970, was in gestation.

While the two books fail without shame to typify modes of writing about the so-called October crisis, they do well represent certain aspects of Canadian constitutional thinking. Moore's novel (which is not really a novel

but a dramatic rendering of the abductions of Cross and Laporte) is a faithful representation of one stream of English Canadian opinion. That is, its point of view is New Left Toronto Intellectual (as the Prime Minister of Canada disparagingly remarked about a group of Toronto thinkers in the House of Commons), even though Moore is Irish-born and a resident of California now for several years. It reflects a probing sympathy by the English-speaking Canadian *avant-garde* in Ontario for the young members of the *FLQ*, sometimes bred to violence by the iniquities of a socio-economic system, and at other times, one feels, by the need to fill a once full religious void. In its attempt at being positive, the novel also betrays Moore's lack of genuine appreciation for what really must go on in an *FLQ* cell. Moore and his *avant-garde* audience who will buy his novel are simply not québécois. Sympathy, to the depth of empathy, is lacking.

*Bleeding Hearts* has more to say than *Revolution Script*. It belongs to the heavy-weight, intellectual branch of the tractate writings, in the league with the Prime Minister's many books and Pierre Vallières' *Nègres Blancs d'Amérique* (Parti Pris, 1969). It is the first English Canadian book that takes up the constitutional debate in print at the politico-philosophical level where it left off in October of 1970. Smith, professor of politics at Trent University, quotes Maritain at a crucial point in his argument as the acceptable authority on statecraft. He chooses him because he believes that political movement, rather than a legal system, is the "leaven" of a democratic state. Smith martials Maritain against the Prime Minister and his Secretary of State, Gérard Pelletier.

With *Bleeding Hearts*, Smith beat Pelletier into the English-speaking public eye by only a couple of months. Pelletier followed him swiftly into the argument with *The October Crisis*, the English version (translated by Joyce Marshall) of his *La Crise d'Octobre* (Editions du Jour) that appeared late last winter. *Bleeding Hearts* remains nevertheless unchallenged in its genre. It re-opens the English Canadian attack on Federal Liberal constitutional policy. Smith is armed with the Federal reaction to the October crisis, with its use (or mis-use) of the War Measures Act and the Army, as a new powerful weapon.

*The Revolution Script* takes up the same instrument masked in the guise of fiction. The fiction is only a mask because Moore does not even bother to hide the fact that he wrote with first-hand information (how he got it is a question his preface never really answers). His work is a novel merely in the sense of narrative arrangement and thematic development. It will sur-

vive historically as a tract with general insights into the characters of individual members of the *FLQ*, but never as a coherent imaginative work. *Script* might be classed as a realistic novel, but it is too historically realistic to qualify for the adjective in a literary sense. It leaves nothing up to the passive imagination of the reader, having sprung in no practical way from the creative imagination of its author.

Given the nature of its criticism of Trudeau, Bourassa, and Mayor Drapeau of Montreal, the novel will inevitably be classed in the still growing body of literature by which "intellectual" English Canada has in the last year returned to attack repeatedly the reaction of the country's leaders of the so-called right, during the October crisis. For Moore the delinquency of the Canadian establishment is its blindness to the mixture of Aristotle and television on which the members of the *FLQ* were brought up. The generation of young québécois in the ranks of the *FLQ* in his novel are Jesuit-trained or bred in the seminaries of other religious orders; they are tossed with lost religious faith and with the residue of a classical education into a world of fleeting television values. Moore's judgment is that the establishment, including the Prime Minister, uses these values for its political and socio-economic advantage. In the meanwhile it ignores the disastrous effect of the merely relative worth of these values as the only existing system of morals for an entire generation. The Aristotelian cast of mind in which the members of this generation were molded, with its love of absolutes and its vision of eternal, does not, as it were, stand up on the television screen. The young québécois apply a mentality shaped by the absolute standards of Aristotelian logic to the relative norms of television morality, and conclude that revolution is necessary. Their sensibility, rooted in history, culture and religion, is warped by the exigencies of the mass media.

Of course, Moore's point of view has to be eked out of the rapidly executed pages of his novel. His theory about Aristotle and television is correct, it seems; the vocabulary of Vallières' *Nègres Blancs*, for example, abounds with references to the human will and the soul, to human individuality and metaphysical being, in the context of modern revolutionary fervor, more reminiscent by far of Thomas Aquinas than Schopenhauer and Marx. But Moore's own pages abound more in narrative action than in cogently developed commentary. His point of view is not worked into the fabric of his story. His characters are merely referred to his point of view every so often. There is no sense in the novel of a pervasive profound level of meaning to complicate the motive of his characters and lift the action to a level higher than local significance.

And even at this level of significance a number of blatant factual errors in the novel cast serious doubt on its author's integrity. He mistakes Phillip's Square for Place du Canada (like Piccadilly Circus for Hyde Park) and Mount Royal Cemetery for Cimetière de Notre Dame des Neiges (where Pierre Laporte is buried) in Montreal. The jacket of the novel's cover says Moore now lives in California. His absence from Canada may account for his missing grasp of the finer points of a complex situation which his confusion of minor facts betrays. Despite its brilliant satire on Trudeau as a young man, *Revolution Script* tries to answer too much in terms of a single valid perception.

Smith has no artistic pretensions and consequently his *Bleeding Hearts* gets more quickly to the crux of its political argument. It suffers no contradictions between matter and form and sustains its political point of view undistracted by the illusion of a fictional narrative. It deals with the October crisis, but extends its conclusions and premises beyond it to the destiny of Canada.

In extending its scope beyond the limits of a single event the thesis of the book becomes enmeshed in the body of literature out of which the October crisis surfaced into history. Its references are liberally sprinkled—Trudeau's works on statecraft (particularly *Federalism and the French Canadians*), the House of Commons debates, Vallières' *Nègres Blancs*, and *The Canadian Forum*. In addition, Smith's work devotes a great deal of space to attacking the French writings in which, by a paradox typical of Canadian history, English Canada has found its defence against the *avant-garde* thinking of Quebec. In fact, the first part of the title of his book was a phrase used by the Prime Minister to describe critics of the war measures. One thinks of Smith from his writing as a member of the Ontario *avant-garde* to whom Moore appeals, and whom the Prime Minister derides.

Smith's main argument is against the "plebiscitary dictatorship" to which he believes Drapeau, Bourassa, and Trudeau above all, reduced Canadian democracy. His thesis is that the Prime Minister of Canada was elected to power by English Canada on the basis of his ideas about national unity in his translated works: in practice, these ideas led the government to misinterpret the importance of the abductions of Cross and Laporte as a political event. Just how much authority does an elected leader have? And is he responsible to his electors for his exercise of power only at election time every four years? What are the mechanisms of a democracy that keep political abductions and executions in the correct perspective of terrorism, rather than in the wrong perspective of politics?

Smith attempts to supply the answers. For Quebec the solution is a coalition government of all legitimate electoral parties—from provincial Liberals to separatists—to harness the irreversible political evolution of Quebec into independence within the known valid confines of traditional Canadian democracy. For Ottawa, the solution is to explain the Quebec answer to the rest of the country. To make this explanation, the Federal Government has at its disposal the tradition of *ad hoc* political compromises by which the country has conducted its business successfully for a hundred years, under the British North America Act. The role of the Federal Government is to interpret the country to itself according to norms that eliminate suggestions of menace and threat for all of it.

*Bleeding Hearts* is a pressing, ambitious book. Since its thesis is cogent, one must either agree with it or reject it as a whole. Like Trudeau's *Les Cheminements de la Politique* (Idées du Jour, 1970), to which it is a counter-statement, its argument is definitive. It not only describes, but defines the state. One accepts the definition as the valid rationalization of an historical process or dismisses it as the distortion of political realities. Probably no English Canadian has written a book of its import, for, if Smith represents accurately the current direction of English Canadian thinking, the history of English Canada is itself altering radically. A nucleus of individuals in Ontario is beginning to hope to achieve under the British North America Act exactly the same thing that a nucleus in Quebec, now grown large, is trying to achieve outside it.

Smith's book is remarkable for its lack of historical appeals. It draws on no parallel situations within Canada to justify its theories. It draws an analogy between nineteenth century anarchists in Europe and the *FLQ* to contend that both were doomed to failure by their use of violence and their lack of real popular support. But its argument is based on Smith's understanding of contemporary phenomena as a series of events which history is powerless to explain. The book combines its author's utilitarian point of view about the present with its utopianism, and succeeds consequently as one of the more interesting and unique works of literature inspired by the October crisis.

The gaping omission of historical dimension in *Bleeding Hearts* distinguishes the work from its French counter-parts. Perhaps the distinction is due to a *clichéd* difference between a practical Anglo-Saxon and a romantic Latin way of looking at things. Invariably the Québécois tract delves deep into history. It attempts to trace the political evolution of Quebec in a com-

plex past. The Quebec House Leader of the Parti Québécois, Dr. Camille Laurin, concludes in *Ma Traversée du Québec* (Les Idées du Jour, 1970), that the province's secession is necessary as the logical outcome of a process that began with Quebec's break not from England or Canada (as one might expect), but from France itself. The English conquest of a colony too populated to be assimilated began an irresistible chain of events to its independence from all eighteenth-century colonial powers, which the disappearance of these powers is itself unable to prevent. England did Quebec a favour by conquering it from France and endowing it with an electoral system to vote itself out of Confederation. Laurin envisages a lasting cultural tie with France, a tie of sensibility, but no political connections whatever. The sundering of Quebec from France in 1759 was final and no mere passing reorientation. Laurin foresees that its independence will occur without violence, as does Smith, by a political evolution historical in character. Smith, by contrast, says this independence will occur without open conflict on the basis of shared contemporary political values.

The literature of the October crisis is actually the literature, too, that preceded it by a couple of years and will follow it by a few as well. It is made up of academic, utopian works like Professor Smith's, for example, Fernand Dumont's *La Vigile du Québec* (Hurtubise HMH, 1971); of frankly political documents like the Quebec Prime Minister's *Bourassa Québec!* (Editions de l'Homme, 1970) and René Levesque's *La Solution* (Editions du Jour, 1970) on opposite sides of the political fence; of only one anonymous tract, *The Creaking Wheel*, out of Montreal's west end; of Léandre Bergeron's Marxist *Petit Manuel d'Historie du Québec* (Editions Québécoises, 1970) that has passed from straight narrative to comic book form on the Quebec best-seller list for over a year; of propagandist works like the Montreal Star's version of the October crisis, Serge Mongeau's *Kidnappé par la Police* (Editions du Jour, 1970) and Jean-Claude Trait's *FLQ 70: Offensive d'Automne* (Editions de l'Homme, 1970), all three of which, by a perverse quirk of fate, share with Gérard Pelletier's book in French and English the distinction that Brian Moore's novel attacks. All three are put together with the flash techniques of the television age—pictures, quotations, deliberately broken paragraphs, and sustained narrative. In Canada's political difficulties and in the meditative time of its reorientation, Aristotle is suffering from the strain of his appearances on television. The emotional demands of the ephemerality of the television age can break the back of any syllogism.