

Carl F. Klinck

THE CHARIVARI AND LEVI ADAMS

BYRON'S ROMANTIC SENTIMENT was echoing in the work of imitators in the Canadas as early as 1824, the year in which he died. *The Charivari: or Canadian Poetics*, published anonymously in Montreal in that year, included stanzas like this one:

Oh, woman thou wert form'd for love,—and love
Nurtur'd for thee;—thy very looks enthrone
A symbol, and a charm of those above
Whose attributes of being, are thine own;
The air, that stirs around, where thou dost move
Is fraught with incense,—as the heavenly zone
Which our first parents witnessed at their birth,
For thou hast, here, imparadis'd the Earth.

Such verse found admirers and was highly praised in the first number of the local *Canadian Review*; the editor was less enthusiastic about the burlesque realism, also reminiscent of Byron, which was in fact advertised in the sub-title of *The Charivari*—"A Tale After the Manner of Beppo." Byron's *Beppo* had been out for only six years.

The Charivari was sentimental chiefly in certain digressions; it was generally satirical in the slow unfolding of a tale about the wedding of an old bachelor and a widow. The Canadian author had found a way to show his sensibility and to make new and old witticisms about the pleasures and pains of courtship. Byron was thus happily naturalized in Montreal by a man who could impart the flavour of this colonial French-English city. He could rejoice in the knowledge that even then a public had been prepared for him and for social satire by *The Scribbler* of "Lewis Luke MacCulloh," which had begun publication locally in 1821.

"MacCulloh" is a thin disguise for Samuel Hull Wilcocke; but the identity

of the author of *The Charivari* has remained hidden from that day to this. Knowledge about him would help to reveal just how much literary activity generated by him, Wilcocke, and others existed in the English part of Montreal in those pre-Victorian times. The exceptionally lively journalism of Britain in this decade had a colonial counterpart. Because of direct connections with the Old Land, maintained by merchants, fur-traders, lawyers, military men, government officials, journalists, immigrants, and visitors, the English-speaking world of Montreal belonged to an extended Britain, rather than to the frontier of the United States.

There was obvious dependence upon the imperial centre, but it was not so strong as to discourage improvisations by colonial writers. Closer association with the United States would not have allowed such individuality. The Canadian frontier offered resources of its own. The French people of Montreal provided a cultural store which was available to the English-speaking citizen or author; but it was for him an influence supplementing, not competing with, the British. He was richer for it, and no less free. The element of choice was also there. Not wholly involved in the London milieu, he could still borrow what he wanted, for he visited the Old Land as often as possible. *The Charivari*, as a result, is surprisingly Canadian, if that term may be applied to a characteristic pattern of selection within the Byronic framework.

The subject matter of *The Charivari* was as indigenous as anything relating to the white man in Canada could be: the folk custom of interrupting the nuptial bliss of an incongruously matched couple by a noisy serenade had roots and branches among the French people of the lower province. The editor of *The Scribbler*, a Montreal literary periodical, had some difficulty in recalling the European sources; he confessed that he had written to Old France to investigate the proper spelling of "Charrivarri" and the beginnings of a custom which French-Canadians had made their own. His remarks in *The Scribbler* of May 27, 1824, found a supplement in the very long article published by a rival Montreal publication, *The Canadian Review* of July, 1824; this was an essay on "poetry of tradition" and a solemn condemnation of those who exploited the charivari in evil ways—

when strangers and foreigners, originally unaccustomed to such recreations, mingled in the pastimes of the natives—snatched from them the implements of their most innocent pleasures—and terminated in riot and crime what had been begun under feelings of the most virtuous, if not religious, endearments!

Yet another Montreal literary journal, *The Canadian Magazine*, had been the first (in April, 1824) to print a review of *The Charivari* praising the work for "some

grave and moralizing passages" and "a laughable story." One returns to *The Scribbler*, however, for a curiously efficient synopsis of the tale:

after describing the persons, and characters of the hero and heroine, Baptisto the old bachelor, and Annette the widow, they are forthwith married, and bedded, disturbed by the Charrivarri, and then put to bed again, where "The future hours repaid the past's delay."

The Canadian subject matter of *The Charivari* may be conceded; the "Canadian" treatment—the pattern of selection characterizing this author's work in this time and this place—requires more careful definition. *The Charivari* is typically narrative, not lyrical; in a story it is possible to introduce, amplify, and interpret much special data of colonial life which could not be readily assimilated in a song. *The Charivari* was solidly based on what the author had seen, heard, and discussed in Canada: the people and even the weather were known to him in the rôle of jolly companion, not of mere observer. He commented as freely as "Tiger" Dunlop did, upon old maids, and relatives, and upon a bleak Canadian autumn, which appeared to him to be bald-headed, perhaps wearing a wig. With regard to below-zero winters, he made the old Northern joke—old even then among fur-traders like his own character, Sammy Grouse—about sharing the warmth of squaws. The poem is as homely and domestic as the complexion of new world towns, hamlets, and farms—all of which he had known from boyhood. It is pretentious only in half-hearted gesture or in full good humour; the implicit apology with which classical bookishness is employed and the relish with which the colloquial is introduced can be demonstrated when Jean Baptiste feels "like one barefooted on hot peas."

It is unashamedly middle-class literature, as the colony was almost wholly middle-class and not a pale reflection of English gentility and social stratification. It deals with unheroic heroes, not the inflated characters of foreign romance; the fictional proportions of these people are appropriately "Canadian" proportions. It is often uncomfortably realistic, with modest understatement and even cynicism toward of blame for undue aggrandisement of what the world might regard as Canadian trivialities. It is critical of itself, and it evokes criticism of native manners. It binds English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians together because it raises no question of two kinds of citizens. It looks remarkably like an early answer to the prayer still heard for representative Canadian poetry.

If many of these qualities are Byronic as well as Canadian, a book ought to be written to illustrate the coincidence or to investigate the causes. Perhaps Byron was one of the fathers of the social system of colonial Canada! If there is anything in

this remark, *The Charivari* ought to be proof that at least one Canadian was not so much the slave of Byron's ways as a master of them. A reading of the whole poem—one hundred and seventy-nine stanzas—leaves the impression that he self-consciously exploited the possibilities for ingenious adaptation of the Byronic to his Canadian material. Some additional evidence of such finesse may be found in his other works, perhaps in a sequel.

Who was this author, for whom Joseph Nickless of Notre Dame Street in Montreal published *The Charivari* in 1824? The reply given by the reviewer in *The Canadian Magazine* of April, 1824, was enigmatic—"Launcelot Longstaff." This is obviously a *pseudonym* and, except for a vowel in the surname, the same as that used for *Salmagundi* by Washington Irving and James Kirke Paulding (Launcelot Langstaff). This may be as much a red herring as "a gentleman of the staff corps", singled out, but not named, by the author of *The Scribbler* on May 27, 1824.

A different line of inquiry has recently been opened by Mr. Lawrence M. Lande (editor of *Old Lamps Aglow*, Montreal, 1957) involving the study of a possible sequel to *The Charivari*. In Montreal in 1825 there appeared *Jean Baptiste: A Poetic Olio, in II Cantos* by Levi Adams. The biography of this man Adams can be reconstructed, but it will first be necessary to ask whether he was a poet whose interests, style, and talents bear sufficient resemblance to those of the author of *The Charivari*.

In both works there is an old bachelor named Baptiste; in the tale acknowledged by Adams the hero unsuccessfully woos the widow Lorrain and then settles for marriage with the spinster Rosalie. The incongruous matching of elderly lovers is here given more scope, and only the charivari, so appropriate under the circumstances, is not described. *The Charivari* has this introduction:

In Canada's cold clime—no matter where
 (For it might put a fetter on my lay,
 To tell you it was such a spot, and there
 Phoebus arose in splendour every day.)
 Liv'd an old Bachelor and Widow fair,
 Nor yet quite fair—for she I needs must say
 Was rather a brunette—and yet with woman
 We call them fair, *en masse*, the phrase is common.

In *Jean Baptiste* there is a parallel passage:

She lived in Canada—no matter where,
 It might be cloistered in a nunnery,
 Breathing a life of solitude and prayer,

In sweet seclusion from all revelry,
 Or it might be, that she did choose to share
 The smiles of an ungrateful world, and see
 The fickleness of man—inconstancy and folly,
 Now smiling, angry, gay or melancholy.

These poems are evidently linked by something more than reference to Canada. The repetition of certain words and phrases is obvious. Both employ the stanza form and the burlesque manner of Byron's *Beppo*. They have a common setting in the "Hochelaga" of *The Charivari* and "our good city" of *Jean Baptiste*, both being Montreal. The thin thread of story in each poem is given urbane subjective treatment so similar and so unmistakable that an attempt could be made to outline characteristics of a common author: one should take note of his absorbing, wry, romantic interest in women when they may be viewed from a distance, analyzed in books, or wooed and wed by somebody else; his deliberate and lengthy digressions; his self-consciousness and vulnerability—

There's bitterness in song—and if I'm right in guessing—
 The reader findeth bitterness in my—digressing;

his book-learning and references to legal matters; his acquaintance with congenial authors such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Peter Pindar, Scott, and probably Samuel Butler; his wit, exhibited chiefly in bathos, cynicism, double-entendre, and homely touches—

Nature was wild and antic,
 And men and women roam'd the woods, without
 More clothes, than Adam, or than Eve, invented
 With leaves, to hide the sexes, being indented;

his easy mingling of the archaic, belletristic, and colloquial in his diction ("yclept," "fretted canopy," together with "inexpressibles" as a word for trousers in both *The Charivari* and *Jean Baptiste*), not to speak of his repeated complaint against Canadian underwear ("wallow in woolens"); his unashamed delight in eating, drinking and perhaps in fishing, smoking and loving; his mock hesitation in giving details about social occasions—

You know what sort of thing a wedding is,—
 Therefore I need not occupy your leisure
 In recapitulating every kiss
 Relations gave each other,—

but his very apparent preoccupation with just that kind of writing, as in this sample:

Assembled *chez son père* we find *Antoine*
 The venerable father of our hero;
 An only sister the fair *Rosaline*,
 Gallanted by Toussaint her cavilero.
 His brothers *Hypolite*, *Ignace* and *Aqueline*,
 Dandies of the “first water,”—Bombardero
 The father with the mother of the bride,
 And *Angelique*, a maiden aunt by mother’s side.

If *The Charivari* and *Jean Baptiste* may be regarded as the work of a common author, then his name is Levi Adams. If internal evidence is not enough, then the poet of *The Charivari* loses credit for *Jean Baptiste* and the name of Levi Adams; he also drops two prose tales, “The Wedding” and “The Young Lieutenant”, which appeared in *The Canadian Magazine* of June, 1825, over the signature of “L.A.” and “L.A., Henryville”. If the poet must remain anonymous, one can construct little more than a bibliographical sketch.

For Adams, however, one could begin a biography with details given by Henry J. Morgan in his *Bibliotheca Canadensis*. According to this account, Levi Adams was “A Canadian writer, supposed to have been a native of the Eastern Townships. L.C. Died at Montreal, of cholera, 21 July, 1832. Was admitted as an advocate in 1827.” The last of these details has been confirmed by Mr. Lande, who has pointed out Adams’s name in the “Legal Register” of *The Montreal Almanack or Lower Canada Register for 1831* with the date of his admittance to the bar on November 5, 1827. “Levi Adams,” therefore, was made of flesh and blood.

But the poet of *The Charivari*, with or without the face and fortunes of Adams, was also substantial and productive. It is not too much to say that he was a prolific early Canadian poet, native-born, and a rival of Major John Richardson and Oliver Goldsmith for primacy in this country’s letters. The key passage of proof, recently mentioned in Mr. Lande’s *Old Lamps Aglow*, is drawn from *The Canadian Review* of December, 1824. In a footnote for “Tecumthé” (a poem consisting of “argument”, three cantos, and notes), David Chisholme, the editor of the journal, connects *The Charivari* with “Tecumthé” and a large body of other verse by the same author:

For this interesting article [“Tecumthé”] we and our readers are indebted to the pen of the ingenious author of “Euphrosyne”, and several other prose and poetical pieces, which appeared in our last number [July 1824]; as well as of that animating production “The Cherivari” [*sic*], to which we endeavoured to do justice in a Review in the

same number; and of another production called "*The Fall of Constantinople*", which we had the pleasure of introducing to public notice while editing another periodical publication [*The Canadian Magazine*]-Editor.

Another link may be forged for the *Charivari* poet, this time with a book whose authorship has long been a puzzle for bibliographers. *Tales of Chivalry and Romance*, a book of 306 pages of verse, published anonymously in 1826 by James Robertson and Company, Edinburgh, and Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, London, exists in two copies in the British Museum, and to our knowledge nowhere else.* In its pages one can find the whole of "Tecumthé", occupying a third of the book, together with "The Fall of Constantinople", "Ode to Spain", "Ode on Death and the Pale Horse", "Essay on Lord Byron", and "Elegy on the Death of Lord Byron"—all of which had appeared in *The Canadian Magazine* or *The Canadian Review* between December, 1823, and December, 1824. Whether or not he is Levi Adams, the author of *The Charivari* is shown by Chisholme's note to be the author of *Tales of Chivalry and Romance*. We know by the same means that this poet also wrote "Euphrosyné"; probably "Dramfed" (a parody on *Manfred*) and a review of Byron's *The Deformed Transformed* in *The Canadian Review* of July, 1824; and also additional pieces in the *Tales*, namely "Stanzas to the author of Waverley", "The Guerilla Bride", "The Passions", "Love and Time", "Stanzas", "The Sensitive Plant", and "Translation from Monti". Internal evidence supports the view that all of these were by the same hand.

Since he wrote "Tecumthé", this author may also be certified as a native Canadian. In the opening lines of that poem he says,

FAIR Canada,—within whose snowy arms
My infant's breath was nurtur'd,—yet once more
The dark blue sea, hath borne to me thy charms
To hail with manhood's voice,—my native shore.

The third stanza identifies Canada as "Clime of my birth", and indicates the location as Quebec city. With this as a starting point, it is possible to construct a sketch of his career (in which should probably be merged the details given earlier for Levi Adams). The *Charivari* poet's boyhood was spent in or near Quebec city, but he

*For a study of this book and its relationship to *The Lucubrations of Humphrey Ravelin*, see C. F. Klinck, "Some Anonymous Literature of the War of 1812", *Ontario History*, XLIX (Spring, 1957), 49-60.

later travelled or lived, perhaps studied, perhaps campaigned, abroad. The first poems which can be attributed to him appeared in *The Canadian Magazine* and *The Canadian Review* between December, 1823, and December, 1824. The note appended to "Tecumthé" states that it was definitely written in Canada. Early in 1824 he had published *The Charivari*. He was probably abroad in the winter of 1825-1826, but maintaining correspondence with editors in Montreal. *The Canadian Review* acknowledged in February, 1826, receipt of a poetic address for recital at the opening of the Montreal theatre on the preceding November 21; the address was obviously too late. The editor explained that the unnamed author was in England, where "we have the best authority for stating, [he] is rising fast to poetical fame". Speculation concerning the identity of this traveller matches the solid fact that in 1826 the publication of *Tales of Chivalry and Romance* put on the British market a number of poems of Canadian origin. One of the other poems in the volume, "The Guerilla Bride", was reported to be "founded on incidents related to the author during his sojourn in Spain."

In conclusion, one may sketch, not altogether fancifully, the literary development of this poet, in terms of the shifting currents in Lord Byron's publications, and, indeed, almost entirely within the bounds of Byron's own life-time: Byron died in 1824, the *annus mirabilis* of the *Charivari* poet's publications in Montreal journals. To put it another way, he followed Byron's own development from the "Hebrew Melodies" through *Childe Harold* to *Don Juan*. Extending this comparison, one may think of some shorter pieces in the *Tales* as his "Melodies"; "The Fall of Constantinople", "Euphrosyné", and "The Guerilla Bride" as his Eastern tales; "Tecumthé" as a kind of *Childe Harold*; "Dramfed" as his *Manfred*; "Ode to Spain" as his "Isles of Greece"; *The Charivari* and perhaps *Jean Baptiste* as his *Beppo* and *Don Juan*. In addition, his acquaintance with criticism of Byron was abundantly set forth in an essay, an elegy, and a translation from Monti's *Mascheroniana*. The last of these was based upon Stendhal's report of a dinner at the house of a gentleman in Milan, where Byron and the Italian poet Vincenzo Monti were present, and where Monti recited some verses from his own poem *La Mascheroniana* in honour of the celebrated Italian mathematician, Lorenzo Mascheroni.

Many hints of Byronic themes and treatments appear as these works are rapidly scanned. "The Fall of Constantinople" is a long narrative devoted chiefly to the "former fame and freedom of Greece" along with discussion of the decline of Rome, the removal of the seat of Empire to Byzantium, the extension of the Ottoman

power, and the siege of Constantinople. "Euphrosyné—A Turkish Tale" is the sad love story of a young Greek lady who had captivated the heart of one of the sons of Ali Pacha, Governor of Epirus and Thessaly. Ali decides to break his son's ties with Euphrosyné and, finding no one who will execute her, carries out the sentence himself. "The Guerilla Bride" concerns young Inez, who enters a convent after she has avenged the death of her lover Julian by killing his slayer, one of the Frankish invaders. "Tecumthé", the very long poem on the Shawnee warrior and statesman who was killed at Moraviantown on the Upper-Canadian Thames in 1813, may seem far removed from *Childe Harold*, to which it has been compared. It resembles the European pilgrim's poem, however, in its descriptive and sententious passages on battles, natural scenery, fame, and the passions of mankind. "Ode to Spain" gives additional evidence of devotion to the cause of freedom. "These Stanzas were written", he says, "at the time all hearts (but particularly those in Britain) were anxiously awaiting the efforts Spain would make to oppose the yoke of the Bourbons of France, in their attempts to dictate laws and tenets to her,—but which ended so disastrously." Like Byron he points to inspiration in the storied past and deplures pointless or unhallowed warfare.

"Dramfed: A Dramatic Poem", which may be ascribed to this author, is a parody on Byron's *Manfred*. The hero of Byron's "dramatic poem," it will be recalled, is in the "Gothic Gallery" of a castle high in the Alps, tortured by remorse and calling upon spirits to satisfy his thirst for oblivion. In "Dramfed" (the parody) an old sot is in the attic of a tenement house, frustrated because of the inevitable oblivion which drunkenness brings, and calling upon spirits to make him able to thirst and drink forever:

Of quenchless thirst, without the weaker spell
Of wild intoxication.

Nothing in this sketch of Byronic experimentation prepares the reader for the positive achievement of the *Charivari* and the probably related success of *Jean Baptiste*. The analogy of Byron's career, of course, called for a Canadian *Beppo* or a *Don Juan*. But neither the ingenuity of "Dramfed" nor the cold Canadian romance of "Tecumthé" leads one to expect the warm Montreal humour of *The Charivari*. One may believe that it was the indigenous, the familiar, the spirit of the place, the life itself—with a flavour of its own at this early date—which brought the author a measure of independence.