

**Ian Underhill.**

**STARTING THE ARK IN THE DARK.**

**London, Ontario: The University of Western Ontario, 1977.**

**55 pp. \$3.75.**

*Starting the Ark in the Dark* (the title is taken from Dennis Lee's *Alligator Pie*) is the first in a series of monographs about education to be published by the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario. Ian Underhill, a secondary school teacher of English, offers a guide to teachers, department heads and curriculum supervisors who find themselves in "the dark" when confronted with the launching of "the ark" of Canadian literature in the waters of the high school.

After briefly summarizing some of the arguments for and against the study of national literatures, Underhill surveys various approaches to the subject and resolves that the treatment of Canadian literature in relation to Canadian culture provides the best pattern for organization of courses at the senior high school level. He then identifies this approach with a study of regionalism, and outlines sample units dealing with the North and with the Maritimes. This regional approach to Canadian literature serves as the major focus for class discussion, but the author insists on the need for complementing this discussion with units of independent study. Thus, a sample schedule for a year-long course devotes four weeks to a teacher-centred introductory unit, twenty-one weeks to regional units, and six weeks to independent study and reports on independent projects. The final chapter of the book examines various possibilities and difficulties involved in integrating a study of Canadian literature with the work of other departments through interdisciplinary projects and courses.

The only serious weakness in *Starting the Ark in the Dark* stems from its emphasis on literary regionalism, an area with a much weaker theoretical base than either historical or geographical regionalism. Despite his awareness of the dangers of environmental and artistic determinism, Underhill cannot avoid suggesting that the literature of the Atlantic provinces will illustrate characteristics such as "a tough, individual, cranky integrity" and "an almost mythical identification with Seafarers, Old World values." Although he emphasizes that "connections" between works from any region must be arrived at inductively by the student, Underhill does not acknowledge that the student will have difficulty reading in the literature of any particular region widely enough to enable him to draw any other than the blandest of conclusions. Indeed, both teacher and student risk inaccuracy and unexamined cliché.

Underhill's experience as a teacher suggests that the historical approach to Canadian literature "demands a student body motivated to an extent which cannot be taken for granted at the Secondary School level." Yet many of the excellent ideas and innovations which he proposes in his discussion of the regional approach could enliven a study of the development of literature and culture from an historical point of view.

This approach would also reduce the teacher's problems in obtaining suitable texts by enabling him to use any of several chronologically arranged anthologies.

Underhill emphasizes that any course must be developed out of the individual teacher's reading; his own proposals presumably reflect this pattern, and while valuable for their suggestions regarding the treatment of twentieth-century Canadian literature in the classroom, they slight the literary ancestors of preceding centuries.

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**Paul Robinson.**  
**AFTER SURVIVAL: A TEACHER'S GUIDE  
TO CANADIAN RESOURCES.**  
**Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1977.**  
**319 pp. \$8.95.**

Irony is a powerful literary device which can bring its audience to an awareness of the difference between what should be and what is. As I searched the 60,000 library holdings of McGill's Faculty of Education for Margaret Atwood's excellent, five-year-old overview of Canadian literature, the title of which (*Survival*) gave rise to that of Paul Robinson's book, the only reference I found to "Atwood, M." was

Atwood, Mark. An Anthropological Approach to Administrative Change: the Introduction of a Guidance Program in a High School.

(And a 1960 Columbia University Ph.D. dissertation at that.) *Touché*, Paul Robinson!

The reader may recall Paul Robinson as the feisty curriculum planner in the Northwest Territories who incurred the wrath of the Federal Government for his efforts in the late sixties and early seventies to develop curricula to suit the needs of native communities. Now at the Atlantic Institute of Education, Robinson has taken on the herculean task of providing Canadian teachers with a book of made-in-Canada topics and learning materials.

What he has managed to provide is impressive in its breadth, although it is hardly encyclopedic. Unfortunately, one weakness of *After Survival* is its sometimes unfathomable organizational structure. Essentially, the book concentrates on twenty-five curricular areas found in Canadian schools. These range from "Art" to "Vocational", and include such topics as "Counselling", "Indians-Inuit-Metis", and "Ukrainians and other Unknown Canadians." It will be obvious that no individual could be expected to command all the subject matter that the book addresses.