

BOOKS *in* CANADA

CANADIAN ART BOOKS

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ADOLESCENTS
AND THEIR

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SUFFERING TERMINAL GENIUS

MALCOLM LOWRY
DOUGLAS DAY
Oxford
cloth \$11; 450 pages

LOWRY
TONY KILGALLIN
Press Porcépic
cloth \$8 95; 232 pages

reviewed by George Woodcock

THE STORY of Malcolm Lowry is a strange case of artist transformed into the hem — ‘and transformed, which makes the matter all the more curious, mainly because of his limitations as a’ artist. When Lowry died in 1957, he was still a relatively little-known writer. A readership small enough to regard itself as a kind of esoteric cult had recognized that one of his novels — *Under the Volcano* — was among the fictional masterpieces of our time. But Lowry had published nothing else that resembled *Under the Volcano* either in dimension or in quality. His only other printed novel, *Ultramarine*, was a’ apprentice work in which one has to search hard, even in afterthought, to find premonitory signs of the literary power that emanated from *Under the Volcano*.

These two novels and a few short stories and sketches were the sole completed works of almost 30 years in which, when he was not drinking madly, Lowry was writing with neurotic fury. It is true that Lowry left a mass of written material but, apart from some rather second-rate poems, only enough was complete at his death to make into the volume of short stories entitled *Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*. Two posthumous novels were later put together by his widow and her editorial collaborators and published under the titles *October Ferry to Gabriola* and *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid*; how ‘ear they are to what Lowry intended — if Lowry ever knew what he intended — is entirely conjectural. Both of them, in any case., turned out to be interesting drafts of novels, which ‘ever escaped from an autobiographical obsession with the author’s neuroses. They had neither the power. ‘or the extraordinary poetic evocative-ness, nor the marvellously integrated planning of *Under the Volcano*. A few

scraps of Lowry’s writings are still left unpublished but we can expect little from them. Thus, after 16 years of editing by Lowry’s friends, and 16 years of expectation by his aficionados, we are left precisely where we were on the day Lowry died in England from a mixture of sleeping tablets and liquor. He is still of interest as a writer mainly on the strength of *Under the Volcano*, without which he already would have been forgotten, and of a handful of very good philosophical short stories.

Yet, on this thin record, Lowry has become one of the most discussed writers of his time, and recently two new books on him have appeared within a few weeks of each other, Tony Kilgallin’s *Lowry*, which only deals with the two ‘authorized’ novels, and Douglas Day’s *Malcolm Lowry, a critical life*. These bring to seven the total of books devoted entirely to Lowry that have so far been published, all during the past five years. Three of them have appeared first in Canada, where Lowry lived for most of his last 18 years, a fact we have not been slow to use in claiming him as a Canadian writer; the other four, including Day’s book, are by Americans; Lowry’s fellow Englishmen have been cautious in writing on him at length. Ironically, apart from book reviews, nobody wrote anything, not even a critical article, on Lowry when he was alive.



Day has faced much greater problems than the other writers of books on Lowry, since his *Malcolm Lowry* is the first book that (in 450 pages) attempts to be comprehensive, critical as well as biographical. The effort has led him into a number of problems, and he has far from solved them all in a neat or satisfying way.

The first difficulty comes with the placing of his criticism. He deals with that by interspersing his narrative passages with long critical interludes on Lowry’s books as they were published (or in the case of posthumous books, as they appeared most significantly in Lowry’s writing life). Since Day is a lumbering and myopic critic, this slows down the pace of the book irremediably, and sometimes it seems as if the talk will ‘ever end and the action will ‘ever start up again. Yet one sees a reason’ for the arrangement. Lowry’s life, ungarished by his books, would be a rather monotonous account of boozing and domestic mishaps; he knew few famous or even interesting people and lived mainly in the inner world of his writing and his neuroses.

Yet it is this inwardly oriented mind and this in many ways grotesquely unsuccessful life that have turned Lowry, as a similar life turned Dylan Thomas, into a myth. He has become in our minds a real-life example of the anti-hero who has flourished in western ‘owls for many decades now, but the kind of cult of which Lowry is the object is perhaps even older than existentialist anti-heroism. It is a romantic cult of which one of the most notorious examples is the myth of Oscar Wilde, who never wrote a book even as good as *Under the Volcano* but who still haunts our minds as a kind of sacrificial figure. Wilde was sacrificed by society; Lowry was sacrificed by inner forces of self-destruction that even he hardly recognized. But the end result has been the same. The fact of Lowry 16 years after his death is his one great work of the imagination, *Under the Volcano*; the myth is his life as we see it.

This, of course, poses enormous problems for the biographer, since even before Lowry died, the myth was being fed not only by many of Lowry’s acquaintances but also by Lowry himself. Even his letters have to

be read with great caution; much in them is fiction. In the case of many events in Lowry's **life** Douglas Day has **had** to sift very carefully what is obviously fact from what looks very much like invention by Lowry or 'by someone else. **If you read Malcolm Lowry and Kilgallin's** Lowry together, you will be struck by the **divergent** accounts of Lowry's **first** days in Vancouver **when** he lodged with a former **sergeant-major** who happens to be still alive. **Kilgallin** derived hi story from the landlord, who portrays himself as Lowry's long **suffering** benefactor;

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Day gives a story from **pro-Lowry sources** that **portrays the** landlord as crude, rapacious and heartless. Whose memory is **right?** What really did happen **in those** early days in Vancouver and in other controversial situations? Douglas Day doesn't **always** convince us **that** he has **discovered** the true pattern of **events**. But how does a biographer keep **track** of a **mytho-**mane, which Lowry was?

The great problem of Lowry's **life** as a writer remains that of his loss of creativity. **Why**, after writing such a **near-perfect** novel as *Under the Volcano*, did he leave no later novel that, was complete **or even** comparable? Day's explanation is worth Quoting:

What destroyed Lowry's genius? If we refuse to agree with Freud that a writer's neuroses feed his art, then we may at least see that they can inhibit and disrupt it. Neurosis by definition is wasteful and destructive; it does not provide creative energy, it only expends it. I believe that Lowry's neuroses crippled him not only as a man, but also as an artist, in that they impeded him in his psychic journey between conscious discipline and unconscious experience. The root of neurosis is fear, and Lowry clearly feared his art; if its visionary aspect frightened him, so did its shaping aspect. He was, then, a man self-compelled

At press time, the availability in Canada of Douglas Day's *Malcolm Lowry* remained interrupted pending investigation of a complaint made by one of Day's sources. At this writing, it is still available in the United States.

to serve a vocation of which he was terrified; and this led him into the most elaborate and self-destructive ways of avoiding his art. Specifically, it led him ever deeper into introspection. Ultimately he was exhausted by this morbid self-absorption, and his art died.

This verdict certainly fits the pattern of Lowry's **massive** literary schemes that were never fulfilled. Most writers have experienced the **occasions** when they drive themselves to the desk, **dreading** the work ahead, **or** the **more** terrifying occasions when writing blocks destroy or at least delay their productivity for months on end. In **Lowry** these common hazards of the **writing** life were gigantically **exaggerated**. And so *Under the Volcano* is a double miracle, both in itself, as a novel, and as a work of self-liberation by a man who then returned to the prison of his **tortured ego** and never emerged alive. □

George Woodcock is the distinguished editor of Canadian Literature whose 50 book include the edition Malcolm Lowry: The Man And His Work, published in 1971.

LOWRY: A MEMOIR

By AL PURDY

WORKING IN A Vancouver **factory** in 1954, getting involved with forcing a onion into the factory **against** the wishes of management — reading Dylan Thomas on the bus going to work, **more and more** interested in Eliot **rather than Chesterton**, Ezra Pound rather than Oliver St. John Gogarty — I heard about this drunken novelist living in a squatter's shack on Burrard Inlet. Curt Lang, a 16 year-old who **could** talk the mood collar off a theologian, assured me the **guy** was good. Downie Kirk, who had translated the man's **novel into** French to sell 3% copies, said the same.

The three of us set out for the novelist's beach shack with two bottles of booze, of which I expected to consume more than my fair share. **The** shack **was** several miles away **across** the **Second** Narrows bridge, near Dollarton. Along the way Downie Kirk mentioned to Curt Lang and me that we might never get to meet this **fabulous drunk at all**. In a bad mood he might kick us unceremoniously off the property he didn't own. But the **sun**, shone bright driving the shoreline mad and we felt cheerful. **We** even **speculated** about **stealing a tombstone** from the **Squamish** graveyard near by, as a trophy for **something or** other. **Bright silver** pipes of the oil refinery **across** the inlet sparkled (with irony, the novelist called this "the loveliest of **oil refineries**"), a tongue of flame **pale** in the paler **afternoon** atop one of them. Even if we **were** refused admittance to the beach shack, booze was still booze.

But the **novelist** was in a good mood. Short, **barrel-chested**, with a red **face**, he received us cordially; We sat and **drank** and talked about **nothing much all afternoon**. His wife was **more** or less cordial too; a woman with cobweb wrinkles masking her face, as though the strain of **living** with her backwoods genius had aged her **prematurely**. Curt showed the novelist his poems, suitably impressing him. I felt **left** out, not having **thought** to **bring** poems, but resolved to remedy this later.

Among the nothing talk it was disclosed with bitter amusement **that the**

novelist's novel, published in 1947, had sold exactly no copies but had received **marvellous** reviews. **Translated** into several **languages**, it sold in none of them; but everyone who read the **free** review copies said the thing was great. This **was Downie Kirk's** information; the novelist himself was mom interested in drinking and talking about Haiti voodoo and **firewalkers** treading **beds of** hot coals with aplomb and composure. He also mad one poem and we applauded his genius. I was impressed because the guy **had actually been published, a Good House-keeping** certificate I found necessary to **myself** at the time.

Near **afternoon's** end we had consumed the **two** bottles of booze we had brought and another that had been domiciled under the **sink**. The novelist and I **set out** for Vancouver to buy more, me driving my little English Prefect, hoping I looked sober. I wasn't, of **course**. At the liquor store, near Main and Hastings the novelist bought six bottles of **Bols gin**. Theo he told me there **was** church with **beautiful** windows near by. **We** set out to look at the beautiful windows. A wedding was in process at the church. An authoritative clerical person was receiving wedding guests, but did not receive the novelist or myself with any warmth. I talked to **the** clerical person myself, feeling I looked the more respectable and certainly the less **drunk**. Then some wedding guests pulled up to the curb; the round collar **turned** to receive them. I **turned** to the **novelist** thinking here was **our** chance. But he was gone, already inside. When I caught up with him he was **kneeling** on the **floor** between long hardwood benches, six bottles of **Bols** gin in a brown **grocery bag** on the seat behind him.

Again I was impressed. Even with hindsight aiding foresight I **don't know why**. But the **Ancient Mariner**, with an albatross of booze around **his** neck, comes to **mind**. The red-faced novelist seemed to me a **driven** man, driven by **devils** in his own mind that shrieked in his ears and would not be stilled by anything but **Bols gin**. He fascinated me. Before driving back across the Second Narrows, I showed the novelist my own poems. He read them like a famous man and said little.

Later, Curt Lang and I visited **him** again, on another **brilliant** day of blue sky and sun. The novelist went swimming with Curt. I typed some poems I liked, feeling quite literary and **single-minded**. They were the kind of poems

I've **now** come to **dislike**, very regular and formal, maybe even **Elizabethan-sounding** — but a **line** or two would go **BOOM in them**, a **phrase** go incandescent. Like stubbing your toe on hot coals. The discipline required to **write** such formal poems probably also produce these great **lines**, a **discipline** he otherwise denied **in** his lifetime.

In the summer of 1954 the **novelist** went to Italy' and, England to propitiate the gods **or** his parents. **The** latter, I understood, were a respectable and prosperous business family in **Liverpool**. I got a **card from him** that fall. In his absence, Curt, myself and a beautiful **girl** visited the beach **shack** again. We poured the heel of a bottle of wine **from the dock** as a libation, as **a** gesture of **meaninglessness** that has **since** **acquired** meaning. A **parsimonious** gesture too, **since** we were **careful** to **waste** only the dregs. Then I **was** drinking coffee with Irving Layton in **Murray's** Restaurant in Montreal some time in 1957. He said the novelist was dead in England. I felt desolated.

The Letters came out in 1965. I **got** to review them for the **Canadian Forum** on the shengtli of having published some books myself. One of the letters was to Ralph **Gustafson**, about **Gustafson** compiling a **selection** of Canadian poems for Penguin Books. The novelist said that twb wild poets from Vancouver came **to see** him one dark and stormy night in 1954. One of them, whose name was **Curt Lang**, **wrote** excellent poems and was **recommended** for the Penguin anthology. The other poet was also good, but the novelist couldn't remember **his** name, whii in part **was** Al **something-or-other**.

I was delighted by that partial memory of myself. The **novelist**, of course, had a bad memory, since **both** days we visited at the beach shack were clear and sunny. But **Curt Lang** at the age of 16 did **write marvellously well**. And my own poems **were** pretty bad — an **opinion** I've arrived at **since** and didn't feel then. I **wrote** the review and signed it Al something-or-other, **because** that's who I was.

The novelist has been dead many years now. Books **and** articles continue to appear about him. He has become a colt figure: I've heard of people who **want** to live in shacks on some beach and write because the novelist did that — not for **real** and genuine masons of their own. **This** repels me and in some ways the life the novelist lived **also** repels me, though not for any **moralistic** reasons. **Just** that it seemed a **nar-**

rowing circle of his own personality closed around and **finally** strangled him. And yet **that** personality **was** immensely attractive; it remains **vivid** along with some of his **writing**. The **novelist** seemed to **believe** and know that words, a writer's words, **could** batter down time, **in some sense** ensure **life** after death. I envy hbn his possession of that belief mom than the sense of the belief itself. Because it isn't **true** of course. □

HARPER TO REID TO YOU

A CONCISE HISTORY OF CANADIAN PAINTING

DENNIS REID
Oxford University Press
cloth \$9.50, paper \$6.50; 319 pages

reviewed by Walter Klepac

LIKE MOST BOORS that claim to be the condensed or concise art history of a given country or period, Dennis Reid's study of Canadian painting from 1665 to 1965 owes much to its mom **comprehensive** antecedent — in this case, J. Russell Harper's classic *Painting in Canada* (1966). While Reid in a number of instances offers **what** **are** essentially paraphrases of **factual** data and theories to be found in the heftier Harper volume, as well as **echoes** many of the aesthetic **judgements** therein, he **does** **manage**, almost **in** spite of his shortened format, to put forth several **intriguing** interpretations of major **artists** and **their** work.

As Reid, **curator** of **post-Confederation** art at the National Gallery of **Canada**, **points out** in his preface, little is actually known of the art **done** in the French **and** the British colonial periods. Consequently, the art historian must forego the weeding-out of **amateurish** and **unredeemingly fourth-rate** material that he would so **zealously** Indulge in under normal **circumstances**. In order to prevent **his** diission of the fist two centuries of Canadian painting **from** disintegrating into lengthy and **rather** tedious **cata-**

logues of scraps and fragments about minor lights and passing fashions, Reid gives this section a sturdy thematic underpinning: he continually explores the fundamentally dependent relationship of the 'homegrown variety of painting to that practised in Europe at the time. Reid convincingly demonstrates that even **artists** who were primarily interested in **documenting** the passing ways of native **life** in Western Canada, such as **Paul Kane** and **G.R. Hind**, relied heavily upon the **highly** formalized, neoclassical conventions of **19th-century** French painting for stylistic direction. These early Canadian painters, unlike the more adventuresome members of the Canadian Art Club and the Group of Seven who followed them, **were** thoroughly conservative in their artistic tastes. They propagated the **current art** styles of the French academies and salons **rather** than that of the then-notoriously avant-garde, the Impressionists. The considerable success enjoyed by several of these painters attests to the fact that only the former course would satisfy the tastes and temperaments of collectors **at home** in Montreal and Toronto.

The real strength of the Reid book is its treatment of the modern em, roughly from the advent of the Group of Seven to the present day. However, Reid's tendency to **view** the development of contemporary painting in terms of the leading artists alone results **in** certain distortions **and omissions**. Although painting in Canada has

survived largely as a collective enterprise, the various groups **and associations**, while mentioned along the way, receive scant attention as the coherent, shaping forces they actually were on the **Canadian** art scene. The Group of Seven, for example, is seen mainly as the individual careers **and achievements** of Tom Thomson, A. Y. **Jackson**, F.H. **Varley** and **Lawren Harris**. Reid provides little insight into the dialectical process among the various members or between the Group's **ideas** about the nature and character of an authentic Canadian art and those of other groups and influential individuals, such as the vociferous art critic of *Saturday Night*, **Hector Charlesworth**. **This** is unfortunate, for this process ("**confrontations**" is the modern word, I suppose) was often the instrument by **which** foreign ("**international**") art ideas became assimilated into the cultural mainstream of Canada. **Individual** Canadian painters are best understood in such a context, and this is as true of Tom Thomson as it is William Ronald or Michael Snow.

On the whole, Reid's critical comments on the work and growth of the major artists since 1914 offer much in the way of interest and understanding to both the general reader and the art history student. His **biographical** sketches of these painters, especially **Borduas** and "**Jock**" **Macdonald**, seem to be **based** on a genuine personal **respect** he feels for his subjects and they are often quite **moving** in themselves. □

umbrage & Unction

*The letter box is fat and red,
Its mouth is open wide.
It wears a tammy on its head;
It must be dark inside.*

*And oh! it is the greatest fun
When Mummy lets me stop
And post the letters, one by one.
I love to hear them plop!*

Anon.

PRAIRIE WRITERS

Sir:

As a **reviewer**, may I object to **Michael Sutton's** abuse of the reviewer's **craft** in his notice of *Writers of the Prairies*, edited by **Donald Stephens** (December), in which he makes **assumptions** about the **intentions** of the **bwk** and of the series in which it is included (and which I edit) that are totally untrue, and in which he **completely misconceives** and **misrepresents** the aims of *Canadian Literature*, under whose aegis the book appeared? I find his **errors** interesting, since in making them he has revealed once again that **extraordinary solipsistic blindness** of the academic community which I have often in recent years denounced.

Let me deal with *Writers of the Prairies* first. Mr. Sutton criticizes it on the assumption that it was compiled to meet "the requirements of university teaching" and that it is intended as a "course textbook"; nothing could be more remote from the truth about the book (though it may reveal some truths about the lamentable limitations of Mr. Sutton's outlook). *Writers in the Prairies*, like the other volumes in the series to which it belongs (*Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work*, *Wyndham Lewis in Canada*, etc.) was published solely in response to a demand for essays that has appeared in issues of *Canadian Literature* now largely out of print. Rather than go to the expense of reprinting the whole issues, with their more ephemeral contents, it was decided to proceed with a series of reprints organized according to subject, and to add a few original essays in each case where obvious gaps in coverage appeared. This was intended as a service to all leaders of Canadian hooks. If university teachers recommend them and students buy them, we do not complain. But the series has never been in any way directed to a college textbook market. Mr. Sutton has invented that allegation.

Mr. Sutton makes on more specific statement about *Writers of the Prairies* that is totally untrue, and another that is pedantically irrelevant. Contrary to his argument that "missing . . . is any attempt to describe just what constitutes Prairie fiction" the introduction by **D.G. Stephens** does precisely that, at length. His second point chides the book for lack of index or



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bibliography; perhaps some students do need such maps to find their way through a book that is very clearly laid out according to subject, but *Writers of the Prairies* is directed to the general literary public, not to the classroom, and such schoolmasterly reproaches are therefore beside the point.

I especially object to Mr. Sutton's description of Canadian *Literature* as a 'critical literary journal in which academic critics could exchange their views and insights with an audience of their colleagues' as if this were its only or even principal aim. As editor of *Canadian Literature* I have never accepted that there is something known as "academic criticism". There is Criticism, including all valid analyses and appreciations of literature, and opposed to it there is a kind of wilful and self-important denigration without literary merit or interest that is practised by apprentice pedants and which *Canadian Literature* has always avoided. Those who do contribute to that journal are there because they are good writers, not because they are academics; in fact many of them, like the editor, were never educated at a university and work as writers primarily or entirely.

I am astonished to encounter in *Books in Canada* the kind of academically cloistered myopia and pedantic self-importance that I would certainly not admit into the pages of *Canadian Literature*, where no book is ever reviewed on the basis of its usefulness to literary morons, whether they teach or learn:

George Woodcock,
Editor,
Canadian Literature,
Vancouver.

RURAL LIFE

Sir:

The recent reissue of John MacDougall's *Rural Life in Canada* in the Social History of Canada series published by the University of Toronto Press has caused R.A. O'Brien in *Book in Canada* (July/September) to wonder aloud at the "mystery (of) why anybody thought (the book) worth reviving" since, he concludes, "Beyond being 'an interesting period piece,' as the publisher's blurb puts it, *Rural Life* has very little significance." Other words contained in that same blurb should perhaps at least have helped to ease his doubts.

The editors of the series decided to republish the work, they state, "in an attempt to counter the bias of social historians who tend to emphasize the industrial and urban problems of a changing society." Canada was indeed changing under the impact of industrialization and urbanization but, as this book fully illustrates, the resultant problems were not confined to industrial and urban areas. *Rural Life*, in its republished form, serves as a kind of reminder to the student of history that most of the population still lived, in 1913, in rural areas, and that these people too were beset by problems created by industrialization. The blurb notes this, for the book is described as a contemporary reflection 'of the public concern of Canadians over the impact of industrialization and urbanization upon the farming population' in the early twentieth

century. As such, it necessarily embodies many of the "values, prejudices, and aspirations of the author and his generation."

On at least two counts, then, the book may be claimed to be of historical "significance". It attempts to put forward evidence that would help to counter the tendency on the part of historians to overlook the rural population in their assessments of the effects of urbanization and industrialization; and it shows the way in which members of the rural population perceived certain threats to their particular (non-urban) way of life. Strangely, the reviewer nowhere alludes to this first claim, and while he notes the second, he as much as dismisses it. Whether these threats were more apparent than real is beside the point, and to argue as O'Brien does that "the trouble then was much the same as it is now" is at the very least to ignore totally the tremendous degree of change in the rural population that MacDougall documents so fully and so well.

A factor which perhaps accounts at least partly for the reviewer's failure to find any redeeming features (other than the use of photographs and "doubtful" statistics) is his general conception of the way in which such a book should be "significant." It becomes clear during the course of the review that he does not distinguish at all between the monographic surveys of this-or-that aspect of Canadian life or letters that have been published in the last few years and those works written in past decades which are presently being published as documents of historical significance. (*Rural Life* is just "another example of that abundant 'Canadiana' that our publishers have been turning out so enthusiastically since Centenary Year.") The point is not that only the latter are "historically significant", for few would deny that works such as Margaret Atwood's *Survival* lack such significance. *Survival* is certainly that, both for its own sake and for the way in which (to quote again our publisher's "blurb") it reflects "the values, prejudices, and aspirations of the author and (her) generation."

Here, then, we reach the crux of the matter: "significance" is not synonymous with "relevance." Miss Atwood's work is clearly relevant to its age, and in that sense is presently significant; that of MacDougall is historically significant but it is not (it would appear) relevant to this age. Hence, in a period when organized religion is not exactly in fashion, the reviewer of Rev. MacDougall's book (he was a Presbyterian and *Rural Life* was commissioned by the Presbyterian Church in Canada) can have a little fun at the course of the author's career. After pointing out how "little significant" *Rural Life* is, the reviewer notes that despite its author's promising background for a future career ("... although he graduated from McGill in philosophy and English [a Gold medal]") his subsequent life was as little significant as his book (he "... ended up at the Presbyterian College in Montreal and served that Church for the rest of his active life.") While the reviewer may well have lamented that a double gold medalist in philosophy and English should have finished his life in so ignominious a fashion, others may see a degree of wisdom in the appointment of a

man with such qualifications to a college which was then one of the leading centers for the training of the Presbyterian clergy in eastern Canada. Others may not find any source of perplexity in the peculiar fact that, "his academic distinction in English" notwithstanding, this clergyman wrote in a "didactic" fashion; and given the nature of his book (described by the editor of the volume as a work specifically "modelled upon what was thought to be the most progressive method of scientific analysis of society") it is perhaps understandable that it may appear to be "uninspired".

The point is, of course, that while *Rural Life in Canada* and with it the values and assumptions both of the author and of those whose concerns he was attempting to convey, may lack "significance" in terms of being "relevant" to contemporary moral and social standards, this is not to say that the work lacks historical significance. To be such, a work needs simply to provide, for a period since past, a perspective which has hitherto been overlooked, and which thereby helps us better to understand the processes and problems which have helped to shape the present. It seems to me that *Rural Life in Canada*, precisely because it is a "period piece" that reflects an aspect of its age, does just that.

A.B. McKillop,
Department of History,
Queen's University,
Kingston.

RURAL LIFE LIBRARIES

Sir:

I'm not at all sure I agree with your stand on public libraries (November editorial). A free public library system is a wonderful thing, and not to be jeopardized. Comparison with England is not really valid as the public library concept simply doesn't have the ascendancy there that it does here (just as in education).

There is a very large minority in this country who quite literally can't afford movies or books, and for most Canadians they both represent rare luxury. Now I agree that the welfare and working poor are probably too dispirited to use libraries, but their children do, in the hundreds of thousands. These kids have enough problems standing in the way of their educating themselves out of the poverty cycle, without adding a reduced library service.

And that's what royalties to authors would mean, I'm sure. Most provinces have rotten library services, totally unsupported, already. Ontario is an exception. Librarians fight the royalty idea because they know full well that their budgets would not be increased to meet the cost of services they already can't afford, and even more money for authors.

Canadians have a habit of asking the poor to solve our economic problems. I agree that writers are badly paid and solutions must be found. For example, if everyone who has ever attended university could be induced to buy just one Canadian book a year we would have a thriving book industry. But a very poor solution would be a reduced free public library service.

Jean Wright,
Montreal.

QUINTESSENTIAL BULLSHIT?

Sir:

May I interest you in a small contest? When you get in reviews like Tony Kilgallin's one of W.O. Mitchell's *The Vanishing Point* (December) — you seem to have several in each issue — offer a small prize to your readers for short reviews of the reviews. In such a contest, my entry for Kilgallin's review would be: Quintessential Bullshit.

I used to find *Books In Canada* most useful in keeping myself posted on current Canadian publications which I might otherwise have missed. Lately it seems to have become a vehicle for poseur posturing, vide Richard Lubbock and Peter Reilly. Is it no longer possible to commission straightforward reviews in straightforward language?

James H. Gray,
Calgary.

FRONTIER VIEWS

PAINTERS IN THE NEW LAND

MICHAEL BELL
McClelland & Stewart
cloth \$2250; 224 pages

CORNELIUS KRIEGHOFF

HUGHUES DE JOUVANCOURT
Musson
cloth \$29.95; 144 pages

reviewed by Al Purdy

"PAINTING," AS THE art historian Paul Duval says, "fit entered Canada as the handmaiden of religion." In New France, as in Europe, artists were both taught and given employment to execute ecclesiastic works to the greater glory of God — and of course to the spiritual authorities who commissioned them. During the 16th and 17th centuries religious and lay art were in urgent demand in New France. There were also itinerant untutored painters exploring the backwoods and villages, doing rough portraits of farmers and woodsmen. The life of these early painters can only be imagined, reminiscent as they are of wandering fiddler's and tinker's. Some nights they slept hungry under the stars in zero weather or in rain; at other times they ate the farmer's own fare and slept near a log fire. They have no parallel in the 20th century.

MAYOR HOWLAND The Citizens' Candidate

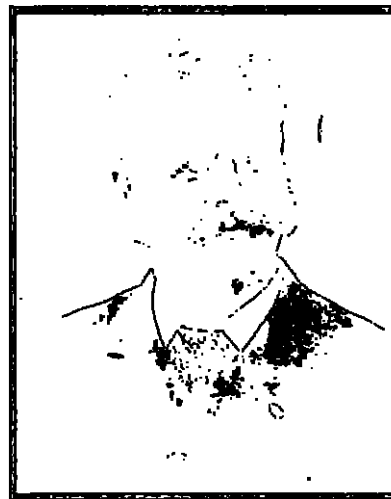
by Desmond Morton

"... A light and pleasant history, a kindly satire reminiscent of Leacock's great election in Missinaba county".

Karl Jaffary, *Toronto Star*.

"The first thing to recognize about this book is that it is rather fun".

Graham Fraser, *Globe and Mail*



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After the British conquest on the **Plains** of Abraham, when settlements edged along the shorelines of rivers and lakes in Upper and Lower Canada, pushing westward in the 19th century, English military artists **left** **watercolour** records of garrison towns and frontier **encampments**. Officers of that time were **required** to have some knowledge of **watercolour** painting and to "acquire a certificate of diligence from the Drawing Master" (of the regiment). At the English **Royal Military Academy** **officer-cadets** "were required to draw the **terrain** of a battlefield in order to provide data to establish **artillery** batteries and **fortifications**". Strange requirements for the bloody trade of sokliiring!

It was not until 1875 that photography reached a stage of development enabling it to replace the lightweight **watercolourist's field** equipment. By that time, however, army **officers** and English **travellers** had left behind **what** was practically the only **pictorial** record of early Canada. Native painters such as **Paul Kane**, **travelling** with the Hudson's Bay Company brigades westward, were very **rare** birds indeed. By comparison, most early **Canadian** artists, such as **Hamel**, **Berczy** and **Plamondon**, were nearly sedentary, specializing in portraiture.

Painters in a New Land gathers together some 200 of these early **watercolours** and sketches. In nearly every way, I **find** the result enthralling. It's fortunate-at least **to me** — that **photography** was not practical until around 1875. If it had been, the loss might have been greater than the gain and these luminous looks at what Canada was replaced by the cold camera.

Of **course** the artists were all influenced by their **European** training. Of course they saw a strange country in terms of familiar manicured landscapes. But they also added the dimension of themselves **to** their paintings. Not always "the terrain of a **battlefield**" — **but** a new town; **land** being cleared, and yes, oddly the trees look like falling soldiers; rebels at **Beauharnois** in 1838, with scythes and crude spears, seem **right** from the French Revolution; the covered bridge at Trenton (my **hometown**) has lumberjacks balanced on logs in front of it; Highway 401 in 1830 is a dirt track between tall trees, where a long-dead man, small boy and dog **walk east or westward**; a long **file** of men with rifles plods through soft snow climbing higher into the mountains (**H.J. Warre's** **exploring** party); building the

Dawson Road at **Kashabowie** Station, northern Ontario. For me, the **light** from these paintings, drawn from the past, illuminates many blank spaces in that lost and uncrowded **world**.

The **long-faced**, bearded and stem Dutch gentleman of the "**self** portrait" in **his** book is Cornelius Krieghoff. He is a roisterer and heavy drinker, a man who **likes** women. I am trying to make up my mind whether the **present cliché** of **Canadian** habitant with **tuque** and corn cob pipe really existed in **Krieghoff's** period or whether the artist fumbled **himself** into Immortality by inventing it. In any case, **this** furiously industrious 'Dutchman' chronicled Quebec **during** the middle **19th** century, painted **Indians**, painted **everything**, even a stylish race horse and rider, even his partly nude wife as a sexy Cleopatra. For **Krieghoff** was a virtuoso. It is impossible to **imagine** a style, terrain **or** subject he couldn't execute. Still-life, landscape, portrait, any damn thing. Oddly enough, he served three years in the U.S. Army, recording the Seminole Wars for the Vietnam generation, deserting when he began his second hitch.

Krieghoff's best-known and most characteristic work is signed with his style, making an actual signature unnecessary. **Clichés** or not, habitants play **cards**, bilk the **toll-gate**, romping **through** brightly **lighted** winter landscapes or darker interiors **like** **picturesque** children. And I think they **are** **clichés**. But I'll ask **René Levesque** about that sometime. Forty-five of these **Krieghoffs** are tipped-in **colour**, plus more than **100** in black and white. De **Jouvancourt** also supplies a somewhat awkward and stilted biography of the artist. It's impossible for me to know whether **this** is the fault of translator or author.

'Comparing them with those in **Marius Barbeau's** 1934 **Krieghoff** (long out of print and **expensive**), the present volume's reproductions are much clearer, more brilliant and more numerous. When **Krieghoff** died at 57, in Chicago, no one knew how many paintings had flowed **from** his hands. **In** fact no one thought it very **important**. But when one of them turned up in New Zealand a few months ago, the **finder** stopped worrying about his bank balance.

Painters in a New Land has large chunks of contemporary prose (to the paintings) included. **People** like **Susanna Moodie** and Isaac Weld, **travellers** and settlers, soldiers and professional writers. Frances **Brooke** says

In 1769: "What man of common **sense** would stay to be **overlook'd** In England, who can have **rival** beauties contest for him in Canada?" Well, that seems a good motive for **emigration**.

Whether the **paintings** in either of these books is great art I don't know. That seems irrelevant anyway. But some of the **impressionistic** **watercolours** in *New Land* seem to me to come close, particularly **Ellice's** "The Rebels at **Beauharnois**" and the **view** of York with **yellow** light pouring out **from** the paper. Both books are **tremendously** enjoyable for dozens of reasons. I **could** use that **high-sounding** word, "heritage", out it's hardly **necessary**. **Paintings are their own** reward. □

BREUGHEL AT VERSAILLES'

0 TORONTO

WILLIAM KURELEK

Introduction by James Bacque
new press
cloth \$10.00; illustrated; 43 pages

reviewed by Kay Burkman

SURE, TORONTO'S a rich city — one of the wealthiest in Canada — but we hide **our** riches **in** the oddest places. You might say that The Colonnade on **Bloor** Street is a pretty fancy spot, with its timeless ladies and clever young men waltzing around displays of elegant imports, but that's just a hint of Toronto's wealth. The **real** stuff is over in Kensington Market.

This used to be a well-kept **secret**, **you know**, at least among those **persistent** natives who started **calling** the city **Trawnà**. Artists and students started mingling among the Portuguese and Jews in Kensington Market because **the** fruit and meat were fresh and reasonable and because they **liked** the Old **Country** merchant who haggled with them over prices. More and more people found out about Kensington, and in the past few summers there have **been** more people over there than up in the Colonnade. Kensington isn't

a secret any more, especially now that William Kurelek has painted it.

As a matter of fact, Toronto has few secrets left since Kurelek's series of 21 Toronto paintings came out in book form. Without leaving home, anyone can discover Massey Hall, Rosedale, Scarborough Bluffs and the East End beaches. They're all there, bold as daylight in Kurelek's new book, 0 Toronto.

But that's not to say Trawna natives won't make 'new discoveries with Prairie-born Kwelek. How about those ripe young swingers on the Strip? (The artist explains for non-natives that this is "the part of lower Yonge street that concentrates on sexual titillation".) Kurelek paints this scene in an unexpected way; he is, after all, the man who took the Canadian Prairies right into the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In another manner, he projects the Manitoba wheatfields onto Toronto's Yonge Street: in his painting "The Strip" a devil-figure is shown on a tractor harvesting the swingles into fornicating couples. Kurelek explains his vision:

The term "strip" is used in farming and lumbering to designate a small parcel of a crop to be harvested by one man . . . The wandering crowds congregating on the sidewalks of Yonge Street in the evenings appear allegorically like the crop talked of in the Bible. They are ready for harvesting, but alas, in this case, by the wrong person. (Italics mine.)"

I consider it significant that in Kurelek's more affectionate vision of "Balsam Street After Heavy Snow-fall", it is not just one man (as the devil on "The Strip"), but all of the neighbours on the street who work together to clear away the snow. Our hope, Kurelek's paintings seem to imply, lies in the sharing and realization of common worthwhile goals.

In this spirit, Kwelek has added his notes toward the understanding of each painting in 0 Toronto, but paradoxically five or six of the most explicit paintings in the Toronto series have also been the most debated. Kurelek calls these his "message" paintings' and their philosophy is decidedly God-fearing. The Biblical metaphors are criticized by those who

prefer their art "pure", but if, for example, one removed Kurelek's figure of Christ (ignored by Christmas shoppers) from the steps of City Hall, the painting would become cluttered and meaningless. The fact is that these metaphors occupy the physical focus of the painting as well as the emotional focus of their conception:

"It's precisely because I'm proud of this city and love it that I can't help but worry about certain disturbing elements spreading into her life," Kurelek wrote when his Toronto series opened at the Isaacs Gallery. James Bacque adds 'in his Introduction to 0 Tomnto:

You could think Toronto is too sophisticated for him; his anecdotal kind of art doesn't belong in a bit modern place, he is like Breughel at Versailles.

But Kwelek transcends the modern and his Toronto series speaks eloquently of the passion this city exacts from eve" the most casual of visitors. □

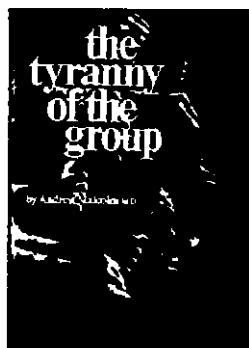
Kay Burkman is a Toronto poet.



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POSITIVELY THE MAIN

A WOMAN OF HER AGE.

JACK LUDWIG
McClelland & Stewart
cloth \$7.95; 197 pages

reviewed by **Michael Smith**

AGAINST WHAT SEEM to be pretty stiff odds, Jack Ludwig has retreated an 11-year-old short story, set in an already overworked locale and built around a character who sometimes comes dangerously close to caricature, into a tight and raunchy new short novel. Back in 1962, in a story titled "A Woman of Her Age", Ludwig introduced Doba Goffman a 75-year-old former radical who takes a purging visit by limousine back to her em-

-poverished roots in the midst of Montreal's Jewish slum, the Main. By 1973, in a book titled *A Woman of Her Age*, Ludwig has increased Doba's age to 84, added such omnibus chic epithets as "quasicapitalist lackey-flunkey resident male chauvinist sexist pig", and populated the oid lady's world with the necessary characters to flesh his short story but to novel length.

On Friday — the only day in the novel's spa" — Doba leaves her empty mansion up on the mountain to return to the teeming world of Himmelfarb the glazier, Mitchell the butcher and Triminiuk's delicatessen, the epicentre of the Main and the only place in Montreal where real ice-cream chairs still exist. Ludwig writes: "It used to be Westmount: today everybody remembers the Main. Mordecai Richler did it singlehanded. If a Montrealer isn't from the Main now he feels like shit." It's perfectly apt for Ludwig, who hales originally from Winnipeg, to acknowledge this obvious similarity in their work, but Ludwig's Main is far different from Richler's youthful St. Urbain Street. By now the Main that

Doba remembers is already half des-troyed, fallen to Mayor Jean Drapeau and the wrecker's hammer, and most of Doba's memories become also re-minders of impending death. Poor Himmelfarb's horse is so decrepit now that he can hardly lift his lame old leg, and Barney Olin, who has secretly loved Doba since the needleworker picnic after World War I, snoozes dreaming that the Messiah is coming and fails to wake to Doba's call.

Doba is physically present — barring glimpses — in only four of the novel's 12 chapters as her day Pro-gresses from rising in the morning to the Sabbath after sunset. But, even so, Ludwig dwells long enough on a cer-tifiably dotty old lady, whose pen-chant for hip-thinking young people and radical causes tend to recall Patfick Dennis's Auntie Mame, Graham Greene's Aunt Augusta and Monty Python's Hell's Grannies. True, her character — a strong one — "ever really jars the reader, though dressed in a faded French workshirt, rapping with the tedious, polemical hippies around the Summit Lookout. old Doba is briefly difficult to imagine.

COHEN



The Disinherited Matt Cohen

A novel of the land and its impact on a family dynasty . . . "Cohen writes with a superb sense of the nuances of love and the hollowness of the refusal to love . . . a real story about real people, which, as all such stories must be, is touched with anger, disillusion, even madness". — Margaret Atwood
\$8.95

SMITH

Lord Nelson Tavern Ray Smith

The Montreal Gazette calls Smith "the most accomplished fantasist writing in Canada today". Smith's *Lord Nelson Tavern* proves it. . . a delightful carnival of fantastically believable people written with a great comic sense of the bizarre.
\$6.95



SEARS



The Lark in the Clear Air Dennis T. Patrick Sears

A wild, Irish, and bawdy novel written with roaring boisterousness and high comedy. Writes Val Clery of CBC, "It is the story, largely true I suspect, of an orphaned boy becoming a man on the rugged rim of the Canadian Shield. The texture of the story and the characters brought to life in it are as robust and earthy and wayward as the country itself." \$6.95

NEW NOVELS FOR SPRING from McClelland & Stewart

The novel's critical event has occurred before the book begins, in the accidental death of Doba's son Jimmy, an attractive young businessman whose success is largely responsible for transplanting the family far from their Main beginning. Thus we meet Jimmy's bitchy widow, Shirley, the chicken-slaughterer's daughter who is finally able to reject her snotty second husband only after Triminiuk's famous hot mustard — an ordeal by fire — succeeds where her impotent analyst has failed. And glandular Maxie Bubis, Shirley's spurned lover, who fears Triminiuk's pastrami for what it might do to his dreadful face full of pimples and forever remembers attending Jimmy's funeral in the dead man's own black silk suit.

Each chapter but the last is a kind of portrait, either of Doba or of those whose lives have touched hers either through Jimmy or the Main. One of these, a short chapter about Barney, is perhaps not worth isolating quite so prominently; sadly, Ludwig fails to exploit fully the remarkable character of Gershon Triminiuk, but at 197 pages the novel is so short that a brief, irrelevant interlude is hardly a deterrent.

Backwards run the sentences in a fair representation of Jewish idiom, and — too often — run together the words in a cute stylistic trick that Ludwig has affected, producing, in turn, such abominable mouthfuls as "aboutturned", "pinkandaqua wedgies" and "convicthaircut". Like many, many similar books the novel is also peppered with Yiddish words and phrases for which we goyim sometimes need some translation, but it takes a Gentile totally lacking in deductive powers to miss the best lines. Perhaps the book's greatest strength (and perhaps its greatest weakness) is its pace; for Ludwig, in updating a dated story, has apparently written and rewritten his contemporary references to the point of utmost currency. There are references to Trudeau, Drapeau, Mao, Nixon, Johnson, Kennedy, James Cross and Pierre Laporte. A Jewish matron no longer simply yells at her grandchildren but hectors them with constant threats of a visit from the FLQ. There is even a contentious reference to Mayor Drapeau and his contentious 1976 Olympics. □

Michael Smith is a former Toronto newspaperman now working on a collection of short stories.

SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN

MEMORIES OF A CATHOLIC BOYHOOD

HARRY J. BOYLE
Doubleday
cloth \$6.95; 192 pages

reviewed by Douglas Marshall

STRANGE, AT LEAST to those of us who never came under their influence, 'are the rites of the one true and apostolic Church in the matter of education. Separate schools can perhaps be defended on the grounds that young Catholic minds are too easily led astray by exposure to heretical philosophy. But so barbaric and illiberal were the institutions many Roman Catholic writers remember having attended that the result was often a more rigorous test of faith than any proselytizing Protestant could invent. Think of Joyce and Clonglowes and the apostasy and exile that followed. And now here's Harry Boyle looking back on a college cum concentration camp he calls St. Gerald's staffed mainly by Germanic priests in a city that sounds like Kitchener, Ont.

To be young, poor and Catholic in a rural Ontario village during the 1920s and early 1930s was to choose between staying on the farm or having a vocation. Despite the efforts of his well-meaning mother to steer him toward the priesthood, the only call Boyle heard was to become a writer. "I can't understand women," his father growled at one point. "If they had their way, the country would be arse-deep in priests." Eventually Mrs. Boyle cashed in her Victory Bonds and sent young Harry to St.-Gerald's for a year in the secret hope he would yet see the holy light. He nearly did during the Easter retreat. But fortunately for Canadian literature, the lure of the library — even a library when Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* proved stronger than the pull of the chapel.

St. Gerald's was a low-cost institution with a cinder campus, a defunct

swimming pool, and a reputation for discipline. The food was terrible and girls were taboo: "They were, in simple fact, anathema." In this authoritarian atmosphere, the majority of students (who ranged from farm lads to the spoiled sons of South American millionaires) were in a perpetual state of frustration and rebellion. Some of the exploits Boyle describes are hilarious. Others demand our admiration. But for the contemporary non-Catholic, life at St. Gerald's mainly sparks feelings of pity. It was all so Irrational and self-defeating.

Like Joyce, Boyle survived to write about the experience. (We wonder how many creative souls didn't — and don't.) Unlike Joyce, he even retains a measure of affection for his old school; St. Gerald's, he concludes, "was a sanctuary on a long journey".

But then lie spent only one year there and suffered only one breakdown. So *Memories of a Catholic Boyhood* is not a bitter tirade or a vehicle for paying off old scores. Bather, it's an episodic evocation of the pleasures as well as the pains of youth recollected in fairly mellow tranquillity. There are sketches of his earlier years, drawn with warmth and sensitivity, and some delightfully frank descriptions of his first encounters with the opposite sex. There's also a brief postscript in which he tells us how he met his literary mentor, a loading-dock foreman with an unBunkerish penchant for Carlyle and Macaulay.

But St. Gerald's remains the central formative force. And although Boyle survived it, he never really escaped it. The scars it left are visible throughout his written work — particularly in *The Great Canadian Novel*, which was published last year. Maybe in its oddly brutal way the Church knows what it is doing after all. □



The end of Joe Rosenblatt

RECENTLY ANOTHER reviewer and I were sitting in the office of Kildare Dobbs, the Toronto *Star* book columnist, and I remarked that I had just read a new selected edition of William Hazlitt, the writer and painter who was a friend of Lamb, Coleridge and others. Until then, I admitted, I had read only scattered essays by him, the stock anthology pieces, but never before had sat down and read him through; it was just one of things I'd never got around to. Continuing to chat with the other freelancer while Dobbs waded through a mound of papers on his desk, I expressed my renewed amazement at how much a modern Hazlitt was, with his familiar style "as any one would speak in common conversation, who had a thorough command and choice of words, or who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes". Hell, I said, making the point perhaps a bit too strongly, old Hazlitt was so far ahead of his time as a stylist that — excepting an anachronism every now and then, the odd amongst, the occasional betook — he wrote just as Robert Fulford does now. Whereupon Dobbs looked up from his labour to ask with the straightest of faces: "Where would he have read Fulford?"

This set me to thinking about Fulford as a man-of-letters and about the role he plays as a cultural disseminator, editing *Saturday Night*, writing his weekly column for the *Star* and other papers, broadcasting telecasting, commenting on Canadian matters for (in the past) *Down Beat*, *New Republic*, *Saturday Review* and (just recently) *the New York Times*. My conclusion was that he ranks not so much with "the writers of imaginative essays and other non-academic prose" whom Dobbs recently defined as men-of-letters but somewhere else in a broader category with the makers of what Herbert Read (in his essay on Swift) termed contingent literature — "authors who only write when there is a public and external stimulus". (rather than the with practitioners of absolute literature "whose stimulus is subjective, who write because they enjoy writing as a free and creative activity").

Within this realm, I reasoned, Fulford is what some 18th-century man-of-letters, not the later Hazlitt so much as Johnson, would have been if he were writing today. For somewhere along the line Johnson would have worked as a newspaper reporter and later editor (one sees him in Chicago's

golden age of crime, pontificating over *Schnitzel at Schlogl's* Round Table) but would have risen above it all by sheer strength and liveliness of mind, while retaining his affection for the cityroom. His ideas would remain coloured by his first profession, just as old newsman Fulford's art criticism, for example, is so coloured and tends thus to be three parts reportage to two parts analysis. what I mean is that Fulford's style, his prose style certainly but also his critical thought patterns, are firmly rooted in the reportorial tradition, like those of H.L. Mencken, whom he resembles in other ways.

It has been said of Fulford that during his first stint on the *Globe and Mail* in the 1950s — 'when he worked his way from copyboy to sports assistant to sportswriter to general assignment reporter, all before turning 21 — he could be seen at all times with a stack of Mencken's works beside him. It was by studying them, say the *Globe* veterans who perpetuate this story, that he perfected the tight yet graceful and funny way he has with prose which is now his hallmark. Fulford denies this, saying that perhaps from time to time one such book may have been visible on his desk but that there was never any concerted effort at emulation. But a similarity at least is undeniable in the two men's styles of writing as well as in their manners of moving and shaking.

In the latter the similarity is less pronounced than in the former, as Fulford lacks the eventually tiresome iconoclasm Mencken directed toward paper targets and as Mencken, an amateur in many areas where Fulford is an enthusiast, lacked the ability to write evenly about any number of media. This is a skill inherent in Fulford, who writes well and frequently of art, cinema and television as well as of books and politics, and is really more a sort of mixed media Burton Rascoe than a diversified HLM. Yet what Fulford did learn those long years ago from Mencken (whose first editions he has begun collecting, along with those of A.J. Liebling) does sometimes come into blatant play. This happens when he suffers from that periodic lull of journalistic men-of-letters, when pyrotechnic opinions are required at times when, frankly, he has no opinions and little interest, but when the show must go on and the white space filled in an 11th-hour display of consummate professionalism. Compare, for instance, the two quota-

tions that follow, in which each writer is lamenting the shlock review copies that pollute the mall of every professional book reviewer. The first, by Mencken, is from the Chicago *Tribune* of Christmas Day, 1927, and was posthumously reprinted in the book *The Bathtub Hoax* (1958). The second, by Fulford, was his old daily *Star* column for Jan. 11, 1966, and appeared again two years* later in his collection *Crisis at the Victory Buriesk*.



ROBERT I

a note on

MENCKEN

Being in a lazy mood, and disinclined to literary composition, I spent the whole afternoon looking through them. What I found, not to put too fine a point upon it, was simply bilge. In the whole quintet there WY not the slightest sign of anything eve" remotely describable as literary skill or passion. The five authors were only lucky bunglers who had somehow managed to get their drivel published.

Why are such books published? OR what theory do reputable publishers go to all the elaborate trouble of getting them set up,



FULFORD:

in his style

printing them, binding them, encasing them in gaudy slipcovers, advertising them voluptuously, and burdening the book stores with them? Who reads them? Who, having ordinary sanity and taste, could read them? I often wonder. For they come out in an endless stream, hailed, whopped up, and then suddenly forgotten. Six months after publication they have disappeared completely. Who stands the loss? And why?

FULFORD

Every morning a young man comes into my office with a pile of a half a dozen books, and on the average three of them fall into this category.

Take one that turned up yesterday: *They Gave Royal Assent*, subtitled *The Lieutenant-Governors of British Columbia*. Imagine it. Not just a book on lieutenant-governors — a subject with truly monumental possibilities for producing boredom — but a book on *British Columbia lieutenant-governors*.

Now the thing' about lieutenant-governors is that in general, they don't do anything. They just sort of *preside*. Their lives lack, not to put too fine a point on it, drama. So who will read this book? If you were a Lieutenant-governor of British Columbia you might well want to read it, and if you aspired to that office you would almost certainly be *anxious to obtain* a copy. But surely that makes a limited market. In addition there are descendants and other connections of lieutenant-governors; but this, too, must be a comparatively small group. Will the author, D.A. McGregor, ('veteran journalist, editor and history-researcher,' the jacket says) meet friends who have read his book and who will congratulate him on it? 'Nice job on the lieutenant-governors old man,' one imagines them saying. But who would they be?

The style is almost the same, with Mencken's perhaps now just the slightest bit dated. The thinking is the same, and so is the wit. Both men spring from the same newspaper tradition that has had such an impact on North American writing; from the tradition that believes the myth of sportswriters as, in Seymour Krim's words, "angels on the typewriter, Shakespeares with an Ohio accent, gravystained Marcel Prousts". Each man has remained planted there, keeping his hand in newspaper work and taking pride in being the highest embodiment of the form. Each has used it as a base to merge cultural reporting with cultural interpretation — the little, periodic pieces adding up to some Sort of aesthetic overview. In his style, each is the purist — something newsmen pride themselves on thinking they are but rarely are in fact. Mencken of course was a linguist who took philology out of the hands of academics (who snatched it back after his death) and turned it over to writers and readers, where it belongs.

Both Mencken and Fulford are the kind of writer who always ends up

writing the newspaper stylebook but never seems to have any influence on his paper's quality beyond that, and so shines by comparison. Little islands of literacy in seas of newspeak and its condensed sister, headspeak, where in sources are forever informed and events are always slated to take place. Fulford writes like Mencken in that he knows how to spread interpretation down a page smoothly and that he never refers to people when he means persons and that he would sooner suffer cardiac seizure, or be forced to use an electric typewriter, than have per cent appear in one of his pieces as one word instead of two. It is a noble tradition, and the value of Fulford, beyond being an excellent cultural writer of this type, is that he is the only one of his stripe Canada possesses.

Fulford claims to be the product of "a long and remarkably undistinguished family", but this is untrue in terms of the tradition under discussion. His father, Ab Fulford, was for 30 years an editor at The Canadian Press. Both his grandfathers were printers and one of them was also a bookseller. A great-uncle was an itinerant newspaperman in places like Buffalo and London, Ont., where his great-grandfather edited the London *Advertiser*. One 19th-century ancestor (the precise details are lost) was a compositor on the New York *Tribune* and proved indispensable' in that pre-typewriter age since he was the only one in the shop able to read the awful scraggly handwriting of Horace Greeley, the editor, and so the only one able to set the editorials in type.

Until Fulford's first book, *This Was Expo*, the 'only book written by a member of the family was *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear*, co-authored by his father's aunt, Theresa Delaney, who was captured during the Riel Rebellion in 1885 and whose surname Fulford combined with his own middle name to create Marshall Delaney, the pseudonym under which he has written *Saturday Night's* movie criticism since 1966, two years before assuming the editorship there. A collection of these pieces, *Marshall Delaney at the Movies*, is to be published this year by Peter Martin Associates. Fulford is also working on a guide book to the arts in Canada for the Department of the Secretary of State, as well as preparing to edit a series of monographs on Canadian artists for House of Ariansi. □

DOUG FETHBRING

OBVIOUS SUBTLETIES

DEATH GOES BETTER WITH COCA-COLA

DAVE GODFREY
Press Porcépic
cloth \$6.95

reviewed by Nancy Naglin

SIX YEARS ago when House of Anansi was first starting out, Dave Godfrey published a collection of short stories as one of their first books. Anansi now is firmly established and Dave Godfrey has since moved on to other matters. His stories — once reflective of the last frenetic days of the late 1960s — are republished in a new edition by Press Porcépic to show hints of what the early 1970s are becoming. All the stories in *Death Goes Better With Coca-Cola* are hunting stories. Many were first published in *Saturday Night*

under the guise of a special outdoors column thanks to the cunning and courtesy of then editor Kildare Dobbs.

The main characters are usually self-contained, lofty-minded, tastefully cynical young men who wander into the woods, in and out of personal relationships or out to both coasts. Their time is spent in the company of other cynical young men killing birds or moose or rabbits, hunting for clarity among the larger issues of sex and death and politics. The men are smart, arrogant and, in their own way, cruel. One gets the impression that if one were to meet them, they would be insufferable.

As befits the gloom of the last years of the decade, a pallor of futility and disillusionment shows in the most '60ish of the stories. A once-talented young man is hopelessly lost on acid in "Night Tripper", a war resister returns to face trial in "Two Smiths", and a best friend is "unable to succeed even in the simple task of maiming a friend who desired physical maiming" in order to escape military service in another of the tales. Obsession with war and political action revolve around the tools and instruments of death — guns and fish hooks.

Godfrey writes in rapid-fire thoughts covered with layer upon layer of nuance and implied meaning. In the best of the stories, he manages a sustained poignancy about this fumbling group of young men, unhappy with their girlfriends, straining at their consciences, pointing their guns at old birds and aiming for "the greater distance beyond the islands". Even when the style falters from too much that is implied or simply too personal to be clear, the fictions remain moving accounts of loneliness, exclusion and misunderstanding.

Stories in which Godfrey struggles for private answers to private lives, in which his group of angry young men mellow into partial solutions, in which husbands outgrow their need to consume their wives, all presage the quiet m-ordering of lives of the early '70s. The war resisters have melted into bookstore clerks, society has caught up with or by-passed the acid trips, and Godfrey's wide-eyed killers consider pregnant wives and the various meanings of resignation.

The young characters of a young book are concerned with ordering experience. Self-discovery is recent enough and retrospection still far

NEW from Doubleday

KOSYGIN IS COMING by Tom Ardies

A fast-paced thriller of espionage and conspiracy set largely in Vancouver's West End and Gastown district. The talented Canadian author of *Pandemic*, presents a high voltage tale of intrigue involving a visit to Canada by Russia's Premier Kosygin and the efforts of the R.C.M.P.'s Special Branch to protect him from a potential assassin. \$6.95

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FALLING BODIES by Sue Kaufman

The author of *Diary of a Mad Housewife* tells the story of the slow disintegration of the perfect nuclear family. A funny, thoughtful examination of upper middle class urban family life in this decade. \$9.25

Canadian authors

Doubleday Canada Limited

105 Bond Street, Toronto, Ontario M5B 1Y3

enough ahead to warrant clever, sharp summations. "Death, too, I think at times, is just another one of our Match Box toys," declaims an appropriately saddened and wisened character with the kind of bittersweet, post-adolescent cockiness that justifies the title.

For this edition Godfrey purposely arranged his stories around illustrations from old mail-order catalogues. Ads for high-grade chains, quality boots for men or plumbing supplies underscore fairly obvious subtleties. Oriental prints and proverbs suggest a personal philosophical attitude, as though each story were a moral lesson guiding characters and readers alike. It is unclear, however, whether the U.S.

Army guns contrasting with Sears forges and quality kitchen ware are intended as harmless period pieces, or implied acknowledgement of the differences between Canada and the U.S. or between killing and the times that come after.

In the years since they were first published, Godfrey's stories seem to have expanded. Although sometimes abrupt or uneven, they are important as comments on the years of the '60s. More importantly, unlike other testimonials to the times, these stories demand thinking. □

Nancy Naglin, a Toronto short-story writer, contributes to Saturday Night, and the Toronto Star.

small presses and magazines

KINGSTON WRITER Gall Fox seldom has been mentioned in connection with the established and emerging female poets like Margaret Atwood, Susan Musgrave and Paulette Jiles whose frequently sexual and sometimes confessional poetry make them, as a group, the brightest source of light in English Canadian poetry at the moment. Partly this is because Fox lacks some of the flashy excellence of the others, but partly it is because she so far has published obscurely (though widely) through small presses of limited distribution. Her first and still most substantial collection was Dangerous Season, published in 1969 by Quarry Press, which also brought out her Lines in Contentment, a broadsheet. Later, in 1970, Fiddlehead Books issued her collection The Royal Collector of Dreams. She now has two new publications, both sequential in form, one another Fiddlehead book, the other from middle-echelon Oberon Press, which should at last bring her some wider notice.

This second book is Flight of the Pterodactyl! (\$4.50 cloth, \$2.95 wrappers) which comprises half of a dual volume of which Plies by Lloyd Abbey is the other part. Abbey's cycle of 23 poems, some dense but all presented straightforwardly, takes as its starting point the existence of insects, birds, small animals and reptiles. It is interesting stuff from a young poet from whom till now little has been heard and it is as evocative of moods

as it is descriptive. Fox's half of the book is a single poem in 15 parts that uses the extinct pterosaur's ruminations on the time when it was merely endangered to make an obvious analogy with man. It's quite controlled without being mannered (somewhat under the influence of the recent Atwood) and is perhaps the best thing Fox has done to date. Less satisfying is the Fiddlehead affair The Ringmaster's Circus (Saannes, \$2 wrappers), a series of poems concerned with various circus performers but lacking unity beyond this. It suffers also from a great deal of extraneous imagery. Gall Fox's SO% of the Oberon volume, though, fits together well; and the whole package is pleasingly designed — though Oberon continues to 'put the prelims at the back of the book, after the text, in disregard of the requirements set down in the Copyright Act.

AFTER LANGUISHING in "overmatter" for more than a year, the 60th issue of The Tamarack Review, the last one edited by Robert Weaver, appeared last October. Now the 61st, the debut of Ivon Gwen (former head of Oxford University Press hem. who assumed the editorship following a reportedly bloodless coup) has come out es. well. On the whole, it is excellent. Owen begins with a brief editorial on the transition in editors, which concludes in an attack on Dove Godfrey in riposte for Godfrey's attack on him in

George Woodcock's Canadian Literature. Among the other contributions are a new story by Alice Munro and a fine piece on Layton by Milton Wilson, former editor of the Canadian Forum of whom lately not much has been heard. The inference to be drawn is that now Tamarack will resume regular quarterly publication.

Contained in that final issue, put out by Weaver (who remains, like John Robert Colombo, on the magazine's board) was a reminiscence by Woodcock of English little magazines of the 1930s, the first excerpt to appear from Woodcock's two-volume autobiography-in-progress, which should be a veritable clearinghouse of information on libertarianism and literature in Canada and Britain during the past 30 years.

Unrelated to this for the most part, Woodcock has been writing a great deal for the magazines lately, with three excellent pieces appearing in rapid succession in literary journals. The first is his editorial in Canadian Literature 58, a review of The Politics of Literature: Dissenting Essays on the Teaching of English, edited by Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter, which reflects Woodcock's admirable anti-institutional bent. Another is his poetic eulogy and letter on Emma Goldman, the libertarian and feminist who died in exile in Toronto in 1940, in the Hanukkah number of Jewish Dialog. But the most remarkable piece is the 12-page "Fragments From a Tenth-Hour Journal" in the new third issue of Northern Journey, an exciting magazine the only fault of which is its irregularity of publication. The Woodcock journal, apparently kept es training for the writing of the memoirs, is a fascinating document for its insights into the personality and work habits of this extraordinary man and writer. "How tedious and how pitiful," he writes of the link between permissiveness and boredom in literature, "one finds these sexual acrobats, these monomaniac fuckers and frosters, stuffing their sweaty bolls under one's nose! Bells have their place, a yard away from the brain." Northern Journey is surely the most entertaining of the little magazines and the best edited — it is edited in fact like a big magazine that just happens to be little.

NOTES: HAS ANYONE ever considered the influence of typography on schools of writing and vice versa and the way in which various editors carry their favourite designs about with

them as they go from place to place or as their influence spreads? William Toye of Oxford University Press and Ivon Owen, formerly with the same firm, were among the founders of *Tamarack* and continue to be involved with it. *Tamarack's* typography- and general style, down to the English single quotes around double quotes, is the same as that of a great many Oxford books and certainly the most representative ones. Similarly, the *Canadian Fiction Magazine* (with its new issue, number 11, a perfect-bound, quarterly-sized journal) bears a strong resemblance to the books of Sono Nis Press, the owner of which, J. Michael Yates, and at least two of the authors of which, Andreas Schroeder and Michael Bullock, are all editors of the magazine. In this case, however, it is probably traceable to the large West Coast printing house of Morriss, which also prints *Canadian Literature* and the University of British Columbia Press titles, all of which look a great deal alike.

Canada Goose, a new poetry quarterly, has published its first issue, featuring work by westerners Dale Zieroth and Andy Suknaski. Edited by Peter Christensen and done-up in

sometimes eye-wrecking calligraphy, it (or the next issue) may be had for \$2.50 from Canada Goose, Colloquium Study, University of Lethbridge . . . *GUT*, a grimey little magazine edited from 201 Queen St. East, Toronto, by Alfred Rushton, one of the editors of *Guerrilla Free Press* and a sort of Canadian Maxwell Bodenheim figure, has published its second issue. This includes poetry by Hans Jewinski, the fabled poet-cop, and Paulette Jiles, as well as fiction by Rushton and reviews by Penny Johnson and Ted Plantos. It is a damn sight better than the previous issue of last spring, which may well have been the worst little magazine since *Bust*. . . Others to be noted are *Proof Only*, a" iconoclastic tabloid "monthly devoted to writing about art in Ontario" and edited by Coach Houser Victor Coleman; and *Urban Reader*, a digest of urban studies with which Vancouver poet George Payerle is associated. *Proof Only* can be obtained from Box 14, Station P, Toronto; *Urban Reader* from the Information Office, Social Planning Department, City Hall, 453 West 12th Ave., Vancouver V5Y 1Y4. Both, apparently, are free. □

DOUG FETHERLING

WITHOUT THE 'BEAST WITHIN

**ANIMALS WITH HUMAN FACES:
A Guide to Animal Symbolism**

BERYL ROWLAND
University of Tennessee Press
cloth \$10.75; 213 pages

reviewed by Daniel Williman

BERYL ROWLAND, PhD in English from the University of British Columbia, is a professor at York University, Toronto. Her new book was flawlessly typeset in North Carolina and produced in Michigan with funds from the Canada Council. The topic is not national, of course, though there is a cute conceit in the foreword about beavers and frogs. The work of North-



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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

rop Frye and Jay Macpherson may foreshadow a Canadian school of **mythological** criticism but **this is** something else; funny pictures (55 monochromes, with no indication of the texts **they** were **originally** attached to) and strange old notions about 37 real and 12 fictive beasts under 57 **names** arranged alphabetically. It is too small for the coffee-table trade, too expensive for the juvenile and too careless for the scholarly.

The title hints at an essay on the tradition of animal emblems. That would be a worthwhile task and one for which plenty of material is assembled here; but **the** author would have to stick to one tradition, **refrain** from **speaking** for Primitive Man and avoid confusion between the symbolic and arbitrary values of images. **Dr.** Rowland's subtitle embodies exactly that confusion. It also expresses the author's desire to be take" seriously as a "secondary source"; but she chose too few materials. too whimsically, and stumbled too much, to be followed by any but the desperate scholar.

She dips into the classical and medieval reservoir of orderly and authoritative (if usually mistaken) natural **history** and etymology and comes up with only a few odd **frag-**ments, some of **which** she misunderstands. The 12th-century grammarian Alan of Lille, for example, in **his Complaint, Of Nature**, describes 23 animals embroidered on Mother Nature's robe. Most of the beasts are treated in Dr. Rowland's book, but she uses Alan's Latin text for only two, Ass and Camel, and gets its **meaning** wrong in both **cases**. She **finds** crocodile tears meaning hypocrisy in Asterius, but that bishop really said that the crocodile weeps when it bites off a **man's** head because there's not much meat on that part. She thinks that the Roman **coin** called **an as** (from the Creek **heis**, a unit) was named for ass-like **behaviour** and that the Creek gods collectively are **called** the Parthenon. She has two inaccurate etymologies for **lupercal** which she uses without reconciling them, she reads the Greek letters **onokoitēs** as if they were Latin, **Onokoiths**, and she **gives** one careful Latin reading from the Greek Septuagint. And **an** alert editor should have caught "a yardstick whereby to elicit information" and "ability to carry off animals and people at one swoop of its talons".

Meaningful animal images are of two kinds, symbols and emblems; the

two are imperfectly and sporadically distinguished by Dr. Rowland. Symbols are powerful only in their own **nonrational** contexts: dream, myth; ritual, drama. **Taking** symbols out **into** the **light** of reason by a mom or less **ham-handed** psychoanalysis makes **them useful** for moral purposes **in** logical contexts, but deprives them of their **original** power; they become **mere** emblems, compact "nits of instruction in sermons and **iconography**, persuasive to those who have the key.

Most of the medieval emblems, though, have other origins: mistaken natural history, fanciful etymology, saints' **lives**. To cite two examples that Dr. Rowland needed but **missed**: **Isidore** of Seville derives **castor** (beaver) from **castrare** (to geld) and reports that the beast **bites** off its testicles and leaves them to the hunter, who only wanted the **oil** in them; so the beaver stands for **Coura-**

geous Ascesis. A pig means Saint Anthony the Hermit because his **written Life has him** domesticating one.

That's a tradition for which a real guide would be possible and useful; exhaustive comparisons would reveal the lost language that once expressed an important **part** of the **European** mentality. Such a guide would take mom work but **might** not be a much blier book. One way to keep down the size would be to eliminate **all** the documents of stupid spite. Land-**mammals** eat and copulate much like men, but without refinement; dozens of animals have been used **in** racist, sexist and sectarian **vilification**, but no handbook is needed to explicate their monotonous meaning, "beastly". □

Daniel Williman, LMS, PhD, is a self-employed professor of medieval history in Toronto.

THE GOLDEN ROAD TO FREDERICTON

THE FASCINATING WORLD OF NEW BRUNSWICK

*STUART TRUEMAN; McClelland and Stewart
Illustrations by Tom Anthes; cloth \$7.95; 191 pages*

reviewed by Susan Rice

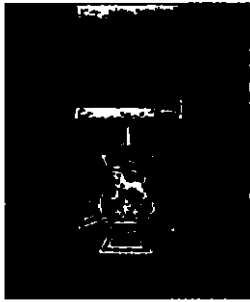
IN THIS **BOOK** Stuart Trueman, former editor of the Saint John **Telegraph Journal** and **Evening Times-Globe**, brings together under one cover a few of the **colourful** characters and places of **his** native province. **The Fascinating World of New Brunswick** fails to fascinate, however, **but** one can scarcely blame **this** on the subjects of **Trueman's** chapters. In his selection he covers the province **reasonably** well, gets off the beaten track a bit, and introduces a good mixture of **craftsmen**, Acadians and businessmen. The problem lies **in** his method of presenting the people and places. The interviews seem awkward, often painfully so when the author's sometimes **purposefully** naive questions are included. Mr. **Trueman** should have brought his long experience of editing to bear on the material. Instead of the stilted accounts of conversations **with** New **Brunswickers** such as Mrs. Hugh

John **Flemming**, founder of the Kindness Clubs, or glassblower Martin **Demaine**, he should have allowed these people to tell **their** own interesting stories. In **some** cases tap&recorded interviews could have been **edited** to fit the requirements of the book.

At **first** glance, this book might appear to be a sort of travel **guide**. **The** four maps, identical but **with** different mutes **emphasized**, might in fact even trick a few tourists into buying a copy for the glove compartment. Misguided they would be; **while** they might find their way to Grand **Manan** Island, fog and all, they **might** not find **their** way off the island **until** **several** chapters later — weather permitting. There is quite a bit of geographical jumping about **in** the book, and the maps don't help. There should have been one good clear, over-all map of **New Brunswick** **included** at the beginning **of** the book. **Large-**

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xxii, 193 pages,, \$9.00 cloth.

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scale, detailed maps should have covered **all** the **main** spots **described**, such as Saint John, St. **Andrews** and Grand **Manan**. The repetition of the same **insignificant** map four **times** seems rather futile.

However, the weakest thing about this book is the completely **uncritical way** Mr. **Trueman** approaches his subject. Really, there **must** be a few things **wrong with** New Brunswick, or why do so **many** of its young people **flee** its borders every year for other parts of **Canada**? Such an important social question as **this is passed over entirely** by the author who seems content to note that at least many people **return** to New **Brunswick in** retirement. There **are no hints**, either, of the **discontent** caused **in** many quarters by the ever-enlarging empire of "famed industrial **giant**" **K.C.** Irving, or of the special problems that must be encountered by the Micmac **and Maliseet Indians**. Also **along this line**, I would like to **know many** more details. For example: **How** much money **per hour** do the 150 girls **working** at **freezing and canning** fresh lobster at **Richibucto Cape** make?

The closest the author **comes** to real criticism is **in** his chapters **on** the city of Saint **John**, and the old Saint John market — obviously subjects dear to his heart. He lashes out **in** quite a salty **manner** at "the bright young bland-faced bow-tied planning **experts**" (from Upper Canada **or** the U.S., of course) who wanted to tear down the old market **building**. One wishes that he had been able to work up enough **fury** to include in his attack those (native New **Brunswickers** as well as outsiders) **who** wish to tear down the rest of old Saint **John** as well. Regrettably, however, the author **notes** with seeming pride that "Saint John is casting off the dolorous image of a quaint, **aging**, rock-ribbed seaport" (surely the **very** 'qualities' that are great about the place?), and that there are such **signs** of "progress" as a **thoroughway** in the heart of the city, a few **skyscrapers**, and a rising population, expected to double in 15 **years**. Oh dear! Soon New Brunswick won't even be a **nice** place to retire to.

The photographic quality of the numerous illustrations **by** Tom **Anthes** makes one **wonder** why photographs themselves were not used. □

Susan Rice is an archivist working in Toronto. Although an Upper Canadian, she studied at the University of New Brunswick, and has a native New Brunswicker son, born in Saint John.

CATHOLIC CONTENDER

HOME SAFELY TO ME

BARRY DICKSON

House of Anansi

cloth \$6.95, paper \$2.95; 144 pages

reviewed by Nancy Naglin

LIKE OTHER first novelists (as well as would-be novelists who, while never writing a word, recall in secret and for company the trials and terrors of their childhood), Barry Dickson, another expatriate from the world of boyhood, has chosen his own thinly disguised youth for his first novel. Michael Harris, the under-achieving, over-chubby, near-contender of Home *Safely To Me* is no Danny Fisher or Duddy Kravitz. Hailing from less difficult cities than New York or Montreal, he's a sensitive, guilt-ridden near-adolescent who escapes the scars of racial or ethnic exclusion but suffers all the same from a less complicated but equally dreary Canadian p o v e r t y .

For Barry Dickson writes well about the personal side of poverty. Not the harsher realities of American slum or ghetto life but the simpler facts of being poor in post-war Ottawa or Toronto where one's interests revolve around food and rent. Dickson's version of street life isn't exactly attractive but to him the obligatory addict seems more eccentric than commonplace, the numbers more shameful than profitable and little Michael more self-conscious than gutsy.

"We always had dogs that had fits or were killed by cats," Michael remembers in his opening lines as if in dire prediction of all the other unfulfilled promises of his young life. A product of a nicely deprived Catholic family desperately clinging to a long-gone respectability, Michael, shunted from a bleary-eyed mother to a querulous and carousing father, watches the members of his family slipping into sin, bearing children without marriage and living without the sacraments.

"Be a success," his mother urges as she ships him off to Ottawa for another stay with his father. But Michael's concerns, like those of all

children, especially the ones who lack the refinements to cover life's crudities, are mainly visceral. He eats four hamburgers soaked in a revolting mess of mustard and ketchup, lusts after marshmallows and with a wisdom and insight that reflects the hopelessness of his adult's world, describes the secret body functions children wonder about and notice in others.

The novel, written from the point of view and memory of a young boy, succeeds in a spare and simple style in recapturing the fears, moral dilemmas and awkwardness of being young, poor and unwanted. Michael thinks he is weak and incompetent. Shuffled about, bullied and ignored, he comes to realize he is strong because of his many weaknesses. After much sniffing, Michael is on his own and Barry Dickson has a winner on his hands after all. The responses of a scared child growing up in an alien and inconsistent world ring true. Fathers punch out mothers, faces bleed and children go under. In this case, the Barry Dickson behind the Michael Harris survived to tell the tale. 0

COOKING THE FORMULA

THE DEVIL'S LIGHTER

JOHN BALLEM

General Publishing

cloth 57.95; 237 pages

reviewed by David Slabotsky

MODERN BUSINESS and modern fiction together have created new mythologies. Like the myths of antiquity, they are direct responses to real anxieties. An example of this can be seen in the formula big-business novels:

Anxiety: Corporate power is remote, inhuman. Myth: Corporations are run from the boardroom. true; but the boardroom is run from the bedroom. Moral: Not to worry; when the seventh corporate veil is lifted, the flesh behind is all too human indeed.

The Devil's Lighter is another telling of the myth, another exposé of the much-exposed theme that big business

is rotten behind its respectable veneer. The novel's greatest virtue lies in its setting — the Canadian oil industry. If any business in the country cries out to be mythologized, this is the one. And at a time when oil has come to symbolize not only wealth and power but life itself, the fever for black gold creates a natural theatre for the murder-mystery novel author John Ballen had in mind.

Unfortunately, the result is disappointing. Instead of the high-powered, action-packed thriller Ballen attempted, *Lighter* is much, much lighter. Indeed. Neither slick nor sleek like the U.S. prototype that is its model, it comes off like a potboiler barely maintaining a steady bubble.

The story is roughly divided into good guys Rod Fraser (handsome, young geologist trying to find his way through the oil patch without getting tainted by the corporate stain) and "Mac" Macpherson (gruff, old oilman, last of the wildcat drillers), and bad guys Frederick Lazarus (fell in love with a lady's heavenly body and paid an orthodontist \$12,000 to fix her deformed mouth) and Luke Willard (Nova Scotia black plotting with Lazarus to blow up the Fraser-Macpherson oil well).

Between the good and the bad falls the shadow (usually naked) of Melinda, a beautiful nymphomaniac who is a bridge over troubled plotters, flying out to the northern Alberta oil field and warning Rod that her husband is planning to murder him. As they sit in a truck on the make-shift airstrip, Melinda confesses that she has come closer to loving him than any other man, but that she can never love because she was raped when still a girl (10 to be exact) and has been frigid ever since (sic). Maybe that explains why she tries harder. Back at the airport hotel she seduces her Eskimo bush pilot. Melinda's cliché-ridden presence is ended when she crashes her pale-pink mustang into a tree, also killing her ineffectual, dildo-toting husband. A most unregrettable demise on both counts.

Ballem is best by the derrick, describing the actual drilling process. His prose is convincing, informative, interesting. One of the most successful chapters explains how Willard creates a giant bomb by drilling into a natural-gas deposit — just far enough so it won't blow up until the next shift comes on. The explosion and the inferno that follow are the "devil's lighter" of the title.:

No one will ever accuse this novel of being profound, and there is no evidence the author intended it to be. However, in settling for superficial psychology and primitive motivation, **Ballem** has sabotaged what could have been exciting fiction. In attempting a novel in the formula class (which this certainly is), **Ballem** should have used his mechanic's checklist and verified if his story was tight (negative), fast-moving (negative), compelling (negative). **Ballem** has not been "hard enough on himself. In sparing the rod, he has spoiled his novel. And about that oil well Rod is drilling throughout the book — it doesn't pay off either.

David Slabotsky is a Toronto writer whose work has been produced by CBC Television and Radio.

BOFFIN ISLAND

THE CHAINING OF PROMETHEUS: Evolution of a Power Structure for Canadian Science

F. RONALD HAYES
University of Toronto Press
cloth \$15.00; 217 pages.

reviewed by David Groskind

"WE HAD in Canada a compulsive desire to give ourselves a national science policy," writes F. Ronald Hayes, Killam Professor of Environmental Science, Dalhousie University. In examining both the compulsion and the policy, he describes how 1960 brought the end of the congenial era of simply giving grants to reputable scientists with good ideas. The Royal Commission on Government Organization (the Glassco Commission) and later the Special Committee of the Senate on Science Policy (the Lamontagne Committee) both proposed administering Canadian science in imitation of business. Professional managers under the Treasury Board began supplanting scientists and systems analysis replaced the desultory allocation of funds. In *The Chaining of Prometheus*, Prof. Hayes looks behind the new rational order of the mandarins and exposes a "older, more

familiar order: the imperatives of politics and personal ambition.

He first convincingly dismisses the logic of using systems analysis to guide the course of research. Systems analysis seeks to provide estimates of the costs and benefits of alternative projects. Yet studies of previously successful research projects — insulin, radar, and television, for example — reveal no common pattern of initiation, selection, and funding. "The time and place of emergence of superior research types is not within the control of granting agencies." In ignoring this elementary principle, the managers appear more interested in good accounting than good science.

And with good reason. Unlike scientists, the authority and salaries of administrators does not increase with the quality of research, but with the expansion of their organization. After the Glassco Commission, the Treasury Board began funding projects on how well their performance could be predicted, quantified, and measured. Because the outcome of research is inherently unpredictable, to secure funds for their departments, managers must favour engineering where they can more readily apply the Treasury Board standards. This is precisely what the Lamontagne Committee recommended.

Moreover, any scheme for rationally selecting priorities in research and development (R&D), must compete with powerful and entrenched political blocks pushing their own sets of priorities. Professor Hayes identifies Canada's current priorities as medical research, military science, and industrial technology. Medical research has such strong support that it receives more money than the available number of medical researchers can strictly spend. The surplus funds spill over into basic research in biochemistry which has a "arguable if marginal association with medicine. As a side effect, this spill-over draws scientists in search of grants into biochemistry and away from other, perhaps more important fields. In military research, the willingness of the U.S. military to buy military products made in Canada often determines allocation of research funds rather than Canadian military needs. As for industry, Prof. Hayes bluntly describes the problem as "how to become competitive in world trade and thus attain a standard of living comparable to that of the United States". Here, however, his analysis falters.

He notes that America's branch plants have supplied Canada with advanced technology at low costs, that American-owned firms perform 44% of R&D in Canada, and that Canadian firms do only half the R&D of foreign-owned firms. He snidely concludes that in R&D, "there is no evidence to support a thesis of American exploitation of the local peasants". Yet the export strength of a "industrial society depends upon its ability to develop new products and cost-saving devices. When multinational corporations produce these innovations in Canada for use by the American economy then it is indeed exploitation. Even worse, Prof. Hayes blithely predicts the end of U.S. technological dominance because of the collapse of U.S. currency, the extravagant waste of the war in Vietnam, and increasingly intense competition from Germany and Japan. Nevertheless, he remains unalarmed by the ties of Canadian research to a stagnating empire.

"The development of channels of escaping from a permanent branch-plant relation with our great neighbor forms the heart of contemporary Canadian planning in science and much else." If Prof. Hayes disputes the necessity of this goal, he still provides a " incisive critique of the methods currently used 'to achieve it. "The planners look to something equivalent to the well-planned Panzer attack that overran France in 1940. I would look rather toward the guerilla type of action by smaller units that defeated the U.S. forces in Vietnam." He would divide scientists into two classes and fund them accordingly: those who are capable of original basic research and those who work best under the discipline of a pre-determined set of goals. Instead of the reorganization of present funding institutions, he recommends using existing authorities. He masons that no bureaucratic configuration can produce major advances on demand and that political considerations, rather than supposedly independent committees, set major goals.

Thus, while analyzing Canadian science policy, Prof. Hayes provides a unique approach to the working of the Canadian political system, an approach that might prove interesting to readers otherwise unconcerned with the course of Canadian science. □

David Groskind, a former management consultant, now is a commercial photographer in Toronto.

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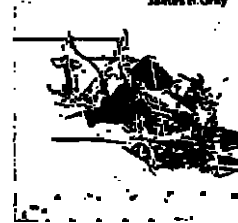
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PERM TEST

THE HAPPY HAIRDRESSER

NICHOLAS LOUPOS
Simon & Schuster
paper \$1.50: 175 pages

T. S. ELIOT IN HIS elegant, measured despair, declared that the world would end "not with a bang but a whimper". **Xaviera Hollander** took this premise one step further and said the world would end with a bang *and* a whimper — of ecstasy, of course. Now **Nicholas Loupos**, alias The Happy Hairdresser, tells us the world will end with a bang and a whimper and a permanent.

In his often adolescent narrative, **Loupos** answers the question "Does she or doesn't she?" with a **resounding** yes. He portrays the loner sanctum of the hair salon as a pool of squirming **eroticism** where women (broadly **classified** in three main groups: the good, the bad, and the lovely) come to wash one man (husband, boyfriend) out of their **hair** to make mom for another — their **hairdresser**.

"In all fairness, this innocent, silly romp through the bedrooms and boudoirs of Nicholas Loupos is a just rebuttal-on his part to the view of male hairdressers as effeminate freaks at best and mincing fags at worst. There is a sense of poetic justice in Loupos, the comb-wielding Casanova, making off with the wives of men who call him a "goddamn queer". Although Loupos is the first to admit that much of his cocksure success is based on reaping the rewards of despair — that is to say, the dissatisfaction of his clients with their own men at home. Whatever their legitimate partners can't provide, their hairdressers can and do, enough to warrant a "happy" on the title.

Since we have yet to hear from The Happy Plumber, The Happy Funeral Director, The Happy Dog Catcher, et al, there is still not enough material in to make any broad analysis of this blossoming literary genre. According to Loupos, however, the hairdresser-as-lover is simply perfectii other men's failures, a modest and merry recycling of human emotions. If all that Loupos says is true, the vast recycling now in progress indicates a certain energy crisis of the highest order.

DAVID SLABOTSKY

CUPID'S MISSES

THE GREAT GETTING-AWAY

CAROLYN GRASSER
Ladysmith
paper, 34 pages

IN HBR BOOK of poems, Carolyn Crasser never gets away from the basic anxieties, fears and disappointments that form the matrix of her work. There is never more than a brief respite, from the facts of life, since dreams, illusions, even hope (like a house of cards, no matter how carefully constructed) are always fragile, precarious, doomed. For Crasser, the facts of life, reality, are mocking, destructive, yet possessed of a decadent, morbid grace.

The great getting-away of the title poem is a wish that we can only presume will never be fulfilled, since most of Crasser's work in this book is pre-occupied with the failures of love.

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The book can sometimes lapse into over indulgence and moments of self-pity, but **much** of it is a sensitive portrayal of loneliness and frustration in the search for, performance, and recollection of love. **Grasser's** is a confidence and trust that has been hurt by its first experiences, **wiser** and shyer now, **questioning, concerned,** and brooding. As a book. **The Greet Getting-Away** is a simple, sincere and often moving evocation of the loss of innocence. **Grasser** writes of what she has lost and shows us at the **same** time how much she has **gained, not** only as a human **being but** as an artist. In this, regard, **very little** has gotten away, and that is very good.

DAVID SLABOTSKY

HOW IT WAS IN SODA CREEK

THE DAYS OF AUGUSTA

MARY AUGUSTA TAPPAGE EVANS

Edited by Jean Speare

J.J. Douglas

cloth \$6.95; illustrated; 80 pages

reviewed by Glennis Zilm

AN UNLIKELY NEWCOMER as a poet is Mary Augusta **Tappage** Evans; 86, granddaughter of a **Shuswap** Indian chief. Call **her** a poet to her

face and you'd likely get an **angry** look, than a **cheerful** cackle. **Neverthe-**less, Augusta's primitive poems make an **impact** — a **literary** Grandma **Moses**.

The Days of Augusta, a **slim volume** of blank **verse, short** Indian tales and beautiful black-and-white photographs is not really Augusta's, but a **collabora-**tive effort.

Probably books were far from **Augusta's** mind the **summer** day in 1972 when **she** stopped by a craft booth at the Williams **Lake** stampede **grounds** to **tell** local **housewife** and writer Jean **Speare** 'how it used to be in the old days'. Aided by tape **record-**ings, **Mrs. Speare** wrote them down.

For many of them, **she** used Augusta's lilting phrasings, **resulting** in a blank **versa** that **evokes** dreamy tones of an old woman looking back **behind** her eyes into **memory** and **describing** the **events**.

Life for Augusta has been harsh. Although she never **travelled** far from the Soda **Creek** area of the **Cariboo** country of the B.C. interior, she **travelled** a long time with her **eyes** seeing the **realisms** of life., death and nature. And the blank **verse** **achieves** the **power** of a muffled drum as the sheer poetry of **her** language creeps up **in** soft moccasin feet **in** the repetitive sounds and syllables of a born story-teller.

Vancouver photographer Robert **Keziere** spent **two** weeks **with** Augusta at **her** summer **cabii** catching a variety of her moods and they add **greatly** to the book. □

Glennis Zilm is a **freelance** writer and **broadcaster** in **Vancouver**.

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