

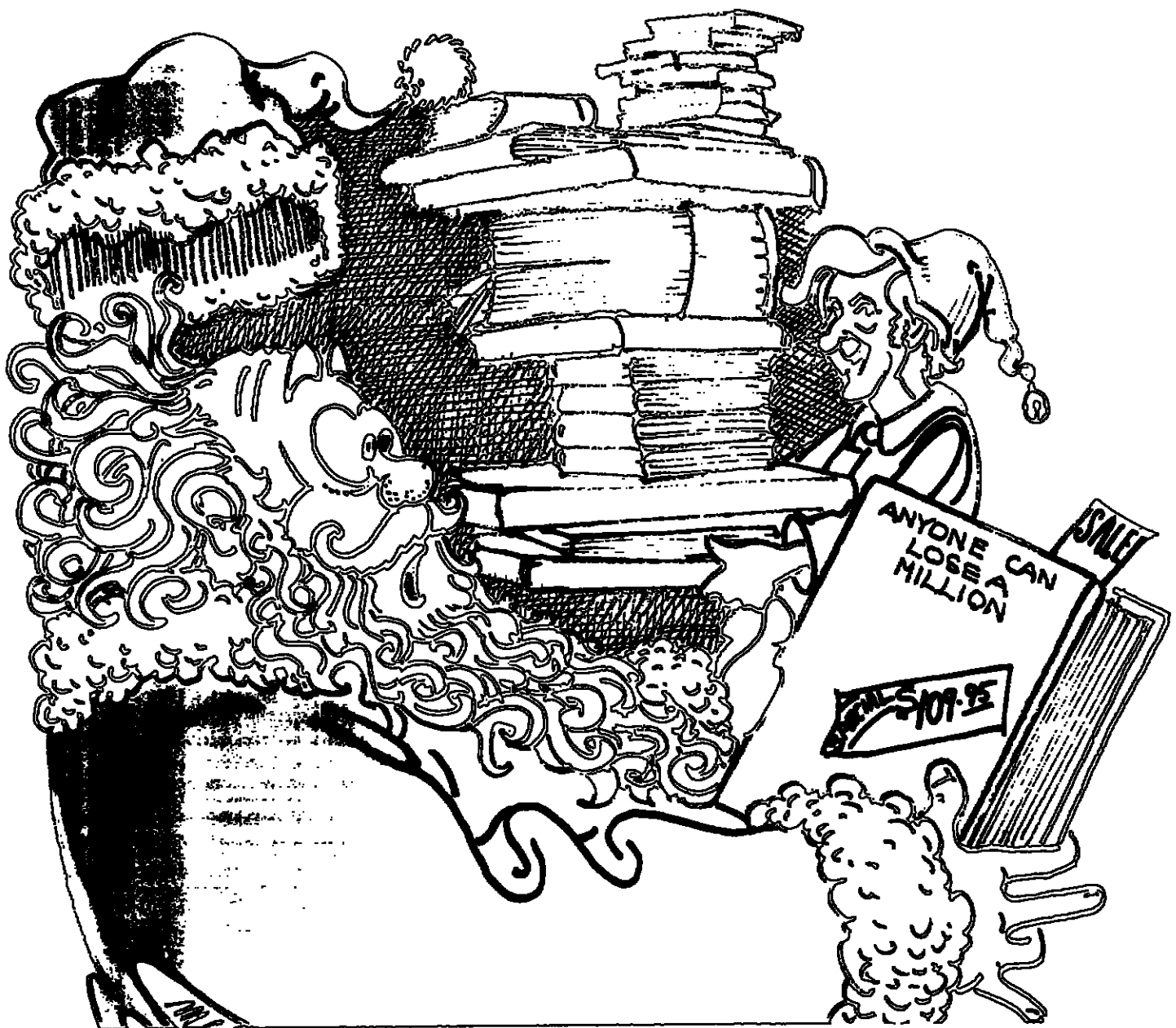
David Lewis finds  
Dief has destroyed  
his image again

When CanLit's waters  
burst, they call  
for Dennis Lee

Gift books: A  
preview of this  
season's greetings

# BOOKS IN CANADA

## The facts about why books cost so much



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# BOOKS IN CANADA

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## CONTRIBUTORS

Freelance writer and indexer Christopher Blackburn lives in Toronto and has a degree in English from Queen's. Jim Christ has forsaken this cold climate to spend the winter meditating in Arizona. Poet David Day, originally from B.C. now lives in Toronto; his most recent book is *The Cowie hat* (Harbour Publishing). Gary Geddes teaches English at the University of Alberta. Geoff Hancock is the editor of the *Canadian Fiction Magazine*. Poet cop Hans Jewinski is the editor of Missing Link Press. John Hofess fulminates on the arts from Hamilton, Ont. Freelancer Paul Kenned) is a former graduate student in history at the U of T. David Lewis is a former national leader of the NDP and a visiting professor at Carleton University in Ottawa. Philip Marchand's collection of magazine articles, *Just Looking, Thank You*, was published by Macmillan last year. Sandra Martin writes about the literary, lively, and percussion arts for this and several other national magazines. Ian McLachlan teaches English at Trent University; his novel *The Seventh Hexagram* (Macmillan) was the m-winner of the Books in Canada Award for First Novels in 1976. A. F. Moritz is a Toronto-based poet and critic who, like Wallace Stevens, works for an ad agency; unlike Stevens, he doesn't enjoy it. Freelancer Barbara Novak is a former associate editor of *Fugue*. Jon Redfern is a student at the U of T. Drama Centre. W. H. Rockett teaches film at Toronto's Seneca College. Michael Ryval is a Toronto freelancer. Hubert de Santana's byline appears frequently in these pages, in *Maclean's*, and on the contents page of *Weekend* magazine if not always inside it. Robert M. Stamp teaches education at the University of Calgary and has happy memories of growing up in and near Toronto in the 1940s. Phil Surguy is a Toronto critic and screenwriter. Freelancer Mark Witten, a native of Edmonton, now is based in Toronto.



**EDITOR:** Douglas Marshall. **ASSOCIATE EDITOR:** Pier Giorgio Di Cicco. **ART DIRECTOR:** Mary Lu Toms. **GENERAL MANAGER and ADVERTISING MANAGER:** Susan Traer. **BUSINESS MANAGER:** Robert Farrelly. **CONSULTANT:** Jack Jensen.

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Books are commodities unlike the others. A consumer might blow \$20 on a roast-turkey dinner but resist paying \$2.95 for a prime Penguin. At issue: Are Canadian publishers serving up

## RIPOFFS OR BARGAINS?

by Phil Surguy

TWO LETTERS TO the editor in recent issues of this magazine have reflected the concern many of us feel for the prices we're paying for books these days. In the first letter, Irwin Kreutzweiser of Toronto pointed out that the new edition of *The Pelican History of Canada* is less than four per cent longer than the 1969 edition yet costs over 50 per cent more — \$2.95 versus \$1.65. And Don Weir, also of Toronto, complained that in charging \$13.95 for Warner Troyer's *No Safe Place*, Clarke Irwin has made this socially important book "prohibitively expensive."

The reaction of Bill Clarke, the executive vice-president of Clarke Irwin, to Weitz's letter — particularly its assumption that the Troyer book has millions of potential readers in Canada — was one of annoyance. In an interview he told me: "I was really impressed that all that could be said in that letter was that the price is high. People are dying and that guy takes pen to paper and complains: about \$13.95. How screwed up can you get? I found it offensive, particularly because I knew I wasn't ripping anyone off. I knew what Warner Troyer put into that book." Clarke then explained in detail why he feels \$13.95 is not an unreasonable price.

The retail price of a book is usually a set multiple of what it costs to manufacture it. The most common ratio in the Canadian publishing industry seems to be live to one (that is, if a book costs \$2 to manufacture, it will be priced at \$10), but I have heard of ratios as high as eight to one.

Clarke Irwin printed 10,000 copies of *No Safe Place*. The initial costs — typesetting, plate-making, and so forth — added up to \$6,700, or 67 cents per book; and the "after start" printing costs, which included the price of the paper used, came to \$2.05 per volume. So each copy cost \$2.72 to manufacture. And, since Clarke Irwin uses a five to one ratio, the book was priced at \$13.95. (Yes, yes. I know five times 2.72 is 13.60; but, according to industry custom, the figure was "rounded off.")

From that \$13.95 list price, Mr. Clarke explained, the bookseller takes off the top an average of 43 per cent — or, for our purposes, \$6. That leaves \$7.95 from which is deducted the author's royalty of \$1.40 and the \$2.72 already mentioned, leaving \$3.83 for Clarke Irwin. That isn't all profit, of course. From the \$3.83 the publisher most pay for the editorial staff involved in the book's production, artwork, permission to use photographs, marketing, promotion, fulfilling orders, shipping, accounting, administrative overhead, heat and light, the cost of borrowing money, employee fringe benefits, and so on. What's left is about 32 cents, which means that if all 10,000 copies are sold, Clarke Irwin will make a net profit of approximately \$3,200.

"No *Safe Place* is going to sell right out, but I didn't know that

when I published it," Clarke said. In other words, like anyone else who brings a book out, he was gambling. Except in rare instances, there is absolutely no way of predicting accurately how well a book will sell. Consequently, a publisher tries to recover all his costs in the first print run, with the hope of making substantial profits from subsequent printings (and offsetting the losses incurred by other books on his list). There are no plans at present for a second hardcover printing of *No Safe Place*, though there is some talk of a mass-market paperback edition. However, given the subject matter and the sin of the Canadian market, the paperback is unlikely to do even one quarter as well as a genuine best seller such as, say, *A Man Called Intrepid* of which 250,000 copies were printed for the Canadian market alone.

In response to Kreutzweiser's letter, Peter Waldock, the vice-president and general manager of Penguin Books of Canada, replied that the dramatic rise in the price of *The Pelican History of Canada* reflects increased production costs and the tremendous inflation in Britain during the past seven years. He pointed out that, while the Canadian price of the book has nearly doubled, the British price is more than three times what it was in 1969. Why then the relatively lower Canadian price? If Penguin passed on all the increases dictated by inflation in Britain, Waldock explained, the firm would price itself out of the market here.

I asked Waldock why Penguins still generally cost more than most paperbacks. For example, the Penguin *War and Peace* costs \$5.90, while the Signet edition is priced at \$2.25. He cited

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**What's left is about 32 cents, which means that if all 40,000 copies are sold, Clarke Irwin will make a net profit of approximately \$3,200.**

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Penguin's superior production values, translations, paper, and typesetting. Penguin produces quality — not mass market — paperbacks. They have a better image: "If you want to buy a Volkswagen, you buy a Signet; if you want to buy a Jaguar, you buy a Penguin." He said his company maintains a list of about 3,000 titles, and prices are set by a complex, computerized Pricing formula that takes into account such factors as the series a book is part of, the author's royalty (if any), the size of the print run, the book's stock life, and basic production costs. Like all publishers, Penguin tries to recoup most of a book's costs from its first print run. The extra profits from subsequent runs — besides earning more money for the company — also offset losses from

unprofitable books that are kept in print to maintain a complete list.

Moreover, when Penguin Canada imports a book into this country, it buys it from the parent company. Not only that, Penguin Canada also uses an artificial currency conversion rate that has two functions: first, it enables the parent company to sell to the subsidiary at a profit (and the subsidiary in turn sells it to the locals at, they hope, another profit); and second, it allows the subsidiary to set a price it feels the local market can bear. However, the point is that these practices are not unique to Penguin. Every publisher importing books from Britain has, with the built-in price markup, his own private version of what the pound sterling is worth. Also, two publishers' profits are built into the list price of every book imported into this country. And, as the Penguin example shows, the pricing formula is really rather flexible; if market conditions indicate that the calculated price is unacceptable, then it is changed, up or down, to one that works.

The information provided by Peter Waldock and Bill Clarke gives us a good, basic idea of how trade books are priced in Canada. At the same time though, their corporate structures are line examples of how, in the end, it is nearly impossible to discover just how profitable they really are. Like most Canadian publishing houses, Clarke Irwin is a private company and, as such, issues no public year-end report. So, when these companies claim to be losing money, as most of them do in one way or another, it's difficult to tell whether they are referring to their Canadian trade books, the foreign books for which they act as agents, their large textbook divisions, or all three. And though Penguin Canada reports publicly, like all branch plants, it does so through its parent company, and the pertinent figures are lost in the big picture the owner has chosen to show to the world's tax collectors.

Indeed, it would require the services of an economist or two, a team of first-rate accountants and probably an inspired psychic and access to Revenue Canada's computers to obtain a definitive economic picture of the Canadian publishing industry, and to decide once and for all whether we are being ripped off when we buy books. So, what follows now pretends to be no more than a rough survey of some additional factors that contribute to a book's retail price.

Jim Buller, the president of the Toronto Allied Printing Trades Council, disagrees with the many people in the publishing industry who say labour costs are the chief reason why book prices are climbing steadily. He says new technology, such as high-speed presses, has offset the expense of rising wage rates, and that the chief factor in a book's manufacturing cost is paper. He claims that papermaking is not a labour-intensive industry and that the prices set by paper companies are arbitrary, rather than the result of the give-and-take of negotiation.

The paper company representatives I talked to disagreed entirely with Buller. They said wages are extremely high in their industry. Furthermore, while a large American mill can specialize in one sort of paper for the book trade, Canadian mills must turn out a

variety of papers and the perpetual changeover of the machinery adds to the basic cost. At one time, Canadian mills were producing as many as 13 sorts of paper for the publishing industry, but in recent years the number of available paper stocks has been substantially reduced. However, according to the paper people I talked to, this rationalization of stock types has not resulted in savings for the consumer: the savings were eaten up by increased wages. (And it should be noted that printers do not buy directly from the paper mills. They buy from distributors, which adds another markup to the ultimate cost of a book.)

Walter Pearce, the estimator at T.H. Best, a Toronto firm that does a lot of printing for the book trade, explained how relatively high per-book paper costs here are a direct result of the size of the Canadian trade market. He chose as an example a small, 144-page book that he had just costed. For its limited run of 5,000 copies the cost of printing, which doesn't include typesetting, is 11 3/4 cents per copy, and the cost of paper is 26 cents per copy. But then, when (and if) reprints are ordered, the printing cost of what Pearce calls "additional thousands" drops to four cents a copy, while the paper cost decreases by only one quarter of a cent. Similarly, the costs of binding and binding materials don't drop too much when additional thousands are ordered. The point here is that a run of 5,000 can more or less be considered typical of Canadian books. On the other hand, an ordinary American run is up around 50,000, and it is with quantities of that order that savings from volume buying of materials begins to have an effect on a book's price.

Peter Taylor, the vice-president for marketing at McClelland & Stewart, says part of his job involves a "realistic, polite war" with the managing editor and production people. For instance, they might feel a certain book is worth a run of only 2,500, while Taylor will be pushing for 10,000 copies. Taylor bases his estimates on his own knowledge of the market as a whole, and informal consultation with about 20 booksellers who know their particular markets very well. But the main factor in obtaining a higher run and a lower list price is advance orders from booksellers. Taylor says these are becoming harder to get. Booksellers are not committing themselves beforehand as much as they used to. One reason for this, says Randy Ware, the executive director of the Canadian Booksellers Association, is that "it's increasingly hard to be unique in what you publish these days." Also, he said, booksellers have been turned off by some books that haven't lived up to their publishers' pre-publication hype.

It bears repeating that publishers take a gamble every time they bring a book out. Recently, though, M&S brought out Tom Thomson: *The Silence and the Storm*. It is priced reasonably at \$29.95, but that required an initial run of 50,000 copies. To decrease the odds on a gamble of that size, M&S plans to spend \$70,000 on promotion. It has also decided to sell the book to retailers on a non-returnable basis only. This has infuriated some independent booksellers. But Brian Melzak of Classic Bookshops is delighted with the deal. His chain, which is rumoured to do about \$20 million worth of business a year — can easily take



advantage of the volume and promotional discounts M&S is offering. And even in the unlikely event that Tom Thomson doesn't sell, he feels it's still an excellent book to offer his customers at a break-even price.

In all, I spoke to 10 publishing company executives. Most tended to offer their own variations of the cost factors already discussed. Additionally, almost all of them made a point of stressing that book prices have not kept pace with the inflation in the rest of the economy: and some, particularly Peter Martin, maintained that Canadian books are priced too low. The main reason for this is the marketing necessity of having domestic book prices match those of American imports (which, to cover the importer's profit, duty, brokerage fees and transportation are marked up anywhere from 10 per cent to 20 per cent over their U.S. list prices).

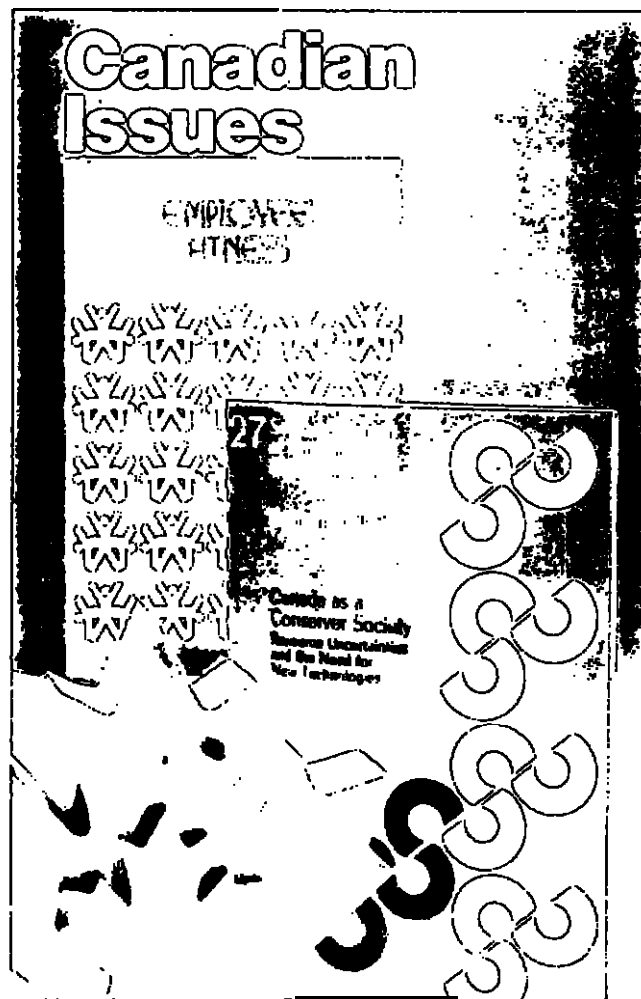
Martin, the founder of Peter Martin Associates and now president of the Readers' Club of Canada, said that even with that seemingly high ceiling imposed by the price of marked-up American books, ours are still underpriced: "It takes a year to a year and a half for a publisher to recover and accommodate extra costs. Very few publishers are getting rich," he said no one makes much (if any) money from trade books, even in New York. There, however, a publisher can earn huge extra revenues by selling a paperback and movie rights: end, if a publisher has a best seller, he wins big. A strictly Canadian best seller rarely makes a fortune for anyone.

Martin also outlined the ways various forms of government assistance help to keep Canadian books competitive. Both the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council give cash grants to publishers. Grants to individual authors and other artists involved in book production are available from both councils, too. The federal government has a huge book-purchase program. The Canada Council also subsidizes authors' promotional tours. And the OAC provides Ontario-based publishers with access to capital by guaranteeing bank loans.

Martin says: "Every publisher truly wants to keep the price of books down." Similarly, as Randy Ware points out, publishing is "one of the few industries when the retailers are upset when prices go up." The retailer, as we saw in the case of No Safe Place, takes an average of 43 per cent off the top of a book's list price. But, says Ware, though the profit from that varies, it is "generally two per cent net after taxes, if you're operating smartly."

So there are some of the many factors that determine the cost of a book. It is truly remarkable that, with a basic potential market of 17 million people, English Canadian books can be priced competitively with the American product, which is manufactured and priced with a potential market of about 240 million people — including Canadians — in mind. It's probably true that most trade books lose money. But some houses have been publishing these losers for years and, in that light, such business practices must be regarded as acts of madness or heroic philanthropy. Yet there is another way of looking at the matter. Canadian publishing is a \$500-million-a-year industry. Trade book sales, however, represent only a fraction of that figure (and not all trade books are sold in bookstores). No, the main market and source of profits for books in Canada are schools and libraries. So, when it comes time for a publisher to tot up the tax he owes on the profits from his sales of textbooks and new and reprinted trade books to institutions (and his profits from imported best sellers and mass-market paperbacks), it's obvious that the write-off value of a trade book that has lost money can come in very handy.

To be fair, though, it should be added that unlike many other industries, publishing can be almost suicidally risky and unpredictable. Most publishers, to use Peter Martin's phrase, are in the business to "make books public." Publishers are indeed reluctant to raise their prices. They are keenly aware of how strongly most of their customers consider books to be much more than simple consumer commodities. As a result, publishing is one of the few industries in which individual consumer protest can have some real effect. So keep bitching; write letters: let them know you are still watching them. The effect won't be spectacular, but the price we pay for books may be kept at a comparatively reasonable level. □



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## THE CASE OF THE MIDWIFE LODGE

Without Dennis Lee, a lot of recent and valuable CanLit would probably not have been born

by Mark Witten

THERE IS AN unwritten rule among publishers that says good writers don't make good editors. Dennis Lee is among a fair number of writers — Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, John Newlove and Al Purdy are others — whose editorial activities behind the scenes have done a lot to dispel that myth. Lee worked as house editor with Anansi (1967-72) and has been consulting editor to Macmillan since 1974. But more than that, on an informal basis — yet with no less intensity or commitment — he has worked privately with a score of poets and novelists, established and unknown, in the manner of a literary midwife who watches and fusses over a gestating manuscript or idea until the author has delivered the finished book. "I sometimes think one of my tendencies is to become almost too concerned with getting the whole baby born," Lee admits. Michael Ondaatje adds: "As an editor he

gets completely involved in a work. It's not a professional commitment. It takes over his life."

That description of course applies more to the work of some than others. Generally, although not always, an established author will need or want less guidance than a poet or novelist coming out with a first work. But even that rule has its exceptions. Says Hugh Kane, former Macmillan president: "When experienced novelists run into trouble with their manuscripts, they automatically turn to Dennis for help." In the case of Sandbars, a recent and highly praised first novel by Oonah McFee, Lee placed great faith in the potential of a then-unknown, middle-aged woman who had never before written anything longer than a short story. After reading several of her stories, Lee suggested McFee try a novel. "I was so green that I thought when you write a first draft that's the novel."

she recalls. Four years and four drafts later, after innumerable meetings, discussions and detailed letters from Lee, his faith proved justified. "What he did till the very end was hover over me," she says, recalling that at the beginning he said to her: "I'll work with you, but I'm not going to be your gum." He made it very clear that it all had to come from me."

Other novelists Lee has worked with at early stages in their careers include Trevor Ferguson, whose novel *High Water Chance* was released this fall, and Graeme Gibson, whose *Five Legs* was the first novel published by Anansi. "I knew it had to be cut down

**Says Hugh Kane, former Macmillan president: "When experienced novelists run into trouble with their manuscripts, they automatically turn to Dennis for help."**

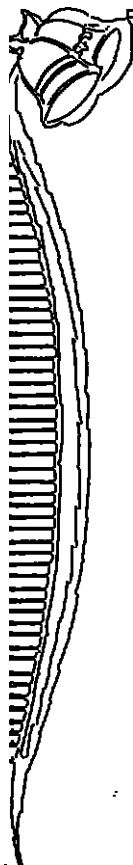
and wanted help cutting it." Gibson recalls. "From Dennis I learned self-editing." (Lee was also faced with the difficult problem of having to help McFee cut *Sandbars* by nearly 50,000 words for the final draft.) Scott Symons has shown him drafts of a novel, tentatively titled *The Helmet of Flesh*, that have varied in length from 180 to 1,000 to 300 pages. "There are problems of a kind with Scott's writing that I've never encountered before," Lee says. "If he made a point, he'd make the same point 18 times in a row. Great highs and lows. He wrote a friend a 950-page letter one time."

Symons was one of the more colourful subjects of Charles Taylor's *Six Journeys: A Canadian Pattern*, which Lee saw in drafts of one and two chapters. "He had a lot to say about the Scott Symons chapter," Taylor recalls. "He was encouraging me to bring out more of the sheer drama of the man. He also saved me from philosophical gaffes of a major nature. He doesn't try to put ideas in your mind. He forces you to do the work yourself and extend your own thinking."

Lee and Margaret Atwood have been working with one another on and off since their days at U of T's Victoria College, sometimes editing each other's work and in several instances — *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, *Eli Mandel's* *Crusoe*, and *Matt Cohen's Columbus and the Fat Lady and Other Stories* — jointly editing the work of other writers. Atwood edited the second edition of Lee's *Civil Elegies* and he suggested minor revisions to her *Power Politics*. He had a greater influence, however, in the writing of *Lady Oracle and Survival*. "He gave me a shot in the arm when I was feeling down about *Lady Oracle*," Atwood recalls. "When Dennis is really on, he sees the full potential of a book." Of *Survival*, which had to be written quickly, she says: "It was a very intensive, intense process. I was writing. Dennis was commenting." Lee adds: "She'd give me a chapter and I'd march off with it. By the time I got through she'd have written another chapter."

In the case of prolific novelist Matt Cohen, Lee was involved with an early novel (*Korsoniloff*), worked on later ones (*The Disinherited* and *Sunrise*, now in progress) and touched others not at all. "He read *The Disinherited* half-way through the first draft," Cohen says. "He was just tremendously encouraging about it. It was at a time in my writing career when I wasn't sure about what I was doing. He takes high risks, which I think is just great. I've often shown him things he hasn't particularly liked. He's definitely not afraid to be critical. He doesn't expect you to do the same thing over and over. He and Peggy edited my short stories. He seems to have had an idea of what I was trying to do that was more developed than my own idea of what I was trying to do. It's a unique ability to see through to the intention and to be able to talk about it to the writer. Dennis has the ability to conceive of it as a finished product. It's as if you can briefly persuade yourself that you have in fact finished it. It's a light at the end of the tunnel before you come back to reality."

Lee believes that continual changes in the direction of Cohen's work have made their working relationship more dynamic: "One of the reasons editing takes so long for me is because with any writer I respect I find myself going into it as a beginner with as few



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preconceptions as possible. Matt grows just endlessly. I try to be the advocate of the book that's trying to get itself written. Often I don't understand and say silly things."

Lee faced similar challenges with Michael Ondaatje's two ambitious experiments in fiction. The *Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Coming Through Slaughter*. Says Ondaatje: "The only reason I went to Anansi first with *Billy* was because Dennis was there. As

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We gave me a shot in the arm when I was feeling down about *Lady Oracle*," Atwood recalls & "When Dennis is really on, he sees the full potential of a book."

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far as I could see, he was the only editor I could trust with the manuscript. As a critic, Dennis is pretty brutal. He doesn't like bullshit. At one point he wants you as a writer to clarify all the intricacies of your work. He tests you with ideas and if you didn't argue back with him it can be deadly. You need someone as brutally honest as you would be with yourself — a kind of alter ego or devil's advocate. He made *Billy* more public in a way. It was a very introverted book. He helped me to take it and turn it into a universal rather than just a very personal thing." Lee's suggestions for *Billy* were made mostly by mail because Ondaatje was living in London, Ont., at the time. "It's better to work with Dennis by mail because you don't have to deal with his cigars."

Although Lee was not much involved in editing the poetry books of Atwood and Ondaatje, he has worked closely with such poets as Eli Mandel, George Jonas, Dale Zieroth, Don Coles, and Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, whom Lee worked with on *The Absolute Smile* and *The Happy Hungry Man*, says: "Dennis is pretty much pulling his own teeth when cutting a manuscript. He is one of the few people who get involved in another person's book as much as his own. He is not attempting to write his poetry through you." Mandel, whom Lee and Atwood assisted with selection, revisions, and arrangement of the text for *Crusoe*, says: "In my work, he saw a progression or development from more difficult poems to simpler and clearer poems. *Crusoe* was arranged to bring out more sharply than would otherwise be evident certain directions in my work. He not only saw that development, he saw that the development had to do with my changing attitudes about language." Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, with whom Lee worked for about six months on *The Tough Romance*, a collection of poetry to be published next fall, found a new sense of poetic voice. "A persona emerged that I hadn't quite realized was my own." Di Cicco says.

Lee reckons he has cut back on his editing activities by about 90 per cent and thinks the most active phase of his editorial career has passed. He has few regrets, but admits that a trade-off was inevitable between time lost from his own writing and the intangible gains of a craft well honed and the special sort of intimacy he developed with other authors. "I'll often startle writers by popping up in a part of their psyche that they didn't realize was exposed to anybody reading the manuscript," he says. "I don't think I have illusions about it. I don't think that I wrote the books. But I can admit the kind of ego gratification I used to be scared of feeling."

There were also occasional self-doubts. "I'm just as vulnerable as a writer," he says. "I did feel pressure. I think I would have felt a lot more pressure if I'd just worked with poets or was a novelist. But if I weren't writing myself, I would have stopped sooner than I

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"I'll often startle writers by popping up in a part of their psyche that they didn't realize was exposed to anybody reading the manuscript."

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did, just feeling that I was riding on people's coat-tails." Clearly the balance has shifted to writing with the recent publication of *Garbage Delight* and *Savage Fields* (*Books in Canada*, November). Lee even hints that he might try his hand at a novel some day — a traditional one first, but maybe not for another five years, he says. With the credit Lee has built up in the CanLit bank, he should be able to have his pick of editors. □



# PETTY, PARANOID, AND VINDICTIVE

Dief had a reputation as a respected elder statesman. With the third volume of his memoirs, he destroys himself again

by David Lewis

**One Canada: Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, The Tumultuous Years, 1962-1967.** Macmillan. 236 pages. \$15.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7705 1569 x).

PARLIAMENT HILL buzzed with stories about the tense caucus held by de Conservative MPs and Senators on Wednesday, Feb. 6, 1963, the morning after the Diefenbaker government had been dramatically defeated in the Commons. Some cabinet ministers had for weeks been agonizing over the Prime Minister's leadership. The patty faced an immediate election and was badly split. But, miraculously, Dief came out of the encounter still Chief, hailed by everybody, including George Hees who had planned to lead an attack but who, instead, shed tears of remorse.

The accounts of the meeting were many and varied, but no one failed to mention enthusiastically a speech by Senator Grattan O'Leary as the turning point. In *Leadership Lost*, Peter Stursberg's second volume on Diefenbaker, several former ministers refer to speeches by Grattan O'Leary, Alf Brooks, and Angus MacLean and particularly single out O'Leary. Thus Paul Marineau says: "The rallying point was the speech by Senator Grattan O'Leary — a very emotional speech." And Erik Nielsen reports: "Senator O'Leary made one of the most moving speeches that I have ever heard in all of my life." In his own memoirs the late Senator describes it as "the most difficult speech of my career," and adds: "That fundamental loyalty that day saved Diefenbaker's leadership, and never a word or sign to me about it."

This determination to ignore the Senator is continued in the book under review. In his account of the meeting, Diefenbaker writes: "I will never forget some of the spontaneous speeches. Alf Brooks and Angus MacLean achieved an oratorical splendour as inspiring as it was amazing. . . ." O'Leary is simply not mentioned. The Senator was a frank and honest person and had never hidden the fact that he was not a fan of the Chief. But he was and had been all his life a committed supporter of the Tory party and had, in fact, assisted Dief with some of his speeches. However, O'Leary's lack of enthusiasm was enough for the author to label him "disloyal" and to refuse to acknowledge his support at a crucial time.

I have described this revealing incident because it exemplifies the petty, paranoid vindictiveness, often at the expense of truth, that renders the book unpleasant to read and distasteful to review. The *dramatis personae* are divided into good guys and bad guys. The first are those who were loyal to the Chief, come what might. They are dealt with lovingly. The others comprise the treacherous ingrates who dared to question their leader's word or deed. They are ignored or reviled. Events are not reproduced: they are shaped to fit Diefenbaker's idiosyncratic categories of political virtue and political vice.

According to this book, Diefenbaker did not face merely the traditional Whii enemy. He faced also President Kennedy and the might of his office, the treachery of senior advisers, the duplicity of colleagues, the unfaithfulness of petty headquarters, the machinations of Camp, Goodman, and Bassett es servants of Bay Skeet, the unco-operativeness of such powerful men es Premier Roblin and dozens of others and, cot least, the Liberal bias of the media, particularly the CBC. If the reader accepts all this, the admiration for the Chief cannot but be boundless. Surrounded by such powerful enemies from without and betrayed by ungrateful and unprincipled scoundrels from within, only a giant could have emerged from the 1962, 1963, and 1965 elections es strongly as he did. That he lost is forgotten in the marvel of it all.

How else does one read some of the statements? About the 1963 campaign the author writes matter-of-factly: "There was cc question that everyone was against me but the people, end that unless I could find a way to get the message across, I would be lost." A little later he informs us with an almost visible shake of his head: "As a point of interest for students of constitutional history, not only had I to wage a one-man, whirlwind campaign in defense of the government, I had also to see to the day-to-&y administration of the country."

Apparently irrelevant is the fact that every government remains in office during an election campaign and that every Prime Minis-



ter continues to be responsible for running the country unless end until the election results cause him to resign. In his mind Diefenbaker remains unique because, according to him, he had only Donald Fleming to help him, since he had been deserted by many and could not rely on the civil service or the party. Thus his was a one-man campaign and almost a one-man government and it never occurs to him that this attitude may have been a source of his troubles.

It is evident that Diefenbaker really believes what he writes. This clever political practitioner becomes naive end astigmatic when looking at the events that led to his government's defeat and to his loss of leadership. This produces incredible charges against everyone who at any time questioned his judgment end leads to recitals of events that deserve credit for inventiveness rather than exactitude.

Surely it takes ingenuity to relate the resignation of Doug Harkness as Defense minister to the alcoholic refreshments et a press-gallery dinner. Harkness was not a brilliant minister, but he was thoroughly honest and straightforward. He strongly believed that the nuclear warheads in dispute were essential if Canada was to fulfill her obligations and commitments to NORAD and NATO. To suggest that he did not resign on principle but that he was goaded into it by journalists when he was in his cups, is a cruel end inexcusable insult.

There can be no doubt that the devaluation of the dollar during the 1962 campaign did the Conservatives greet harm. The Liberal admen conjured up the "Diefendollar," a smart gimmick that haunted the Chief through the rest of the campaign. Watching the Canadian currency fell precipitously under the Liberals in 1977 might justify him feeling retrospectively that he had been unfairly victimized IS years earlier. But Diefenbaker doesn't stop there. "I must wonder," he states, "if official advice given me in 1962 was entirely free from partisan considerations." In more than one place he hints, if he does not explicitly state, that the top civil-service advisers knowingly misled him for political reasons.

I have, personally, never been impressed by advice given to governments on fiscal end monetary matters; but to accuse the advisers of deliberate sabotage is monstrous, unless supported by herd evidence. For such sabotage would be directed not only et a given government bet et the entire country, ik people, and ik economy. The persons concerned would have to be traitors as well es political partisans. The astonishing fact is that a man who prides himself on being a guardian and defender of human rights permits himself to make wanton accusations based only on suspicion and innuendo.

As one would expect, the book also discusses many important matters of policy and thus gives a deeper look at the author's ideas. Some readers will not agree with many of them, bet this is irrelevant. What is distressing is that even in the area of policy there is neither objectivity nor generosity. The policies that Diefenbaker defends were, apparently fashioned by him alone; there is no mention of assistance from any quarter — not party, caucus, cabinet, or staff. Perhaps one should take such assistance for granted, but the occasional acknowledgement would be a welcome gesture. Furthermore, the discussions are no more than an extension of the election campaigns. There is no in-depth analysis of events; there is only partisan repetition of arguments made years ago in Parliament and on the hustings — es if time had stood still since then.

Diefenbaker rehearses the lengthy flag debate of 1964. The Maple Leaf has now flown proudly around the world for 13 years but he repeats his old arguments with undiminished passion. His leadership of the protracted filibuster in the flag debate cost his party support across the country and especially in Quebec. Indeed, it was Balcer, his chief Quebec lieutenant, who urged Pearson to impose closure after he failed to persuade his colleagues to end the filibuster. But not even in retrospect does Did make any attempt to understand his Quebec MPs; he simply dismisses them.

His discussion of the general Quebec-Canada problem is equally ossified; it shows not the slightest influence of recent events. Although one cannot but appreciate Diefenbaker's obvious devotion to his country end ik unity, some of his statements are offensively simplistic. Imagine a former head of government relying on the fact that et Confederation "there were fewer than a million persons of the French race and culture in Canada" while "now there were close to six million" es evidence that "the survival of French Canada after a hundred years of Confederation... did not seem seriously in doubt... And this in 1977.

With equal disbelief one reads his defence of his opposition to the bilingual end bicultural commission. He writes: "I thought the Laurendeau-Davidson [sic] Commission at best a dodge. At worst, I sew it giving rise to a popular false hope that solutions to the problems of Confederation would be achieved through a Commission of socialists end outspoken protagonists of particular constitutional changes." I suppose it was the membership of Frank Scott that evoked the reference to "socialists." But what a superficial comment! There are other similar comments, sock es the one that the specifics of the Liberal platform were as socialist es anything in the New Democratic Party and that Hazen Argue was "the left wing of the CCF's left wing before he joined the Liberals." Absurdity on absurdity.

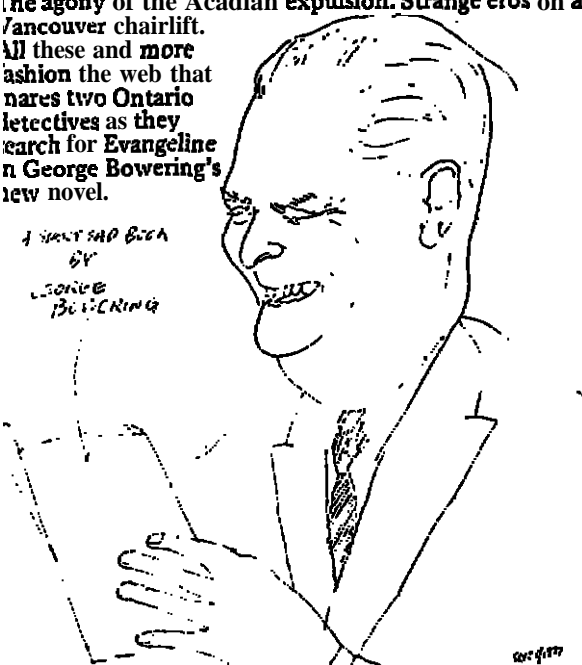
No doubt Diefenbaker has written his memoirs to set the record straight and to assure and enhance his place in his country's history. The pity of it is that the opposite is the more likely result. The three volumes, end particularly the third, are mom likely to diminish his stature es leader and statesmen.

This is regrettable because in some areas Diefenbaker's record stands out. His refusal to jump obediently when Kennedy demanded a high level of alert doting the Cuban crisis was an important assertion of Canada's independence. Many of us strongly supported his position on nuclear warheads end lost respect for Pearson when he announced his continentalist volte face. (So, by way, Trudeau.) Dief's Rights and stand on South Africa deserve a high place of honour. His manner of campaigning was a delight, his political instincts always alert, his oratory moving, his humour sparkling, and his rapport with "the little people" enviable. He should have let the record speak for itself. His defensive attempt to explain end justify has done that record a disservice. □

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## Longevity is not enough

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**A Political Memoir.** by Walter Gordon, McClelland & Stewart, 395 pages, \$15.95 cloth (ISBN 0 77 10 3440 7).

**MacKenzie King: His Life and World,** by J.L. Granatstein, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 202 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 07 032304 91).

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By W.H. ROCKETT

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GORDON AND KING are as unlikely a pair of politicians for consideration in one breath as any imaginable. But book reviews make strange bedfellows of the most Jekyll and Hyde combinations, and so one finds oneself looking for some thin thread with which to string a noose that they might hang together.

Perhaps it can be found in Gordon's conclusions about King, as given in the closing pages of *A Political Memoir*:

Mackenzie King is not likely to go down in history as a Great Canadian Hero. To be revered by successive generations, a Canadian political leader must surely have more important, more inspiring aims and objectives than mere political longevity.

Gordon's dictum applies best to himself: while he mastered many of the political arts required to gain and then retain power, first as a national Liberal Party organizer and later as a cabinet minister, the "gentle patriot" always placed ideas and ideals foremost, maintaining a remarkable consistency (for a politician) over the years in his commitments.

It was not an entirely happy career, and *A Political Memoir* is not as satisfactory an expression of that career as Gordon's many admirers (among them this reviewer) could wish.

Walter Gordon, now 71, is a gentleman. His are not the cot-throat manners of a Diefenbaker. Consequently, he finds it painful to discuss his disappointments and virtually impossible to assign responsibility for many of them to others, as he might with great justification do.

Gordon has been concerned with foreign ownership of Canadian business since the late 1930s when he attempted to capitalize a Canadian holding company to serve as an alternative purchaser of domestic businesses in danger of selling out, an aim he had almost accomplished when the war intervened and capital dried up. This concern has dominated his political thinking for 40 years, and he has long seen the relationship between economic control and political independence, something we take for granted today (those of us who are not

members of the government). His attempts literally to raise consciousness, first in his party through his political work and later in the country at large through his books, speeches, and the Committee for an Independent Canada are noble works. Noble works seldom make for lively reading, and Mr. Gordon has not got the knack despite the very occasional anecdote dropped into a rather dry narrative.

Politics, on the other hand, make fascinating reading; but Gordon's gentility keeps him from making the most of his material. He goes on at great length about the organization of Liberal campaigns, including those in his riding, but much of the material is of little interest to those not engaged in the process themselves. He is hesitant in dealing with personalities, unless it is to say something nice about someone of whom few people have been appreciative (for example, Judy Is Marsh), or something cautionary about heroes (for example, Pearson is described as "a much more complex character than the general public ever realized").

In his closing chapter, Gordon assesses the merits of Canada's first ministers. Among his principal criteria:

If a cabinet is to operate well, if its members are to work in harmony, they should all feel a true sense of loyalty to the Prime Minister and be prepared to support him no matter what the circumstance. And this sense of loyalty should be reciprocated by the Prime Minister to his colleagues.

As Gordon circumspectly notes, his colleagues in cabinet supported Mike Pearson "despite the fact that Mike's loyalty to his colleagues in return was sometimes uncertain and inconsistent." Gordon, not little responsible for what electoral success Pearson enjoyed, did not always receive the kind of loyalty and support he so much values.

This book will unfortunately interest few admirers, while it is difficult to assess its usefulness to the historian, saving the appendices which include a number of letters and memoranda written by Gordon over the eight-year period of his most active participation in party politics.

Granatstein's *Mackenzie King: His Life and Work* is the second volume of a McGraw-Hill Ryerson series on Prime Ministers (*Macdonald* was the first, while volumes on Laurier, Borden, and Pearson are in preparation). It is unpretentious popular history, better-than-average Berton with pictures, and certainly belongs in school libraries. At \$14.95, one question both the value and interest the book offers the individual reader.

King himself is fascinating, but the reader should not expect Granatstein to dwell on the Prime Minister's emulation of Gladstone in "rescue work" with hookers, his affection for his mother and his dog, and his dabblings in spiritualism. Nor are the more dramatic political developments dwelt upon (the King-Byng wiggling is handled in three pages). What the author and picture

editor Peel Russell do attempt to give us is a context. For the political events of the King years. This is accomplished with graphics ranging from the pages of the Eaton's catalogues of those years to a special section on Canadian painting and the Group of Seven, newspaper cartoons and political posters, formal portraits and news photographs.

The result is pleasant browsing and relaxed reading, since the text is not intended to be demanding and succeeds in its own terms admirably. □

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## All fragile on the Western front

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**The German Wars: 1914-1945,** by D.J. Goodspeed, Macmillan. 561 pages, \$20 cloth (ISBN 0 7705 1570 3).

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By PAUL KENNEDY

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DONALD J. GOODSPEED is an excellent military historian, with an unusual ability to write readable narrative prose. He is also a lieutenant-colonel, with an unfortunate aspiration to become a moral philosopher. The tension between these two roles makes *The German Wars* a schizophrenic book. As academic historian, Goodspeed provides a lucid and coherent account of political-military conflict in the early 20th century. As khaki moralist, he imposes pessimistic precepts about the imminent decline of the West, where "military virtues" have given way to "softness and corruption" and where "eunuchs are inheriting the earth." It is a tribute to the analytical soundness of the first 516 pages of this book that the Spenglerian cadences of the conclusion ring so utterly false. It detracts from the consistency of Goodspeed's otherwise critical overview that he periodically articulates the same nostalgic faith in noble warfare as the naive politicians of 1914. Like most military men, Goodspeed has a mortal fear of being ranked among the eunuchs. Unlike most university professors, he is curiously unsympathetic to the eunuch's fear of being ranked among the mortal.

The story of *The German Wars* actually begins at the end of the Franco-Prussian War of 1871. The ignominious defeat of France fostered an attitude of resentment and vengeance in Paris, which Goodspeed ultimately depicts as the fundamental cause of the First World War. It was, he argues, the diplomacy of Poincaré, rather than the ambition of the Kaiser, that sparked the conflict in 1914 and that thus prepared the way for the military maelstrom of the following four decades. This shifting of responsibility from Germany to France is Goodspeed's only major departure from conventional interpretations in a book that

relies entirely upon secondary source material. It is also an issue over which he anticipates violent critical attack. Great pains are taken to defuse any criticisms in advance, by labelling them as "ideological" and by arguing that they are more concerned with political purposes in the past than historical truth for posterity.

Fortunately, the merit of this book is not limited to Goodspeed's unproven ability "to provide a new set of broad outlines for the subject." Nor is the book's value connected to his questionable claim that it is suddenly possible — 30 years after the peace — to rise above partisan interpretations and to dispel the shadows of war "with the light of truth." The *German Wars* is neither profoundly original nor miraculously objective. At its best, how-

ever, it is an informative and remarkably sane overview of the confusing world wars of the early 20th century. Goodspeed sees the two wars as really one war — connected by an organic unity. Within this unity, he leaves considerable scope for the development of distinctions and contrasts. The First World War is described as unnecessary and tragic. Its premature and inconclusive armistice contained the inevitable seeds of further conflict. The Second World War, on the other hand, is seen as necessary and even constructive. The threat of German Fascism prompted a belated but positive reaffirmation of the values of Western civilization. The constant presence of the German threat provides much of the rationale for this unified treatment of the two wars, although Goodspeed is quick to

admit that the Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm was very different from the Germany of Hitler. His narrative reflects an historian's appreciation for the continuity of events and a soldier's awareness of the uniqueness of situations.

*The German Wars* should thus be hailed as a balanced and well-written history of modern warfare. The self-indulgent military moralism that mars the final pages is irrelevant, and even contradictory to such a history. Unfortunately, Goodspeed's flaws will probably sell more books than his virtues. His lingering soldier's love for the battles of the good old days will answer a vast and apparently insatiable demand for books about wars. Old soldiers never die. They just turn into military historians. □

## ESSAY

# Our most erotic Puritan

Layton continues his attempt to repatriate his brother Jesus but is more at home on the soft hills of nature and sex

by Gary Geddes

*The Covenant*, by Irving Layton, McClelland & Stewart, 112 pages, \$4.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 4832 7).

IN 1962 Irving Layton was invited to submit and comment on his favourite poem from among his own work for an anthology called *Poet's Choice*. Significantly, he chose "A Tall Man Executes A Jig" and made the following comment upon it:

More than any other poem of mine, this one fuses feeling and thought in an intense moment of perception. Of truth. Truth for me, of course. That's the way I feel about gnats, and hills, and Christian renunciation, the pride of life and crushed grass-snakes upon the King's Highway. I like poems that are subtle and circular — the perfect form of the serpent wallowing its own tail and rolling towards Eternity. A meditative music, the feelings open as the sky. Formless poems give me the pips. If ideas, I want to see them dance. Otherwise, it's historico-politico-economic uplift and braggadocio concealing a sad poverty of feeling. Worse, a poverty of imagination. Tk vulgar stance Of the talentless mediocrity... For all the big talk and big words and big noise, only the genuine finally endures. The words that redeem us; justify the millions of slaughtered Xmas turkeys.

This passage is particularly interesting for what it says about Layton's poetic criteria and because it draws attention to a first-rate poem written more than 16 years ago that had, as its central concern, the failure of traditional religious consolation to explain and ameliorate the tragic contradictions inherent in existence. What he says about "A Tall Man" is perfectly true; it's one of his finest, most carefully crafted poems, making its impact not through rhetoric and bombast but through a subtle interweaving of image and sound and idea. Despite its debt to Wallace Stevens and perhaps to A.M. Klein's "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," and its overabundance of classical and historical allusion, the poem is as nearly perfect as anything Layton has written. The ideas, given flesh, have been made to dance.

And the "truth" it embodies might be described as philosophical or theological naturalism, the belief that man needs to look to the natural world, not to revelation or dogma, for understanding and strength. Too little has been said about this dimension of Layton's best poems (including "The Birth of Tragedy," "The Cold Green Element," and "The Fertile Muck") and too much has been said about the rant, jest, and titillation. Given the gradual but certain destruction of the balance of nature, with man himself the

most endangered species, Layton's naturalistic philosophy ought to be more popular, especially as it releases his creative genius in a way that no other subject does.

The *Covenant*, then, which is the second installment of the attempt to repatriate that outrageous and wayward Jewish poet Jesus Christ that began with Layton's controversial *For My Brother Jesus*, might well be judged against the above criteria and the example of Layton's best poems. Few poems in *The Covenant* are "subtle and circular"; even fewer will roll far in the direction of poetic immortality. Too many poems, to use Layton's scales, are formless; the ideas do not dance, but sit there uncomfortably waiting for the poet to turn off the rhetoric and turn on the imagination.

If there is anything "vulgar" about these poems, it is not that they might offend the sensibilities of those who prefer to have their saints and heroes without bowels and genitals, but that they do not fuse thought and feeling, that they try to say more or less than the language will allow, letting content override form at every turn.

In the first poem, "The Circumcision," for example, there are at least six abstractions in a poem of only 14 lines, none of which are concretized by being buttressed with active verbs and powerful adjectives. The images and historical allusions that are

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supposed to render the flat statements of the poem acceptable are not specific enough to reach the senses. Throw-a-away poems such as "Judean Epigrams" serve only to dissipate the energy created by the best work. And "Bambino," a rather pathetic piece of moralizing, palely echoes Layton's fine poem "Cain" and his less important but more popular "The Bull Calf." "Aviva," too, calls attention to Layton's shift from a mood of joyous exultation in the earlier "The Day Aviva Came to Paris" to his new dependence upon the traditional clichés of love-poetry and an absorption not in the beloved but in the poeticizing self.

I have always been impressed with Layton's care and precision. Even in poems that I considered not worth the effort. However, I find in this latest collection lines such as "they will be hauled off to the clink to cool off." where the word "off" seems to be there not for reasons of music but carelessness; end "the read papers lie on the floor and sofa," where the word "read" means "no thing to the eat and another to the eye. The distance here from the absolute rightness of lines in "Keine Lazarovitch," such as "the inescapable lousiness of growing old." where the community of sounds captures the ear and the word "inescapable." predictably hyperbolic in an elegy, is rendered acceptable by juxtaposing it with a completely unexpected colloquial word such as "lousiness."

Many "I the ubi sum" poems, lamenting the grandeur that was Rome, fail to rise above the level of tourist impressions, which anyone with an eye might have offered. And the imitative poems, such as "Dialogue," which seems to derive from Graves' "In Broken Images," seldom compete with their originals for attention. One fine exception is "The Arcade," where Layton deliberately parodies Yeats' "The Second Coming," concentrating not upon sacramental images to suggest social and moral breakdown, but upon cinematic images on a billboard. Here the detail is excellent and a simple line like "a lone cyclist whose machine shoots up the street" provides a visual stimulus as well as a contextual pun that recalls the billboard image of woman with gun. And the poem ends with a deliberately banal version of Yeats' rhetorical question: "I quietly sip my coffee and wonder through the night/what new-old malignant symbol is being forged/ for the billboards of the day after tomorrow."

This connection with Yeats is interesting to me, not only because it reminds me of Layton's long-time interest in Yeats and in "passionate normal speech," but also because it recalls a statement that Yeats once made that bears directly on a problem in his work and in Layton's. He said that out of our argument with others we make rhetoric, but out of our argument with ourselves we make poetry. There is, perhaps, to" much of the public debater in Layton and not enough of the private man who has composed some of the greatest poems in our language during his 40 or more

years of writing. He may now be content, as he says in "Invocation," with "a good feed/ a good fuck/ and to write poems/ to outrage people." Once he would have applied the word "good" to poems rather than food.

Layton warns in his foreword that he has included "several minor pieces" to break the tension, "to lighten the seriousness" of the volume. I remember arguing with him about this tendency at a conference in Calgary, after he had berated the younger generation of poets for willing drivel, for their lack of craft. When I suggested that he had published more squibs and non-poems than anyone in this country, he said graciously, "Geddes, you and I would probably agree on my dozen or so best poems. These don't come unless you keep writing, and no one would ever get to read those dozen masterpieces, given the realities of Canadian publishing, unless you throw in the warm-up pieces too."

Given these exigencies of publishing (especially with a firm like McClelland & Stewart, which requires the poet to write with both hands, one to fill up the required minimum of 96 pages with "inspired playfulness" and the other to be ready when the good stuff starts to come), the reviewer's task must be as much editorial as descrip-



Irving Layton

tive, weeding out the bumph that the poet ought to have kept in his drawer for nine times nine years and the" sold to the University of Texas.

I would prefer to concentrate on the best poems and to address myself to the overriding subject of the volume. In addition to "The Arcade," there are several poems that especially move me in *The Covenant*. One is called "Laurentia" and somehow menages to fuse both of Layton's favourite enthusiasms, nature and sex, in a single delightful lyrical sweep:

*The loveliness of incorruptible snow  
lying bunched on evergreens.*

*Am I mad that I see soft breasts  
everywhere?*

*I want to climb up to fondle and caress.*

*O the sensuousness of snow-covered  
hillocks:  
a harem of naked women  
inviting me to run wild among them and  
disport.*

*On all sides the winter displays  
its voluptuousness made irresistible  
by discipline and icy restraint.*

*But best I love the stillness  
that coming down from the mountains  
surrounds the grey trunks of trees.*

*When it releases me at the road's end  
Laurentia will have a lover  
fit to embrace her cold sensuality.*

Here is the Layton that I admire, eyes "pen in his home ground and not trying for significance and meaning in the decadent Mediterranean landscapes. He is, after all, our most distinguished, most EROTIC Puritan.

Another fascinating poem is "Catacombe del Cappucini," in which Layton's wonderfully rich vocabulary, with its Latin resources, is used to fullest effect and the eight-line stanzas seem ideally suited to the needs of this powerful historical meditation. The Christian obsession with death is concretely rendered in the images of the skulls that line the catacombs, some of them grotesquely dressed to mimic the vanity of human wishes. The poem reaches its most moving point in the fourth stanza, where the dressed up skulls of children "coddle like faded dolls left on shelf or well after the Xmas sale." The rest of the stanza falls off somewhat, and the insistent underlining of the Christian origins of this exercise in perversity, draws away paver from the statement already implicit in the images. However, the poem ends strongly, with a measured and richly textured three lines, where each word counts and has been carefully selected: "My mind caresses each leering chalky skull/ even as it consigns with matching derision/ this grisly harlequinade to a blazing furnace."

Hem is the best Layton, exercising another exalted imaginative and making more poetic sense than in all the rest of his repatriation poems together.

When I think of the difference between most of these poems about the slaughter of the Jews and a poem from Klein's *Hittleriad* such as "In re Solomon Warshawer," I have the feeling that Klein is taking the holocaust personally and Layton is taking it publicly. Them is to" much bombast, to" much posturing and ego in *The Covenant*. Too often the persona of the poems seems more like a paper tiger than a prophet or lawyer For the prosecution. I see the terrifying photo on the cover, I remember all the stories, movies, books; then, as always, there comes back to me the "statement" made in the Israeli pavilion at Expo '67, made so powerfully, so eloquently, not through frontal attack or overkill, but through a devastating understatement: a child's tiny shoe, sitting alone on a rectangular block in an empty room. □

## The perils of Charleen

**The Box Garden**, by Carol Shields, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 213 pages, \$9.95 cloth (ISBN 0 07 082547 5).

By SANDRA MARTIN

THE PROBLEM with first novels, particularly good ones, in second novels. The hapless author, having produced a work that meets the fancy of the critical elite, most immediately start writing a more mature book, one that's less flashy, sensational, or controversial, all the while maintaining the proper sense of decorum as a first novelist. To rush into print with a second novel is unseemly, but to wait too long is devastating. The first is over-reaching and greedy while thesecond implies laziness or, worse, a shallow uncreative soul. No, the etiquette of second novels is sacrosanct, especially in this country. The secret to success is timing and humility. The first novel should only be a pleasant blur when the second is slipped almost apologetically into the stores. That way nobody can be envious, outraged, or overwhelmed by the author's audacity in actually writing a second novel.

Now, why didn't somebody explain this to Carol Shields? Her timing with *The Box Garden* was deplorable. Critics, reviewers, and interviewers across the nation hadn't even finished praising *Small Ceremonies* when she waved i-he *Box Garden* under their noses. Who does she think she is, Matt Cohen? The results were predictable: comparison reading. How could *The Box Garden* win the battle of recent memory? *Small Ceremonies* was still too freshly in the minds and hearts of reviewers for *The Box Garden* to have a fair chance.

So let us, purely for the sake of argument, examine *The Box Garden* as though it were an individual piece of work and not attached by an umbilical cord to *Small Ceremonies*. The story is about Charleen Forrest, a 30-year-old divorcee, mother of adolescent Seth, lover of Eugene, the kindly orthodontist and lapsed poet. She is poor, fiercely independent, insecure, and totally real. Charleen is divorced from Watson Forrest, a botanist who freaked out when he turned 30 and ran off to join a commune. (Charleen compares his constant change of identity to a snake's ability to shed its skin.) That was 12 years ago, but Charleen is still trapped by Watson's memory. He may have disappeared but she has stayed in the same city, known the same friends, and even taken a job as a secretary/editor for her husband's old colleague and friend, Doug Savage. For all her talk of independence, Charleen is still Mrs. Forrest.

The book opens in Vancouver although there is none of the flavour of the West

Coast. Shields is not very good at setting the physical scene; despite her frequent mentions of Vancouver I was convinced (still am) that I was reading about Halifax. It became very confusing, particularly since travelling across the country is a key theme in the book. I was permanently turned around and out of place except when Shields was writing about Toronto. There she had more of a feel for geography and provided practical signposts like subway routes and suburban house styles.

The routine of Charleen's life is upset by a letter from her widowed, 10-year-old mother announcing her impending marriage to an unknown quantity named Louis Berceau. The thought of her despised and hateful mother marrying anybody is so grotesque and fascinating that Charleen, poor as she is, determines to attend the wedding in Toronto. Accompanied by the faithful orthodontist Eugene, Charleen leaves son Seth in the care of her friend and employer Doug Savage and his crazy wife Greta, and makes the trek back to her childhood home.

In Toronto we meet Charleen's mother, Florence McNinn, and Charleen's sister Judith. Florence is a wonderful character, as mean-spirited and tyrannical a witch as anybody Margaret Atwood or Alice Munro could create. When she was younger, Florence had a mania for decorating her suburban box of a house. Nobody could ever be comfortable for Florence was con-

stantly sacrificing herself in a yet more futile and pathetic attempt to out-carpet and out-curtain the neighbours. Now that she is old and sick (having recently lost a breast to cancer), Mrs. McNinn is content to whine and scold while the flounces and tassels fade and fray around her. Shields writes superbly about mothers and daughters, and captures delightfully the guiltily giggling reunion of Judith and Charleen with their whispered late-night confidences over stolen cups of coffee in the McNinn kitchen.

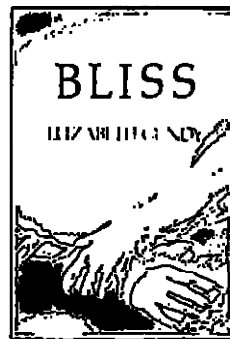
So far so good. It quickly becomes apparent that Charleen is even more tightly bound to her hideous mother than she is to her middle-aged hippic of a husband. She must learn to divest herself of both pieces of excess baggage. Simpler said than done, of course, but the journey back to Toronto and the family reunion provide both the occasion and the *raison d'être* for Charleen's emergence as an independent being.

Suddenly, as the novel is moving along gracefully and satisfyingly to its inevitable conclusion, Shields goes berserk. It's as though she were struck by the same frenzy for embellishment that she has bestowed on her fictional character Florence McNinn. Until the day before, the McNinn-Berceau wedding, Shields was writing a delightful little back garden of a novel. True, it was small in scope, but the characters were well realized and there was a simplicity and beauty to the arrangement of themes and incidents. Why she felt compelled at this

# Bliss



Elizabeth Gundy



Bliss is a high school dropout, a handyman—good-natured, strong and plain. He lives in a sleepy Canadian town with his wife, Hazel, and their two children. Leona is a neglected spinster and confirmed academic who teaches at a nearby college.

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point to dress up the plot with the most absurd series of coincidences and contortions remains a mystery. It was clearly a mistake. for the book ends in a jumble of hastily tied ends and snipped threads. And it is an error for which Carol Shields must suffer. Until that is, she produces her third novel. Third novels, you see, are fine. They demonstrate a seriousness of purpose and a dedication to craft. □

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## A la recherche du temps à présent

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The **Scarecrows** of Saint-Emmanuel, by André Major, translated from the French by Sheila Fischman, McClelland & Stewart, 176 pages, \$10 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 5471 8).

By IAN McLACHLAN

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THE TITLE seems like a good place to begin. In French it's *L'Épouvantail*, *The Scarecrow*. So why did Sheila Fischman, who for the most part catches the rapid transitions in André Major's style with impressive subtlety, change it so arbitrarily for the English edition?

After all, the first two thirds or so of the novel focus entirely on a single consciousness, that of Momo, the smell-time, half-Indian thief from the tiny village of Saint-Emmanuel, who on his release from prison sets out for the big city to look for his girl-friend, Gigi. Everything that happens is filtered through Momo's puzzlement and pain as he tries to prise her out of her new life as a hooker in the Paradise nightclub. He's beaten repeatedly, blamed for her murder, and finally shot, though not killed, by some anonymous ill-wisher back in Saint-Emmanuel. So it seems clear enough: Momo, the outsider, the victim, the scarecrow.

But the last one third of the novel is totally different—a difference that seems to have given most of the reviewers an undue amount of difficulty. Momo drops out of sight completely and we realize how ridiculous it was to imagine he could ever have been more than a passing object of sympathy and contempt. Instead, we focus now on Therrien, the local police inspector, who doesn't give a thought to whether Momo is a murderer or not (Montreal isn't his territory, after all) but who is passionately committed to tracking down the man who shot him. Therrien muses on his approaching retirement and lusts after the hotel-keeper's wife, who makes him fudge; unlike Momo, he knows the world too well, but he is still shot out from it, caught in his own doneness.

And then, in a beautifully daring jump, the focus changes again, to Saint-Pierre, the

fallen priest, fearful and full of guilt, the only one who knows the identity of Gigi's killer. When he picks up the phone to inform the police it's an act not only of social but also, strangely, of sexual salvation.

At the end, when the villagers enter the church for Gigi's funeral they are described as "wearing their scarecrow suits," and an hour later, as Therrien leads his culprit away, the image occurs again:

The dazzling snow made him close his eyes and he could have passed for a scarecrow, black and lost as he was in the streaming whiteness of the morning which was drawing to an end:

The "he" is the culprit, the new victim, but syntactically it could also be his son or, for that matter, the inspector. They are all now scarecrows, warnings. The English title will do just as well.

Through all this talk about titles I find myself beginning to trace the intelligence that lies behind the book. It's cold, at times condescending, essentially moralistic; but it achieves, too, not by its harsh logic but by an imaginative leap through space, a sort of final compassion. It works in a structural way, by juxtapositions that expose the social and emotional inadequacies of the scarecrow's context. And it does this by taking a popular genre, the detective story, and breaking it, fragmenting it, turning it against itself.

This, it seems to me, is one of the most interesting things the contemporary novelist can do. The forms of popular literature — the spy thriller, the detective story, science fiction — are essentially means of keeping reality at a distance. They take the real violence and alienation of our lives and romanticize and tame them. The importance of what a writer such as Major is doing lies in the way in which he appropriates that apparently conventional surface, the everyday, and disrupts and exposes it. In the process, of course, he will be accused by the critics of "falling between two stools," or whatever other clichés lie most easily to hand. In a way that may be nearly true. Ott almost every page then are flaws, embarrassments of melodrama or pretentiousness, but the hybrid, ironic form of the book contextualizes and even at times redeems them.

What we are left with is not a tatted-up detective story, but a serious exploration of the way in which the present is, as most men live it, little more than a rearrangement of the past. The characters are always remembering, and it's here incidentally that Major, in a purely technical sense, is at his most awkward. He keeps on telling us that Momo remembers this, or Saint-Pierre that, but he doesn't need that word "remembers" as a squeaky gate into the past. This novel is not in any real sense at all about the processes of memory: it's a subtle and sharp definition of the arbitrary inter-relationships of cause and effect, a fact of art rather than of psychologizing.



There is nowhere in this novel, in this society, that the present can happen freely. R's a point of energy and pain where various events are juxtaposed, the intersection of past and accident. One of the tremendously appropriate and stimulating aspects of Major's observation lies in this: that the present hardly ever seems actually to happen at all. Events are in the past as soon as they occur; one cannot react to the event, only to the response. The gunshot isn't heard, but the shock and puzzlement are frozen into consciousness. Things happen because they have happened; not because we will ever know why, or how we are to deal with them. Other than by trying to define them as accurately, as acutely, as this. □

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## Lest we beget, lest we beget

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The **Abramsky Variations**, by Morley Torgov, Lester & Orpen, 175 pages, \$8.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919630 80 4).

By JIM CHRISTY

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AFTER THE FIRST few awkward pages during which one all too readily sees the novelist hard at work and working too hard, I wanted to like this book. I wanted to like it when Leibel Abmmsky, later Louis Brahms, began to emerge as a character. Abmmsky is a violin player from Russia who journeys through Europe before crossing to the new world, arriving in Halifax the same day Lindbergh lands at Le Bourget. Leibel changes his name and fiddles and falls in love with a girl named Goldie Glicksman.



Her father owns a bakery. You just know once you learn he owns a bakery that Louis' days as a musician are numbered. He falls in love with Goldie because he sees her doing a fall: dance and thinks she contains within herself all the soul of their race. They get married and he prospers and she turns out not to have the soul of her people within herself. Or any kind of soul. Goldie becomes obsessed with Charles Lindbergh and the Depression hits and ruins the music business. Louis finally gets into his father-in-law's bakery business. Goldie becomes a shadow and eventually dies. Louis prospers with his Hearth-to-Table Coffee Shop variation on the bakery. There is a son named Hershey and a series of new Chryslers. Then, alas, we get into section two. Louis is reduced to a bit part and Hershey has grown up and owns a Mercedes-Benz. The test of the book is just the filling of pages.

It gets very boring. Hershey is married to Charlotte and they have a mid-life crisis. She is involved in the community. He isn't and begins to dream just like his mother did. His fantasies revolve around the exploits of Thor Heyerdahl. It doesn't exactly take a Nostradamus to realize that eventually we are going to have to read a scene wherein is explained that for a Jew, wherever he is, there is a frontier. A Jew doesn't need the dreams of a Lindbergh or a Heyerdahl.

There is a third part to the book and a third generation. Hershey's son Kevin is the

pivotal character here. He changes his name to Bart because Bart is cooler than Kevin and he wants to make it in the rock business, so a mol name is necessary. In one sense Bart has a purpose. He has no flesh and blood or life of his own but he does have purpose, which is to bring the generational saga, in all its variations, up to date. The climax occurs on a beach in Nice. Bart is staying in the south of France to let some air into his mind and he has a girl friend named Kathy O'Hearn from Boston and you can imagine the problems, especially when Louis and Hershey and Charlotte decide to stop in Nice on their way home from Israel. Father and son have big, significant existential confrontations over their *salade verte*.

The family returns to Paris to catch their plane home. Louis decides not to go back to Toronto. He wants to hang around Paris for a few days. He springs this decision on his son and daughter-in-law at Le Bourget. They went to know where he will stay and he gives them an address and phone number. His son says, "That's just an address and phone number."

"The name you'll remember easy," replies the elder Brahms. "It's called Hotel Lindbergh."

Get it?

I did but I didn't.

If I have repeated the story at length it is to show the length to which the story should have been condensed. Or, better yet, we should have had a short story about Lads

playing the violin at bar mitzvahs and wedding receptions.

I know the book has something to do with three men, three generations, three dreams. But it all falls terribly flat. The only scenes that resemble literature are the ones where old Louis figures. Whenever anyone else speaks it's stale, mechanical, writer-at-work. There are too many wooden speeches and meaningless confrontations. We are supposed to sympathize with Hershey as he lies in his bed in a room in Nice agonizing because the *dee dahs* of the ambulances out on the streets remind him of the sirens in the concentration camps. We cannot sympathize because we have previously been offered nothing to indicate that Hershey has any particular feelings about his Jewishness or any interest in the history of his race.

Torgov is completely out of the picture when he puts words into the mouths of Bart and his girlfriend. Each manages to get the other's name in every sentence they exchange like a couple of Dale Carnegie graduates. Their debate over involvement and apathy could have been taken from a high-school lit mag circa 1967, although it is set in 1976.

Torgov's previous book, *A Good Place to Come From*, won the Leacock Award in 1975 but this one suffers from too much serious intent, which is, if I may say so, unlearned by Louis' wisecracks. If this is humorous then Torgov can maybe get a job writing one liners for Jean-Paul S&C. □

## Howard O'Hagan

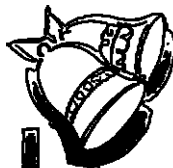


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# Jingo bells, jingo bells

'Tis a vintage season for gift books and once again Canada's incredible landscape is accorded lavish treatment - with a Tom tonie leading, the way

by Hubert de Santana

THE SUMMER drought is over. Publishers have opened the sluice gates and bookstores are awash with this year's Christmas offerings. Most of these books are designed to appeal to the eye, the mind, and the cheque book — in that order. Nevertheless, it is a vintage year. Blessed are the bibliophiles, for their coffee table shall be laden with treasures.

## ART BOOKS

Ride of place goes to Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm, by Harold Town and David P. Silcox (McClelland & Stewart, 529.95 to Dec. 31, 542.50 thereafter). This is a splendid celebration of the life and work of one of Canada's greatest painters. The authors have approached their subject without the slack-jawed, round-eyed adulation that most critics in this country reserve for Canadian genius, and the result is that the text is refreshingly cool and lucid. Thomson's weaknesses are acknowledged along with his strengths, because the authors know that he will survive the toughest scrutiny. The design of this book and the quality of the printing are beyond praise. Thomson's palette was as vivid as Van Gogh's, and the jewels of landscape he created are reproduced here with remarkable fidelity, more than one half of them in their original size.

The range of Thomson's work is dazzling. His electric energy runs through everything he painted. There are wonderful cloud studies — from sunset banners of flame to menacing blue-black thunderheads. The opalescent play of light on his beloved northern lakes is rendered in the manner of the French impressionists. Sometimes his landscapes are abstract, with autumn foliage reduced to a constellation of bright arrowheads. Thomson's flower paintings are astonishing, swirling compositions; his feeling for colour was usually unerring because it was instinctual. Thomson was only 39 when he died, but he left Canada an inestimable legacy, produced in just five passionate years. "His ultimate achieve-

ment," writes David Silcox, "is the more striking because it arrived like a comet, unheralded, brief and glorious."

Another example of fine printing is The Art of Glen Loates (Prentice-Hall, \$35). Paul Duval, who last year focused attention on Ken Danby, now does the same for the 37-year-old wildlife painter Glen Loates. He gives a balanced critical assessment of Loates' work, and has wisely included some sketches done by Loates in childhood that prove how precocious his talent was. As always, it is the pictures that bear the most eloquent testimony to the artist's brilliance. Whether he is painting birds, animals, fish, or flowers, Loates portrays them with immense skill and love. The reproductions are extraordinarily good. Every nuance of the most delicate watercolour washes has been captured: not a single stroke of the pencil or brush has been lost. Owning this book is the next best thing to owning the originals.

Paul Duval's Ken Danby (Clarke Irwin, \$32.50) has enjoyed a well-deserved success, and is now in its second printing. Opinion on Danby's work is sharply divided; but what the pictures reproduced in this book show beyond dispute is that miracles can be achieved with egg tempera in the hands of a master. Danby's work in other media such as oils, watercolours, and serigraphs is also represented. As a realist painter Danby is regarded internationally as a contemporary master. He is only half-way through his career, and it may well be that he is destined to become one of the great Canadian painters of our time.

## PLACE BOOKS

Images of Spain by Mordecai Richler and Peter Christopher (McClelland & Stewart, 527.50). Mordecai Richler was 20 when he first visited Spain, in 1951. My own love affair with that country began eight years later, when I was 17. Spain exerts a powerful spell, and Richler, returning after an absence of 25 years, finds that the country has lost none of its magic. He

writes with affection and insight about Spain and its people: and as one who knows that country well, I am full of admiration for the beauty and accuracy of his observation. Richler's essay is complemented by absolutely superb photographs by Peter Christopher, who spent three years and travelled 30,000 miles to get them.

Toronto, by William Kilbourn and Rudi Christl (McClelland & Stewart, \$27.50) is a flashy book. The breathless blurb on the dustjacket would have us believe that Toronto is some sort of Xanadu on the edge of



Sir Isaac Brock's monument, from *This Land, These People*

Lake Ontario. And with the use of double exposures, camera movement, and special filters, photographer Rudi Christl contrives to create and maintain that illusion. Toronto is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world, but you'd never know that from looking through these photographs. Christl seems to be more interested in the phallic CN Tower than in the ethnic diversity that contributes in such large measure to the colour and excitement of this city. Tomato's black and brown citizens are conspicuous by their absence from this portfolio.

William Kilbourn's seven-part essay which is printed on yellowish pages that look as if they're made of recycled paper proves that his love for Toronto runs deep. Indeed, it is a city one can quickly grow to love. But there are dark undercurrents beneath the surface glitter. For instance, the South Asians have become victims of the most scurrilous sort of racism, but their problems hardly rate a mention in Kilbourn's text (it's supposed to be a celebration, remember?). Kilbourn writes of Toronto as "a dream of cloud-capped towers" and that's what's wrong with this book. Both the words and the pictures deal more with dreams than with reality.

I didn't care much for Paul St. Pierre's introductory text, but any Canadian who can look through the pictures in British

Columbia: Our Land (Hancock Home, \$35) without feeling his blood stir has to be made of stone. The landscapes of B.C. have become a cliché for majesty and serenity, but here they are seen through the fresh and original eyes of photographers resident in the province. Their work reaffirms the grandeur of this incredible and tameless country, and their pride and love is something we all share.

The experience of the B.C. Landscape over the last two centuries is treated in From Desolation to Splendour by Maria Tippett and Douglas Cole (Clarke Irwin, \$19.95). The authors trace the evolution of artistic perception of the province, from the bland, bloodless prints of the 18th century to the soaring, cathedral-like compositions of Emily Carr's forest paintings. Of special interest are the watercolours by such artists as Collings, Maclure, Pemberton, and Bamford. One of the loveliest is a watercolour of an ice cave on Illecillewaet Glacier by T.M. Martin.

Native Newfies will not be flattered by the skimpy Newfoundland Portfolio by Ben Hansen (Breakwater Books, \$17.50). Only the middle section, which is in colour, is worth looking at. It is sandwiched between two dull collections of black-and-white photographs that are so drab that they are likely to scare potential visitors away from the place.

Bartholomew's World Atlas (Clarke Irwin, \$17.95) is worth a mention here, simply because it is the best atlas I have seen in its price range. The maps are printed with exemplary clarity, and there is plenty of information on geology, climatology, oceanography, population, and vegetation. An attractive and useful gift for friends who are not kindergarten drop outs.

#### NATURE BOOKS

A Vanished World: The Dinosaurs of Western Canada by Dale A. Russell (Hurtig, \$12.95). Fifteen million years ago, dinosaurs roamed through Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. That mind-boggling spectacle has been recreated in this book through a series of striking paintings and beautiful photographs. To these are added paleontological data that help the reader to understand an awesome, primeval environment. I'd rather take my chances in our own world, with its human monsters.

Moments of Discovery: Adventurer with American Birds (Clarke Irwin, \$29.95) is a collection of exquisite bird studies by Eliot Potter, one of the world's most distinguished photographers. The text is by Michael Harwood. Potter's camera has the uncanny ability to catch birds at rare moments, preserving them in perfect little cameos. The cover picture shows a snowy egret alighting, its outspread wings translucent in the sun. The same high standard is maintained throughout the book, which is meticulously designed and printed. It's good value in spite of the high price tag.

If you still approve of seal hunts after looking at The Life of the Harp Seal by Fred Bruemmer (Optimum Publishing, \$19.95 until Jan. 1, \$25.00 thereafter) you deserve to be manacled to an iceberg and set adrift in the High Arctic. Baby harp seals are among the loveliest and most appealing creatures on this earth, and it is sickening to think of them being slaughtered so that primed-up human poodles can have fur coats sad muffs.

As one who has killed his share of animals and birds before seeing the error of his ways, I found it hard to drum up any enthusiasm for The Book of Hunting (McClelland & Stewart, \$60). It is a massive, expensive encyclopedic survey of hunting from prehistory to the present day. The marvellous pictures only underlie the beauty and grace of the animals, whose destruction is celebrated by the hunting set. My sympathies are firmly on the side of the hunted, whether they are killed for food, for their skins, or for "sport."

#### GENERAL-INTEREST BOOKS

Taken by the Wind by Ronald Woodall and T.H. Watkins (General Publishing, \$29.95) is an elegiac essay in words and pictures on the vanishing architecture of the West. Many of the structures shown in this book have already disappeared, which underscores its importance as a social and historical document. The sensitive photographs convey a fine feeling for textures; and the pervading mood of transience and abandonment is powerfully expressed. A fine tribute to the loneliness, toughness, ingenuity, and resilience of the pioneer spirit.

Those qualities were amply displayed by the explorers of the North, who are the subject of Frank Rasky's The North Pole or Bust (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, \$17.95). Rasky writes with verve and excitement, and his narrative is immensely readable. He describes Robert Peary lying crippled in a wooden shack, "his eight frostbitten toes snapping off like icicles." When dealing with Charles Hall's Arctic diet, Rasky writes Judylaine Fine into the ice. He tells us that polar-bear liver has so much Vitamin A that it's poisonous; kelp mixed with blackberries makes a "luscious appetizer"; and vegetation in a caribou paunch is like "a salad of sorrel." Once taken up, this book is hard to put down.

And so to The Canadian Cook Book (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, \$14.95). It's exceptionally good value for the money. Gastronomic mysteries are explained clearly and concisely, and even a kitchen duffer should be able to produce something edible with the guidance of this book. It deserves a place in every kitchen, whether the owner is a gourmet or an impecunious journalist grateful for advice about preparing meals that are low in cost and high in nutrition.

Everything you always wanted to know about a home, from buying it, to furnishing, decorating and maintaining it, is set out in *The House Book* by Terence Conran (Carlton House, \$35). It's a hefty, handsomely bound book, crammed with information and colour illustrations. Since its first publication in 1974 it has become indispensable to home makers. A bonus chapter on metric conversion should make it more popular than ever.

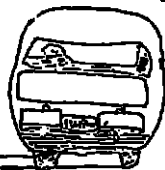
**Canadian Garden Perennials** (Hancock House, \$17.50) is a comprehensive book on a variety of gorgeous perennials, "the backbone of most gardens." The author, A. R. Buckley, has been a horticulturist for 35 years, and his wide experience is a mine of information on the planning and planting of a garden, general care, renovation, winter protection, the treatment of diseases, and the constant battle against insect pests. He discusses favourites like delphiniums, poppies, and peonies, as well as rarer hybrids. Buckley's lively text is enhanced with excellent colour photographs.

**This Land. These People** by W.L. Morton and L. F. Hannon (Gage, \$29.95) is an illustrated history of Canada, and is less chauvinistic than one might expect. It is a more than adequate outline of Canadian history, and its brevity allows it to skim comfortably over some of the more unsavoury episodes in our past. Non-Canadians will find it a useful introduction to an immense and compelling land. I like the colour photographs, some of which are so carefully composed that they have the charm and geometric discipline of still-life paintings. The quality of the printing could be improved, though.

The perfection to which modern photography and printing techniques can be taken is well illustrated by the **Art Directors' Index No. 5** (Hurtig, \$39.95), which contains the work of 235 of the world's best commercial photographers. Canada is represented by 17 photographers, and I'm happy to say that their work more than holds its own in this distinguished international company.

#### OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED

The following gift books either arrived too late for inclusion in this roundup or were passed over because of the specialized nature of their subject matter. Some may be reviewed in a future issue of *Book; in Canada*, together with other late arrivals: **Modern Firearms**, by Yves Cadiou, McClelland & Stewart, \$19.95. **Graphis Annual, 1977-78**, Hurtig, \$39.50. **Canada: Symbols of Sovereignty**, by Conrad Swan, U of T Press, \$29.95. **The Pacific Princesses**, by Robert D. Turner, Sono Nis Press, \$24.95. **The Colour of Ontario**, by Bill Brooks, Hounslow, 59.95. □



## The 'J' is for Jeremiah

The Wit and Wisdom of Richard Needham, by Richard J. Needham, Hurtig, 110 pages, \$9.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88830 137 5) and \$3.95 paper (ISBN 0 88830 138 3).

By PHILIP MARCHAND

I BEGAN reading Richard J. Needham's column in the *Globe and Mail* when I first arrived in Toronto 13 years ago. He struck me then as that rare phenomenon, a Toronto newspaper columnist who actually had something to say. He addressed himself to those subjects that, in all the world, seemed to me to be the most interesting - subjects like the terrible, intricate emotional network inside families, the ways in which individuals gain and lose their personal freedom, their personal integrity. These are not subjects newspaper columnists ordinarily devote themselves to. We are much more accustomed, particularly in the city where Needham lives, to hear about something funny the columnist's wife said over the fried eggs that morning. And though Needham could be wry, even perverse, in his humour, he was always basically serious about these subjects, and serious about his readers.

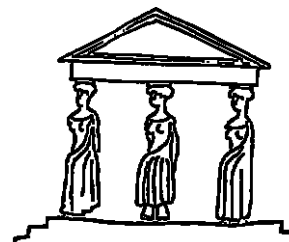
Needham still writes his column, and I still read it regularly. *The Wit and Wisdom of Richard Needham*, a title that would have made the Needham of a decade ago cringe, is a distillation of these columns over the past few years, a son of sampler from his Late Period, containing aphorisms and brief comments on life, the world, the Dominion of Canada. Needham has not lost his ability to provoke, to entertain, and occasionally to stir the conscience of a reader with these comments, aphorisms, and jokes. The collection is also notable, however, because it points out, in a way, what must be the major problem of any newspaper columnist.

That problem is simply how to fill the space given to him almost every day for months on end. This problem has defeated a number of well-known columnists (Gary Lautens of the *Toronto Star* may be one of the most prominent examples), who started out keen and ended up insipid. Needham has, as evidenced by this latest collection, certainly avoided this latter fate. Partly he has handled the columnist's problem by printing liberal doses of the readers' mail and other writers' reflections. But what this collection makes plain is that Needham has altered his approach to the column over the years, doubtless in response to changes in his own interests and temperament, but also, I am sore, in response to the brutal demands of the daily column.

Briefly, those demands over the years have drained much of the exuberance, the healthy rebellious life-loving instincts from Needham's columns. What remains often seems nothing more than a sour and cynical residue, exemplified by "aphorisms" such as the following from Needham's collection: "When you are young, you want people to love you; when you are middle-aged, you want them to like you; when you are old, you wish to God they would leave you alone." As I mentioned, there is still the old flair, the incisiveness that shows itself throughout the collection as well. A statement such as "All men make trouble for women; the difference is that strong men make a clean kind of trouble, weak men a diiy kind" may not rank with the best of Pascal, but it's shrewd, truthful, and worthy of being pondered over long and hard by any adult man or woman. What I am trying to point out is that, in going through this collation, a reader ought to keep in mind that even Thoreau — to take a major influence on Needham's life and work — would eventually start sounding like a crank and a bore if forced to turn out a daily newspaper column for 15 years or so.

The book also points out, in its heavy reliance on Needham's political aphorisms, what is the most obvious sign of change: Needham as columnist has gone through over the past few years. That is his ever-increasing obsession with the political questions of inflation and crime. Both of these phenomena Needham lays at the door of the modern welfare state. Needham has always been an "individualist": of late, however, he seems to have gone from the individualism of Thoreau to the individualism of Ayn Rand. What is the real source of his political passions, however, is neither Thoreau nor Rand, but rather the almost morbid pessimism of traditional conservatives like Joseph De Maistre, the 19th-century Frenchman who recognized and articulated, among other curious insights, the central position of the hangman in society. Such pessimism may be a perfectly sane response to the condition of the world, but Needham, like most of these pessimists, betrays from time to time a sort of glee at seeing his wont predictions come true. It is the least attractive quality of his writing.

Still, the book is undeniably useful. If nothing else it shows us the essential Needham, a tough, durable man who, even at his worst, provides a necessary counterbalance to the sentimentality and routine piety of the writers who inform us, from the pages of our daily newspapers, how we should view life, politics, and the unfolding of the universe. □



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## Growing up superb

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My Childhood and Yours: **Happy Memories of Growing Up**, by Robert Thomas Allen, Macmillan. 167 pages, \$9.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7705 1576 2).

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By **ROBERT M. STAMP**

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REMEMBER THE taste of a pineapple sods all your favourite ice cream parlour? The sheer delight that came from wading in mud puddles? The ignominy of losing a school yard fight or the embarrassment when mother took you shopping for a new suit? Verandahs, hammocks, and home-made preserves? Like a photo-realist painter with careful attention to detail, Robert Thomas Allen in *My Childhood and Yours* has recaptured the spirit of growing up in Toronto in the 1920s. All the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of remembered childhood are here for us to share — from roast-beef Sunday dinners to Monday-morning doses of castor oil.

Allen employs the cycle of the changing seasons to introduce us to his earliest years. Springtime brings the mud puddles, the Twenty-Fourth of May, and the long-awaited end of school. Summer is divided into two parts — looking forward to and attending the Canadian National Exhibition. Autumn means piano lessons, Halloween, and storm windows. Winter consists of Santa Claus, Christmas presents, and layers of warm clothing.

Then the screen widens and we begin to see young Bobby Allen finding his place in the wider world. (Considering its central place in the world of childhood, schooling gets short shrift. "At best, school was just something that temporarily barred the way to the real world.") We learn about the Allen family, the houses and neighbours along the street. We read the books and view the Saturday afternoon movies that gave young Allen his boyhood heroes. We go for bicycle rides around the city and Sunday afternoon drives in the country.

Gradually the dreams of childhood give way to the realities of the adult world. "The period I think of as my boyhood," recalls Allen, "ended around the time my family sold the car." Excursions out of the city now depended on his own efforts. That summer he went camping with friends in a remote spot north of Lake Superior, away from home and parents for a full month. That event was one of "the salient points of my life."

Allen's vivid remembrance of childhood makes delightful reading for all nostalgia-lovers. But this is not a book about anyone's childhood. It is about a childhood fashioned by lower-middle-class, Anglo-Saxon

Toronto in the 1920s. It is a Toronto of well-kept lawns, which "if not exactly British, [were] connected with sound thinking and right values, like the British." It was a time when one referred to Eaton's as a "grand old firm" in exactly the same tone one used for England or the British Empire. Allen's own father thought Toronto was the fittest city in the world because it had "miraculously avoided all un-British behaviour."

Yet Allen himself claims that "the world of childhood is universal." In his dosing paragraphs he observes the children of the 1970s playing outside his apartment window. "The kids are still there. They exist in their own world and in their timeless time." One child looks as if he is "running toward a promise — a magic land, the same one we knew was there when we were kids."

Here is the dilemma faced by any writer of childhood — whether novelist or historian, biographer or autobiographer. How much of one's childhood experience is universal and how much is unique, bound by a particular combination of class, race, geography and time? In *My Childhood and Yours*, Allen comes as close to blending the unique and the universal as any reader could demand. □

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## We like it hot, they like it not

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The Bass Saxophone, two novellas by Josef Skvorecky, translated from the Czech by Kaca Polackova-Henley, Anson-Cartwright Editions. 186 pages. \$4.95 paper (ISBN 0 919974 03 1).

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By CHRISTOPHER BLACKBURN

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Totalitarian ideologists don't like MI life (other people's) because it cannot be totally controlled; they loathe art, the product of a yearning for life, because that, too, evades control — if controlled and legislated, it perishes.

so says Josef Skvorecky, a distinguished Czech writer now living and working in Canada, in his preface to these two novellas. Skvorecky knows about this authoritarian dislike for creativity. His first novel, *The Cowards*, written at age 24, became, says E. V. Kohak, "a rallying point of life" for young Czechs living under Communism, and was banned for political reasons two weeks after publication, although it continued to circulate underground. When, in the relatively liberal, pre-Soviet invasion days of Alexander Dubcek's leadership, *The Cowards* was finally released for publication outside Czechoslovakia, it was

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translated into 13 languages and acclaimed as a major Czech novel, one of the most important books to come out of post-war Europe.

Skvorecky left Czechoslovakia in 1968, before the Soviet takeover. He went first to the United States, then came to the University of Toronto as writer-in-residence for 1970-71. During his year at Toronto, he produced *All the Bright Young Men and Women*, a history of the Czech cinema. He now teaches at U of T's Erindale College.

Nce Hugh Anson-Cartwright, a Toronto antiquarian bookseller and bibliophile, has published two Skvorecky novellas that have not previously appeared in English: "Emoke" and "The Bass Saxophone." In them Skvorecky shows himself to be a masterly portrayer of individuals playing the tragicomedy of life. Both works show the battle of life against death — of laughing, loving, propagating energy against routine, regulations, dullness, and fear.

The first story, "Emoke," takes place in a state-sponsored "recreation centre" in Communist Czechoslovakia. During the week of dreary "organized activity" at the centre, the narrator is drawn to an attractive young widow, Emoke. As he gets to know her, he sees her beauty, creative force, and "immense sensuality" imprisoned by "a desperate and vicious illusion" — a life-denying religion of superstition and hocus-pocus in which she has taken refuge following the brutality of her first marriage. He perceives that a worldly love could restore her to the life she has turned from, but realizes that what is involved is not a casual affair or a single act of love but a total commitment of one life to another: "If I didn't take upon myself her whole life I would destroy her." The narrator is not able to throw himself into Emoke's future without stopping to think it over; a moment of spontaneity and willingness to surrender is spoiled by doubt, an opportunity passes, and something is lost forever.

The second story, "The Bass Saxophone," is set in a Czechoslovakian town under Nazi occupation. The conventional sentimentalities of a shabby band playing for the entertainment of the Nazis and local German community are broken up by the explosive energy of a bass saxophone player, who seems to shake off not only the laws of music but also the omnipresent weight of the Nazi oppression.

The stories show Skvorecky's instinctive humanity and his understanding of the illusions by which, perhaps, most of us live. The characters are all seen clearly as individuals, not as types. Whether good or bad, the characters are all subject to human hopes and fears. With Skvorecky's love of life, humour, and truth, and his refusal to be bound by stereotypes or by other people's expectations, it is no wonder he was a *bête noir* of the bureaucrats and ideologues who have taken over the cultural life of his homeland. □

## The small rain down can rain

The Canadian Short Fiction Anthology, edited by Cathy Ford, Intermedia Press, 239 pages, paper unpriced (ISBN 0 88956 045 5).

A Room on the River, and Other Stories, by Garfield McRae, Queenston House, 135 pages, \$8.95 cloth.

By GEOFF HANCOCK

CATHY FORD'S anthology goes to great lengths to emphasize how up to date it is. She firmly states in her introduction: "I hope a page of this book is rain on the soil of prose writing. . . ." Idealism indeed. Unfortunately, as the promised rain on a fictional drought, this anthology suffers from delusions of grandeur.

The 36 stories are not representative of Canadian short fiction now, but as it might be from writers-in-progress. Some of the stories originated in the fiction-writing workshops of the creative writing department at the University of British Columbia. Most of the writers are under 30, and many are unknown even to regular readers of the small literary magazines. Only one contributor, Eugene McNamara of Windsor, Ont., has an established reputation, and his story "Changes" is reprinted from the *Canadian Fiction Magazine*. So by and large, this is a student anthology.

As a result, it is held together by an odd mixture of youthful exuberance, undergraduate cleverness, and some fine professional craftsmanship. But small details annoy. The biographical notes are often

silly. "D. is a lousy typist . . . lives life to its emptiest." A bit of florid overwriting manages to creep into the prose as well. "Somewhere deep in my mind a brain screamed." In fact, many characters scream as their anguished situations prove too much: (I should add here that, as editor of the *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, I had a chance to consider many of these stories for prior publication and with the exception of McNamara, all were turned around fairly close to the post office.)

But on the pitvite side, let me add that many writing talents are on display. The stories range over many modes and styles, from real to surreal. I liked with varying degrees of interest Norm Alford's "Beyond Words," D. Buckland's "Pearl," Peter Crowell's "Sugarpops and Razorblades," Ken Fernstrom's "The Boy Who Insisted," Morris Panycz's "Andre Maczjewski," Robert G. Sherrin's "Schadenfroh," Hal Gray's "Groceries," Opal Nation's "More Testimonials by Recipients of Artificial Limbs," and E. R. Zietlow's "Waiting." Many of the others have a fine proficiency with the technical tools of fiction. With few platitudes and fine craftsmanship, these stories could offer much to other titers.

Art, however, means transcending craft, and this is where the good intentions of this anthology weaken. In story after story the framework is too visible, the subject matter banal, the author's voice too apparent. Worse, looking for a good read, I found too few stories exciting, terribly original, entertaining, or funny. A serious, often ominous tone pervades.

Whether the story is realistic or non-realistic ("armadillos everywhere he looked"), the characters all seem to be in their mid-20s. Many have freaky drug or sexual experiences or both. The future of Canadian fiction, should the seeds of most of these stories take root, is doom and



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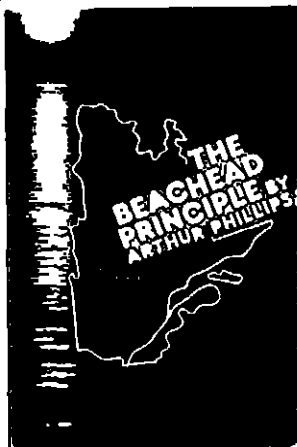


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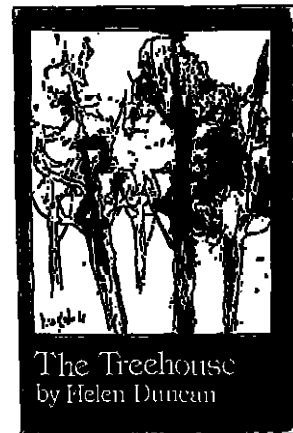
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gloom. These young writers have a preference for the more bizarre aspects of reality. Insane asylums, assassinations, mysterious phone calls, and burial alive, sometimes on a bus that "moves deeper and deeper into the heart of the city," are often clues that the writer is indeed a youngster. Lacking the experience to draw upon life, and lacking the oxygen-rich philosophy to sustain them in the intellectual stratosphere of Franz Kafka or Jorge Luis Borges, the result often reads like warmed-over Edgar Allan Poe.

The most interesting experimentation in world-wide fiction is, of course, the delving into the nature of language and narrative. At random, I'm thinking of Ronald Sukenick's *Q.S.G.*, Severo Sarduy's *Cobra*, or Nicole Brossard's *A Book*. But in this anthology, any page of brd typing passes for experimentation. Dropped punctuation, the slash, or lack of capital letters is a poor substitute for the avant-garde.

All these writers have potential, but with few exceptions there is more promise than achievement. In trying so hard to squeeze Canadian letters in a new diction, they simply get red in the face from the strain.

From Manitoba comes Garfield McCrae's *A Room on the River*, a collection of 11 stories loosely connected to form a cohesive novel of sorts, something like Margaret Laurence's *A Bird in the House*. The key to this collection is a story about an ugly bread truck, still hid&n in the weeds, "yet after all this time, it is acid the birds still find crumbs." The narrator and hero of these stories, Willie-John MacNie, likewise finds crumbs of his childhood experiences in the town of Orallo, Man., "a town that later died when the railways receded." But the crumbs add up to the whole loaf of the grown man. Like John-Boy Walton in the TV series, Willie-John recollects his emotions in tranquility. The stories, which begin in the mid-1940s, are chronologically arranged. He is eight years old when he moves with his parents to Orallo, population 96. There is no curling rink, "far more a bastion of the Prairies than the long romanticized grain elevator." At 18 he leaves for the city, presumably Winnipeg. In the intervening 10 years, he meets an eight-year-old tomboy, a budding teenage beauty, a deaf minister, a slovenly aunt and uncle, the local urchin (reminiscent of Young Bun, the prairie boy in *Who Has Seen the Wind*), a simple-minded girl, and decides to be a movie star, Tristan Sailor, though the bus to Hollywood ends up kicking gravel in his face. (Indeed, the running inventory of movie stars of the 1940s and 1950s makes a compelling sub-text. The people he meets shape the man at 18, when he has to make a humane decision, even at great personal cost to himself.

McCrae is a good traditional story-teller. He moves swiftly and usually manages to keep a tight rein on the sentimentality that threatens to pop through the nostalgia. Though not always. A story that begins "Summer was still green and new, as was I..." telegraphs its predictable end by a Prairie mile with "... tears for a summer

that had vanished forever." But despite these occasional reaches for the Kleenex, McCrae also has a sharp eye for the cruelties of people. Because he understands what his characters want, his delicate touch makes a smashed cake, an oversize wedding dress, a thrown-away gift book into the touchstones of real tragedies. Within the simple shape of these little stories is much wisdom. □

## Blowing their covers

Many Voices: An Anthology of Contemporary Indian Poetry, by David Day and Marilyn Bowering, J. J. Douglas, 98 pages, \$4.95 paper (ISBN 0 88894 134 x).

Giant Canadian Poetry Annual 1977, Press Porcépic, 80 pages, \$2.95 paper (ISBN 0 88878 152 0).

Western Windows: A Comparative Anthology of Poetry in British Columbia, supervising editor Patricia M. Ellis, Commcept Publishing (Suite 234, 470 Granville St., Vancouver), 294 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88829 000 4).

By HANS JEWINSKI

THREE NEW anthologies... and three titles gone wrong. When I read these collections I found, in each case, that the title promised something the rest of the book did not deliver. It is silly enough to have mass-market paperbacks that mislead by cover & sign and title, but is this really necessary with a poetry anthology?

Not that these three go far out of their way to deceive; in two instances there just does not seem to be enough material and energy for that. For example, *Many Voices* bills itself as an anthology of contemporary Canadian Indian poetry. Great. High time, I would say. But why only 33 poets and 98 pages? Not a bad page-per-poet average on the surface, but after one full page is subtracted for each poet's biography, there is not very much room left for anything else. Furthermore, there is only a 16-line introduction to the "cultural revival occurring among Canadian Indians" that this book heralds. The editors have nothing to say other than that "the poems speak for themselves." Well, there should be a detailed and informative introduction to this anthology because these poems are not, as the blurb on the back cover would have us believe, "rooted in traditional oratory, storytelling and religion." Most of the poetry in *Many Voices* should not have been anthologized in this or any other book. Too many of the poets write as if they had just discovered *The Corn Goddess*, or Al Purdy, or both. In fact, Purdy, among many, many other poets in Canada, has thrown away better poems than shown here. Even the

editors seem more committed to craft than do the poets, for they have donated their fees and royalties to an annual award to be given a Canadian Indian for achievement in poetry.

The *Giant Canadian Poetry Annual* is another misnomer — there is nothing gigantic about it at all. After last year's edition sold 5,000 copies, Press Porcépic decided to place approximately 10,000 of the 1977 version on the magazine racks of Canada. Perhaps that is the "giant" to which the title refers for it certainly could not refer to the 80-page comic-book format. Nor could "giant" refer to the poets, since then are only two whose work is worth rereading: J. D. Carpenter and Sam Johnson, who have both been unforgivably overlooked by publishers and other anthologists in the past. Here's Carpenter's "Atavus":

*so my body  
once seen  
if not pedestalic  
at least as my own  
now allows the butting abuse of children  
and surprisingly houses unrecriminated  
those tenants of joy  
the sins of the father*

And here is Johnson's "Boat Ride on Lake Shabomeka":

*But to say they are like the sun, to turn  
around  
in our own cleverness and say they are  
like the sun,  
Would be to turn our abundance into the  
brevity  
It is. To see at last under the magistry  
Of eye, the signature of laughter our wits  
have  
Brought us it. And the storm carrying in  
over the lake*

Both should be carefully examined by the other contributors to give them some idea of



what poetry is about. And, aside from lack of good poetry, this anthology also suffers from errors in design: full pages set aside for biographies (with or without photographs), pages and pages wasted on editorials, messages from the sponsor, letters and



reviews about the 1976 annual, a guide to "who publishes poems" .. and just plain blank pages. It's little wonder no one takes credit for the editing of this titanic effort.

*Western Windows: A Comparative Anthology of Poetry in British Columbia* is the third title that is slightly off. Why "comparative"? Nothing indicates whether the adjective refers to the anthology or to the poetry. There are good poems by P.K. Page, George Bowering, Pot Lane, Lionel Kearns, Susan Musgrave, David Day, Tom Wayman, Bill Bissett, Allan Safarik, Peter Trower, Dorothy Livesay, and many others. And to really make the book worth reading, the editors have included a section of statements about poetry, interviews, reminiscences, and commentary that fills the last one third of the collection. Furthermore, the design of this book actually works. The poems are not crowded on the page (either by other poems or by illustrations). Rather, they are given full pages, wherever possible, to permit maximum impact on the reader. The illustrations reflect the mood of the poems and seldom get in their way. This anthology is nearly 300 pages long and is consistently interesting and provocative.

All three anthologies have problems carrying out the full letter of their titles. It is ironic that *Many Voices* and the *Giant Canadian Poetry Annual* should fail because they are physically small while their titles claim to be so much. When measured against them, *Western Windows* proves to be the most impressive and responsible. □

## Well worth poring over

**Raincoast Chronicles: Stories and History of the B.C. Coast**, edited by Howard White, Harbour Publications (Box 119 Madeira Park, B.C.), 272 pages, \$12.95 cloth and \$10.95 papa.

By DAVID DAY

MOST REGIONAL histories are rather like Great-Aunt Ethel's photo album. Only Ethel really knows who is actually in those faded photographs and when she explains, it means nothing to anyone who didn't live within one mile of Horsefly between the years 1904 and 1906.

*Raincoast Chronicles* is, fortunately, not one of these books. It is an example of what regional publishing in Canada should be. It is deeply involved in the presentation of the raw history and legend from which any region's character and identity grow. *Raincoast* is essentially a journal of folk history — a working-class history in a province settled by loggers, fishermen, miners, and homesteaders. As editor Howard White explains in his introduction, he is after "the spirit of the B.C. coast" —

something he admits is as elusive as the wily Sasquatch, but White and his associates nevertheless pursue the creature with enthusiasm and conviction.

The book is a collected edition of the *Raincoast Chronicles* magazine, which first made its appearance four years ago. It combines the first five issues of the magazine with a substantial amount of new material. *Raincoast* has a sort of handmade, homespun quality about it that is fitting for a journal edited, printed, and published in a barn in a forest clearing by what *Maclean's* magazine calls "the publishing magnate of Pender Harbour."

*Raincoast* has had an amazing amount of success and recognition within British Columbia. The magazine won B.C. media awards for Best Feature Article and Best Magazine of 1974, and the book won the \$1,000 Baton's British Columbia Book Award of 1975-6 as "the publication that contributed most to the enjoyment and understanding of the province." In less than a year *Raincoast Chronicles* has sold over 10,000 hard-cover copies. It is now in its third edition, and is available for the first time in paperback.

*Raincoast* generates an authenticity about B.C.'s history. It is a history that professional historians have not yet had a chance to smooth over. Nor has the movie industry got around to reducing it all to glossy myths.

There is certainly nothing glossy about this book's presentation, although it is a

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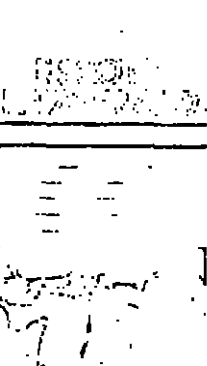
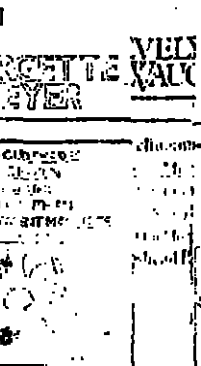
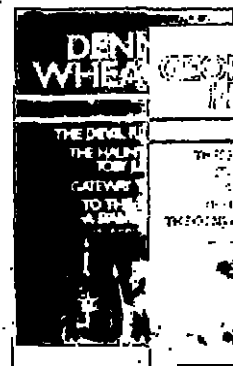
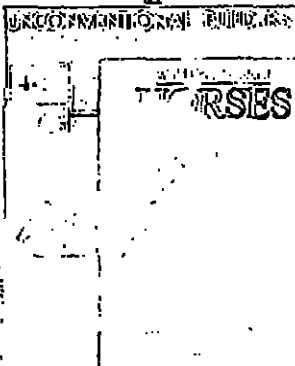
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There is a great deal of excellent material on logging (from horse and oxen to steam and diesel) that is largely owing to the efforts of associate editor Peter Trower. (Trower is probably one of the most knowledgeable men in the province on logging history and folklore, and definitely the most authentic "logger poet" m breathe air.)

There are articles on such divergent topics as rum running and leper colonies, lighthouses and sheep ranches, the Finnish utopia at Sointula, and a discussion on Buddhist settlements on Vancouver Island's inside passage.

Without doubt, this is the best source book currently available on Canada's West

Coast. Anyone interested in the history and the "spirit" of the B.C. coast would be well advised to take a good look at *Rain-coast Chronicles*. 0.

## The kitsch is in but not the sync

Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel: *The Ancestral Resent*. by John Moss, McClelland & Stewart, 326 pages. \$6.95 papa (ISBN 0 7710 6363 9).

By JOHN HOFSESS

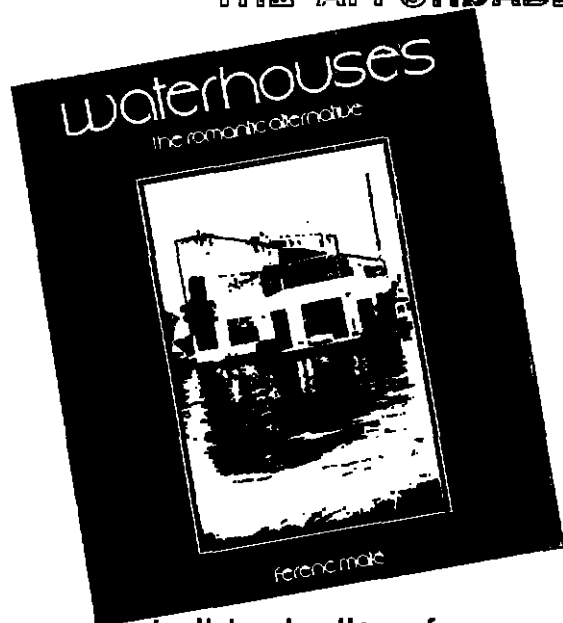
THE FIRST TEST one should make of a new work of non-fiction. Penelope Gilliat once told me, is to examine its index. If it has none, the book is probably a cheapjack production. If the index is copious and detailed, it's an encouraging sign that the author and publisher cared. The index to *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel* is paradoxical: it's extensive, but owing to an error in the book's production, it doesn't work. The pages and index are out of sync — and there is no particular pattern discernible to help make the book more easily useful. A reference to Marian Engel's *Bear*,

supposedly on page two, turns up on page four. (*Bear* is not discussed because the author confines himself to fiction published between 1960 and 1975.) A reference to *Jane Rule* indicated for page 36, turns up on page 41. A reference to Anne Hébert promised on page 24, turns up on 29. But, to confuse matters further, a single reference to Mavis Gallant (who is mentioned merely in passing, because Moss doesn't deal with short stories in this work, and Gallant's novels aren't listed in the bibliography) turns out to be accurate on page 312.

French-speaking writers get only occasional glances in this study because Moss maintains that "them is only one Canadian literature and that is written in English... To call Québécois literature Canadian is to diminish it immensely, to spread it over a whole continent into regions of consciousness where it simply has no affinity." Separate cultures, separate volumes. If Leslie Fiedler, in his much more provocative study, *Low and Death in the American Novel*, had excluded "the Jewish novel," "the Black novel," and those of other minorities on the grounds that general readers had less "affinity" with their writings than those in the American mainstream (probably true, but so what?), he would have produced a far less interesting and comprehensive book. By excluding consideration of Québécois literature — particularly on the issue of "sex and violence" — Moss imposes a frustrating restriction. In American literature, anti-

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podes are part of the whole — from Poe to Hemingway, Henry James to Henry Miller — but in Canada it seems fashionable et present to maximize one's differences until a state of isolation is produced. In the world of my imagination, the work of Marie-Claire Blais does not seem to be so far, distant, unbridgeable remove from that of Margaret Atwood. nor the work of Gabrielle Roy from that of Margaret Laurence; but Moss divides and compartmentalizes, leaving a lot of interesting comparisons unmade, and making no effort at synthesis.

The book has a minimal the&consisting of such observations es: (a) "The remarkably high incidence of sex and violence in the Canadian novel reflects our national pre-occupation with identity"; (b) "In contemporary Canadian fiction, the female tends to be the sexual aggressor, not the male"; and (c) "An interestingly large number of Canadian writers seem drawn to the biological and sociological aspects of sexuality in the passage from childhood to maturity..." The statements read (there is not much in the way of supportive argument) like dull commonplaces following the more daring and penetrating study by Robert Fothergill of sexual patterns in Canadian films from 1955 to 1974 (of which various instalments have been published in *Take-One, Cinema Canada, and Canadian Forum* in recent years). But if *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel* provides little intellectual stimulation it nevertheless does serve a purpose. In his discussions of Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* Which Moss regards as "the great Canadian novel". Graeme Gibson's *Five Legs* (which Moss calls "the most exquisitely accomplished experimental novel"). Dave Godfrey's *The New Ancestors* ("the novel yielding the most reward for the heaviest demand on the reader"), and Robert Harlow's *Scann* ("the most inventive"), works of fiction that Moss has evidently read with much affection, we are given positive and useful reappraisals of novels that have tended to become disregarded, even lost, in recent years, and which are well worth a revival of interest.

In his discussions of these novels, Moss naturally stresses whatever sex and violence he can find. (Curiously, he barely discusses the fiction of Audrey Thomas and John Buell, among others, in whose work the incidence of sex and violence is so pronounced.) But the essays on Wiebe, Gibson, and Godfrey would be equally presentable in a volume of literary criticism with no such theme in NW. What we are left with is a book that is badly produced (the binding began falling apart, with pages dropping out, after a few days' use of the misleading index) and quite possibly hastily written (given the general lameness of the prose and the timid development of the central theme). Yet such is the need for good critical material on many aspects of Canadian culture that one greets this book with pleasure for the little it does well, while eagerly anticipating the day it will be surpassed. □

## Tribal Brecht and a wail of an Othello

The **Great Wave of Civilization**, By Herschel Hardin, Talonbooks, 121 pages, \$3.95 paper (ISBN 0 88922 106 5).

Creel Tears, by Ken Mitchell and Humphrey & the Dumtrucks, Talonbooks, 145 pages, \$3.95 paper (ISBN 0 88922 120 0).

Have, by Julius Hey, translated from the Hungarian by Peter Hay, Talonbooks, 137 pages, 53.95 paper (ISBN 0 88922 108 1).

By JON REDFERN

THERE REALLY isn't any justification for some of the paltry writing in these three plays — unless of course, one ascribes it to writer's fatigue or just plain inexperience. But there's an old maxim in the theatre that whet's bed on the page may blossom on the sqe. And when one thinks about it, there is lots here that is praiseworthy, even good blood and thunder.

Certainly Herschel Hardin's *The Great Wave of Civilization* is remarkable for its theatricality. His plangent arguments, songs, and deftly sketched episodes vitalize his constant (if never dulling) preaching. Hen's a story of a cultural clash between white whiskey traders and Blackfoot Indians, a nose-to-gun-barrel quarrel between hem Little Dog and Snookum Jim, a free trader of some notable villainous wit. The fell of Little Dog under the charm of the jug is pathetic and heart-breaking, for he's doubly alienated in rebelling against his tribal fathers and the usurping whites. Hardin frames this mini-tragedy within a picture of America's industrial empire-building of the last century. Note glorious feat, es Hardin shows; a proud race is dissolved in a matter of decades into a spirit-broken culture. Hardin succeeds in stirring our ire because he writes a fable of genocide with conscience-raising fervour. He is Canada's finest exponent of the social problem play in the tradition of Brecht.

It's a pity his ideas and sensitivities are, on the whole, so old hat. Yes, the destruction of the Indian was an appalling fact. It's a dead issue now, whet with Red Power and the spirit of Fort Chimo. Hardin's middle-class white guilt trades in stereotypes and his recycled sentimentality has been done better before. Remember Arthur Penn's film, *Little Big Man*?

Pity, too, that Hardin was forced to write his Indian dialogue in "wampum" English, that odd blend of sentence shard and Chief Den Georgian metaphor. When will playwrights throw out that tired convention to carry their social messages?

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Recycled material of one sort or another has helped Ken Mitchell to concoct *Cruel Tears* out of Shakespeare's *Othello* and the country and western ethos of Cash and Parton and Loretta Lynne. Venice's noble senators and patricians are now Knights of the Road living in Saskatoon and truckin' their way through the pitfalls of love, sexual jealousy, class bitterness, and murder. Originally produced by the Persephone Theatre of Saskatoon, *Cruel Tears* just wound up a nation-wide tour with final performance in Toronto. It had loving audiences all the way, probably hyped up by the thumping sound of the country and western miracle group of Saskatchewan, the Dumptrucks.

Mitchell shares the writing credits with them and their former leader Humphrey, who left the group before the tour. But it's not clear who should be blamed for the dialogue or songs, since both are equally trite and doggedly unimaginative. To the jaded urban ear, the script of this "country and western opera" comes across as a feeble musical comedy with a rather clanking down-home touch. Mitchell's no Merle Haggard, and it's hard sometimes to distinguish between what's good country wallin' and what's just plain poor lyrics.

Yet one can't resist the simple, sincere honesty that eventually creeps over the whole play as it blunders along. Mitchell's hem. Johnny Roychuck (*Othello* as a Ukrainian), may be a sap and his girlfriend

Kathy an empty-headed trucker's wife, but they are likable all the same. Only villain Jack Deal (*Iago*) has a convincing, even entrancing, brutal realism. He is a jealous and destructive force in the play and it is to Mitchell's credit that Deal can play against the simple humour and romantic clichés of the Saskatoon working-class types. Mitchell new condescends to satirize his characters. His play lacks the occasional true power of *Hardin's*; but it has the comforting ordinariness of a rural romance or a TV soap.

*Have*, by Hungarian writer Julius Hay, is not a new Canadian play since it was written in 1936 in a Viennese jail. For some reason Talonbooks' editor Peter Hay (a relative) found it suitable for translation and so has put it on his list, along with the *Ryga* and *Reaney*. A long, verbose, and didactic piece, *Have* surveys the strange conscience-stricken confessions of a group of Hungarian peasant women who are tried for poisoning their husbands for some inheritance. As an allegory on the socialist ideal it seems to work well enough. But it drags terribly, too. Its 14 long scenes don't draw enough poignant moments out of the seven leading women. When they are faced with their own evil and self-delusion, the play is haunting. *Have*, however, is not the find that translator Hay perhaps thought. And it is hard to imagine it blossoming on the stage into a truly memorable, let alone bearable, theatrical production. □

## Other ranks, other files

*David and Max*, by Peter Simonds, J.M. Dent & Sons, 265 pages, \$10.75 cloth (ISBN 0 87695 174 4).

*The Birds of Prey*, by John Ralston Saul, Macmillan, 247 pages, \$9.95 cloth (ISBN 0 333 22599 6).

By BARBARA NOVAK

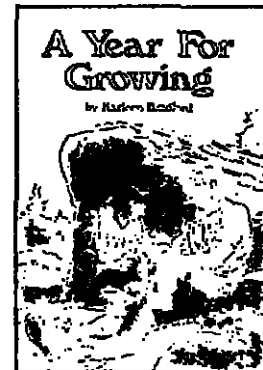
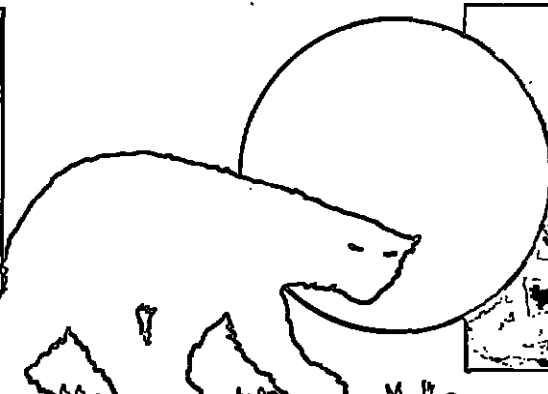
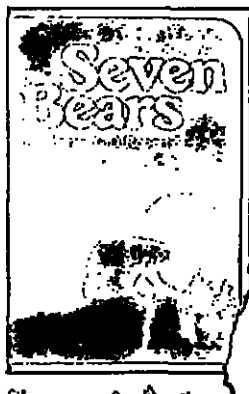
THE SUCCESS OF any novel based on actual events hinges on the author's ability to blend fact with fiction. Unless the blend is perfectly smooth, the reader's interest will surely give way to scepticism.

Both these books are based on real-life tragedies. *David and Max* on an incident during the Second World War in which two young German corporals were needlessly and shamefully sacrificed to the machinery of political bureaucratic cliques; *The Birds of Prey* on a plane crash in 1968 that killed General Ailleret, the powerful and unpopular chief of staff of the French army.

But whereas Peter Simonds admits to having "yielded to the temptation to read thoughts and motives into characters which they may or may not have held in real life,"

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thereby apologizing for his failure to achieve an absolute truth, John Ralston Saul has incorporated the absence of any such truth into the very fabric of his novel, of which he writes: "Even the system had turned its back and therefore fact no longer existed." *David and Mar*, intended primarily as a factual account of a bizarre and tragic incident, loses credibility through its passage into fiction (and, I might add, its often heavy-handed and didactic moralizing), while *The Birds of Prey*, intended primarily as a novel, becomes that much more intriguing by being rooted in fact.

Although *The Birds of Prey* is more skillfully written than *David and Mar*, the two books are evenly matched in terms of their respective Pandora's boxes of political and military corruption.

*David and Mar* traces the tragic history of corporals David Kohn and Max Unger, who surrendered to the Fii Canadian Army shortly before the end of the war. After VE Day, the Germans demanded their return as traitors. Frantic attempts by individual Canadian officers to save them proved futile, and they were returned to face a court martial. Not only did Canada comply with the German demands, we also further co-operated by supplying the unarmed Germans with guns and ammunition for the execution. Why such collaboration? Backed by limited evidence, the author speculates that an Allied intelligence team had been negotiating with German generals to form an alliance against anticipated Russian aggression in Europe.

The story is first and foremost a human drama, however, and while the author may fail to captivate his readers with the style of his writing, his material is certainly provocative and the reader is made painfully aware of the pitiful price humanity pays for putting its faith in political bureaucracies.

*The Birds of Prey* is in every respect a remarkable book. Above all, it is a gripping political novel, rich with intrigue and adventure. It is also a compelling account of one man's need to test his limits -to discover the core of his own humanity. Charles Stone, a bold and charming journalist, learns by accident of the mysterious circumstances surrounding the death of General Ailleret in a plane crash on the Indian Ocean island of La Réunion, and sets out to discover the facts. Despite increasingly violent efforts to dissuade him, Stone uncovers a massive conspiracy involving every level of the political and military hierarchy right up to Charles de Gaulle.

When Saul began working on his doctoral dissertation in political science — a study of the power of the French army after the Algerian conflict — he had no idea that he was preparing the groundwork for an explosive political novel. But his discovery of evidence suggesting that the crash that killed General Ailleret was no accident led to seven years of research, during which he interviewed 150 French officials. He then proceeded to write the novel (his first) in French, although English is his native language. The French version, *Mort d'un*

*Général*, appeared last June. It is already well into its third printing. Ironically, the English version (translated by the author), is dedicated to de Gaulle, "fmm a disciple, Sans pew et Sans regret".

It is written in a clean, confident style in which every word is significant. The tone is

deliberately quiet, leaving any sensationalism to the story itself. There is every reason to believe that *The Birds of Prey* will be just as successful as *Mort d'un Général*, and that John Ralston Saul, who is not yet 30, is a brilliant new international voice in Canadian literature. □

## on/off/set

by A. F. Moritz

# Ruminations 'on Romanians, jackpines that grew from Acorn, and some seeds of Kroetsch

*The Sausage Master* of Minsk, by August Kleinzahler, Villeneuve Publications, 32 pages, paper unpriced. Kleinzahler is another new poet, relatively little known but extremely interesting, to surface in a chap-book recently. This brief collection shows mastery in an impressive variety of styles: dramatic monologue, personal meditative lyrics, and some delightful brief poems informed by elfish imagination and manic language: "The snipsnap worm/has made eggs in your hypothalamus/and worse." These poems are far from being uniformly successful, but the meditative ones ("Your Sadnesses Reign Unbroken." "Equinoctial Lines") are fine indeed, as are several others. And all the poems are shapely, intelligent and alive.

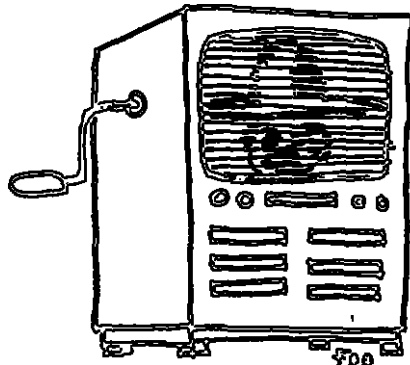
*A Stone Diary*, by Pat Lowther, Oxford university Press, 96 pages, \$3.95 paper. This book shows a writer haunted by physical and psychological violence in her personal life and the world at large. And it shows a longing for the pence and adequacy that nature rind dreams seemed to promise, though violence followed Lowther even to these sanctuaries in the form of nightmare and "the royal animals/quiet and dangerous: Perhaps the total lack of security in Lowther's world-vie\ led to her intense hope for redemption, which nonetheless never underestimates the difficulties, never ignores the cause-and-effect relationship

between individual sin and social calamity.

Despite its positive and attractive qualities, this book indicates that Lowther's current reputation owes much to her tragic death and what it can symbolize. There is much that is powerful or suggestive here, but also much that is trivial in thought or expression and undistinguished by energy or precision of language. Few poems seem perfectly realized and satisfying. We must wait for a "selected poems" that draws on other Lowther publications before assessing her place in current Canadian poetry.

*Landscape*, edited by Allison Hood and Rapoport, The Women's Writing Collective, 127 pages, 54.50 paper. This well-produced anthology is one outcome of a poetry event sponsored in Toronto by the city's Women's Writing Collective. It contains one to three poems by each of 65 writers, and is at least to me extent free of feminist posturings and wish-fulfillment. Though the format presents too little from each writer, almost everyone will find impressive and promising things here. Personal choices of mine are Lela Parlow (quickly emerging as a fine writer in Canadian periodicals), Polly Thompson (one of Toronto's best non-publishing poets), Heather Cadsby, and Patricia Keaney Smith.

*Seed Catalogue*, by Robert Kroetsch, Turnstone Press, 75 pages, \$5.95 paper. Poet and novelist Kroetsch discusses this, his third volume of poems (plus other facets of his writing), in the current issue of Arts Manitoba, an informative new magazine devoted to writing, fine arts, and performing arts in that province. Kroetsch reveals himself as an intelligent craftsman with a good grasp of the issues of current poetic form: his ideas seem well ahead of those of most of his contemporaries in Canada. Why, then, one wonders while reading *Seed Catalogue*, isn't it more interestingly and better written than it is? Tbio is banal reminiscence and description in flat language, and the dullness of the elements cannot be overcome by a collage-type organizational pattern that is not very exciting either. Formal "innovations" in this book are always unmasking themselves as



mere typographical disguises for the prosaic end unnecessary.

**Modern Romanian Poetry**, edited by Nicholas Catano, Mosaic Press/ Valley Editions, 128 pages, \$9.50 cloth and \$4.50 paper. Between the two world wars Romanian poetry, largely under the leadership of Tudor Arghezi, developed as cosmopolitan, distinctive and modern a national voice as any in Europe. The diverse sources and ties of Romania's language and culture — to France, England, Italy, the Slavic states, Turkey — have made Romanian poetry's quest for identity difficult, but as a result its achievement has been uncommonly rich. Yet Romania has been isolated from the West, and only recently have George MacGregor-Hastie in Britain and Brian Swann in the U.S. begun to make Romanian poetry known to Anglo-Saxon readers.

Canada now makes a fine contribution to this growing awareness with an anthology assembled by Romanian immigrant Nicholas Catano. While not neglecting Arghezi, Lucian Blaga, and other poets identified most closely with the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, this book also includes the period after the "loosening up" of Romanian socialism in 1953. The translations, made by Romanians working with some of Canada's best poets, are all accomplished English poems and many are exceptional. The book pays tribute to Romanian poetry's ability (which it shares with other Eastern European poetries, especially Polish) to be direct and powerful without sacrificing the complex stylistic and perceptual acquirments that have formed modern poetry since Baudelaire and are so often squandered or forgotten in English-language poetry today.

**Jackpine Sonnets**, by Milton Acorn. Steel Rail, 109 pages, \$10.95 cloth and \$4.95 paper. "Jackpine sonnet" is Acorn's term for a loose form he has developed in order to give a measure of classical tension and precision to his shorter lyrical poems. The poems themselves bear witness to the continued intransigence of Acorn's thought, his steadfast violation of norms, fashions and platitudes, his "I'd rather starve" attitude before all forms of coercion and bribery. Here is a man who looks and judges only with his own eyes. His work will always

bear the crabbed, odd character of a man working apart from the mainstream, but it will also have the energy and beauty belonging to things well and earnestly done.

**Jackpine Sonnets** represents an increase in the complexity and compression of Acorn's language. Here it is convoluted, allusive, crammed with far-flung images and ideas, "metaphysical" in the scope of its shaping thought: "I've loved, and love the Earth. If you are Death/Stay around to summon more performance." The pressure of intellect and belief continually explodes apparently common subjects. And there is still Acorn's customary humane appeal to liberating desire and hope, expressed perhaps more eloquently and with wider implications than before. This is Canada's most independent and perhaps its richest working poet.

Contemporary Verse II, now in its third year, is Canada's most visible and almost its only magazine (CV II appears quarterly)

## interview

by Michael Ryval

### Today, the children are still dancing and that's why Veronica Tennant spun a tale

VERONICA TENNANT is a principal ballerina with the National Ballet of Canada and has been dancing professionally for nearly 12 years. But, like many other artists, she felt the need some years ago to express herself in another medium. Hence the publication *tbii* Fell of On Stage, Please (McClelland & Stewart, 176 pages, \$6.95 cloth). Illustrated by Rita Briansky, it's the fictional story of how nine-year-old Jennifer Allen begins the serious business of training as a ballet dancer. Woven into the plot is a wealth of realistic information about the world of ballet. To find out why and how Ms. Tennant wrote her book, Books in Canada asked freelancer Michael Ryval to interview the dancer. (The interview, incidentally, took place 10 days after the birth of Ms. Tennant's first child, Jessica.)

Books in Canada: *What* moved you to write the book? *What* was its genesis?

Tennant: I guess it was something I wanted to do. For many, many years. More precisely, about 3½ years ago I set up in bed and said to my husband, "John, I think I'm going to write a book." And he said, "That's great," and went back to sleep again. Actually, he was very excited about the idea. The reason was, having been a dancer in this country and seeing the public's reaction to ballet, I realized there's nothing for children to read about ballet that's Canadian. There's very little for them to read about ballet at all, and what there is was written 20 or 30 years ago, usually in England. And so, I felt the book was needed

devoted to criticism of current Canadian poetry, poetics and related cultural issues. Though this is its focus, it also gives considerable space to poetry.

CV II is important not because of the high quality of some of its reviews and essays, and because of the need for such a forum where the analytic thought of poets and critics can actually touch and aid current writing to become adequate to our historical moment.

But for this last reason it is disappointing that CV II continues to encourage the same debates on poetic nationalism and regionalism that we are too familiar with, and to set itself for the most part firmly against styles and forms that are innovative, or even contemporary. It continues to print and to approve the usual loose free-verse poem that makes a direct statement of private insights and opinions, and seldom in its pages do we find the awareness that something more is needed. •

and ought to be written by someone who knew what it was like to be a dancer. So many ballet books are clichéd and have all kinds of inaccurate information and are a bit corny, to tell you the truth.

BiC: *I found it very down-to-earth, practical. It's also moving, identifiable, though I'm not a nine-year-old girl.*

Tennant: Well, the interesting thing is any good children's book can also be enjoyed by adults. And never once when writing *tbii* did I change a word to make it sound eerier or more likely to be understood. I tried very hard not to talk down. I didn't try the book out on children while I was writing it. No



Veronica Tennant

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child read it until it was published. But I've had some wonderful responses already.

**BiC:** Did you enjoy writing it?

**Tennant:** Very much. It took me a long time, partly because I was combining it with a pretty active ballet schedule. Being a dancer is totally absorbing and it's difficult to find time for other things. I did find all sorts of parallels between being a dancer and being a writer. The dancer is constantly searching for perfection, constantly going over something even though it's been created. By the same token, I'd completed the book within a year and a half but would constantly go back to it and reshape it. I found that when you are trying to create something as well as you can, it's all the same no matter what field you are in.

But there was one way in which I found writing more exciting than dancing. I've been a professional dancer for 12 years. Yet

I have never seen the results of my work — except for television shows. You perform on stage and it's passed, finished. The next day all you have is the memory of it and what other people say of it. But with a book there is enormous satisfaction. It's the first piece of creative work that I've been able to hold in my hands and refer back to and see the results. I can pick it up and say, "That's 3% years of my work." I can actually see it, whereas with my dancing I can't.

**BiC:** Do you plan to write more books?

**Tennant:** People have already asked me, "Have you got a sequel? What happens to Jennifer Allen?" Well, at the moment I have no plans for a sequel. I've just had a baby and I also feel I've just given birth to the book. But then, you never know. I may wake up one night and decide to write another. □

## the browser

by Morris Wolfe

### Guides to English and architecture, alternatives to coffee and Confederation

The Little **English Handbook** for Canadians by James Bell and **Edward Corbett** (Wiley, 207 pages, \$3.95) is the best new guide to **matters** of grammar, style, and punctuation that I've seen in years. It's simple, clear, and complete. And all in a pleasant style. "A dash," say the editors, "is made on the typewriter with two unspaced hyphens and with no space before the dash or after the dash." In case that's still unclear, they add: "Do not hit the space bar on the typewriter before the first hyphen, between the first and second hyphen, or after the second hyphen. In short, do not hit the space bar at all in forming the dash on the typewriter." Pm keeping this book on my reference shelf.

The **Lure of the Labrador Wild** by **Dillon Wallace** (Breakwater, 285 pages, \$5.95) is a reprint of a book originally published in 1905. It's a good first-hand account of a disastrous attempt in 1903 by three men to travel through a previously uncharted section of Labrador. The men almost starved, and large portions of the story are taken up with a description of their growing obsession with food. (Wallace based his text on his and the others' diary accounts.) One of the men, **Leonidas Hubbard**, is left to die. Ten years later, in 1913, Wallace returned to the area to find and buy the corpse of his friend.

\* \* \*

**TOO BAD** NC Press was a bit late getting out its oral history honouring **Stratford's** 25th season. Because Stratford Under Cover: **Memories on Tape** (edited by **Grace Lydiatt Shaw**, 127 pages, \$20 cloth and \$9.95 paper) deserves more attention than

it's had. Some years ago Shaw interviewed more than 150 people for a CBC-Radio series on **Canadian theatre history**. The material she collected is the basis of this book. And it makes for interesting reading. (Would that more of the material in **CBC's radio archives** were put to such use.) The real hero of the creation of **Stratford**, to judge by this book, is not **Tom Patterson** but **Dora Mavor Moore**.

\* \* \*

**ONE WOULD** think from its title that **Peter N. Moogk's** **Building A House in New France** (M&S, 1.14 pages, \$9.95) would be dull. Not so, **Moogk's** book offers a fascinating look at architecture in New France. And through the architecture one learns a great deal about the daily lives of the 10,000 or so French immigrants who came to Canada before the Conquest. Tavern-keepers in the late 17th century, for instance, were forbidden to serve food and drink to carpenters, masons, and others during working hours unless they had the permission of the workers' bosses.

\* \* \*

**DON'T KNOW** whether they're related but **Moogk's** name reminds me that I recently came across a 1975 book I hadn't see" — **Roll Back the Years** by **Edward Moogk** (National Library of Canada, 443 pages, \$12.50). It's a history of Canadian recorded sound from its beginnings in the mid-19th century to 1930. Under the name of **Ed Manning**, **Moogk** was host for 25 years of a fine CBC-Radio program called **Roll Back the Years**. The book is a wonderful treat for anyone interested in early recording. There are end-papers consisting of lovely reproductions of old 78-rpm record labels. The

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Text by **M. Harwood**

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## The Trail of the Fox

by **David Irving**

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book includes a small 33 $\frac{1}{2}$ -rpm recording with 12 samples of early sound on it — the earliest being Baron Stanley's voice in 1888. There are good photographs and reproductions of advertisements throughout — including a picture of the Sherlock-Manning Combination Piano-phonograph II! of 1917. Moogk's detailed text is excellent. A bargain.

\* \* \*

**Mock Java**, by Joe Ritter and Allan Safarik (Seal Books, 63 pages, \$1.25) offers a collection of recipes for simulated coffee. One only needs such nourishing ingredients as licorice, chicory, flax, and dandelions. Sounds from the book as if the stuff produced actually tastes good and is much cheaper than the real thing. Now that Seal Books has shown us how to beat the high price of coffee, maybe they'll show us how to brat the high price of mass-market paperbacks, which at two cents a page seem to be going up at a much higher rate than any other commodity. [Editor's note: See page 31.]

\* \* \*

TWO HIGHLY readable spiritual autobiographies. The first, **Bearwalk**, has been turned into fiction by one of its subjects. Tom Peltier, with the assistance of journalist Lynne Sallot (Musson, 212 pages, \$6.95).

It tells the story of a family plagued by the ancient Indian curse of the "bearwalk." Tom Peltier — Richard Savard in the story — is able to break the curse but only after years of study (analysis) with a shaman. Movie rights have been sold for 250 thou. The rewards of suffering are going up at an even faster rate than the prices of coffee and paperbacks. The second book is an amusing first-person account by gurupie Patricia Joudry, who has had more spiritual masters than even Jerry Rubin. **Spirit River to Angels' Roost: Religions I Have Loved and Left** (Tundra, 196 pages, \$8.95) tells of the sometime-playwright's search for a shaman — or Shawman — who can bring more than just temporary relief.

\* \* \*

IT'S INTERESTING to compare the well-made Tundra book by Joudry with the godawfully-made Hancock House book **The New Confederation: Five Sovereign Provinces** by Brian A. Bawn (176 pages, \$7.95). Hancock House continues to produce material that looks and feels as if it's been thrown at a printing press rather than designed and edited. In the case of *The New Confederation*, even the prose of the dust-jacket is garbled for lack of proof-reading. The text itself is so badly type-set that you could drive a small truck -OK, a car — through the spaces between some of the lines. And I was afraid that if I dropped the damn thing it would fall apart. That's

unfortunate because *The New Confederation* explores in some detail, for the first time so far as I know, W. A. C. Bennett's proposal of some years ago for reconfederation. Bennett's Canada would consist of five regional provinces — an Atlantic region, Quebec, Ontario, a Prairie region (Manitoba and Saskatchewan) and a Pacific region. The Prairie and Pacific regions would extend their borders north to include the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. According to Bennett, if there were five strong regions, Quebec would automatically have everything it wants. It's ironic, says Brown, "that only .. Quebec seems to have maintained the spirit of the BNA Act .. by insisting on its own powers in fields of Communication, Health, Welfare, and so on. It could be argued that only Quebec is in step with the BNA Act and that the other nine provinces are all out of step." □

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## Letters to the Editor

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RALLYING.. .

Sir:

Sandra Martin's quixotic reaction (October issue) to David McFadden's review of *Canadian Poetry: The Modern Era* (May) cannot be left unchallenged, although her ludicrous misreading

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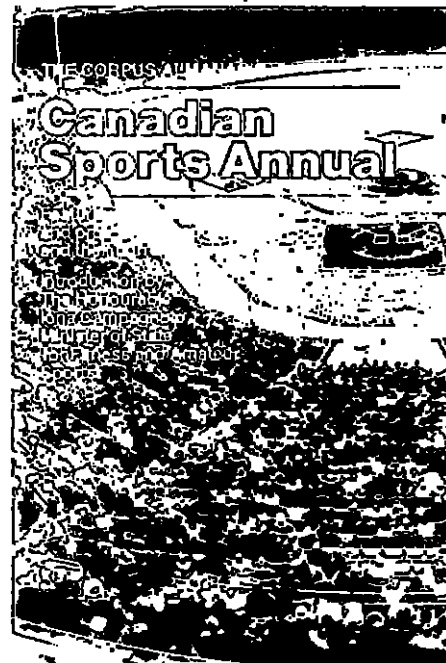
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of the article in question should perhaps be ignored.

First of all, McFadden's piece was sorely — at least in part — aimed at the hordes of careerist poets who would feel suicidal at having been left out of such an anthology. Of course it is not unknown for a writer to have been accused of the very folly he was satirizing. Yet Dudley Fuddington is, I'm sure, a character invented by McFadden and in trying to console Fuddington's egomaniacal whinings McFadden makes several pungent comments on the nature of poetic and earthly ambition.

I for one found the piece delightful. And far from ignoring the book itself in his discussion, as Sandra Martin suggests he doer. McFadden scores dead-centre, at least to my reading, in ridiculing the very notion of a "Top Thirty" among contemporary poets. I think Sandra Martin should have read the piece over a couple of times, giving it a little more thought, before exposing her ignorance to the world. McFadden's subtlety was obviously far beyond her.

Celeste Dunsmoor  
Mount Hope, Ont.

### ... AROUND ...

Sir:

I am appalled at Sandra Martin's misreading (October) of David McFadden's review (May) of *Canadian Poetry: The Modern Era*, edited by John Newlove, which I thought one of the most entertaining and apropos reviews to appear in your pages for some time. It is sad to see Me. Martin mistaking satire for self-indulgence and "whining." As a fledgling publisher I can appreciate the dollar signs that must have lit up in the eyes of McClelland & Stewart's marketing department when they concoced the idu for the "perfect" anthology, one that would satisfy the demands of academics teaching Canadian literature by providing them with what they asked for. As a credible anthology, however, the book, as it stands, is ludicrous. Unfortunately, John Newlove was left with the job of trying to make an aesthetic silk purse out of a commercial sow's ear. McFadden's review simply satirized the ridiculousness of the enterprise and the absolute absurdity of this book being claimed as the "definitive" anthology of the last 30 years. It, quite simply, is not. The cash registers may be ringing but the book is a dud and does a disservice to Canadian poetry because of its money-first attitude. In its own way it panders to the "academic" market the way reedy-made slicks pander to the masses. A book such as this demands to be treated lightly, having as much aesthetic substance as a McDonald's hamburger has taste. But then again, as we know, McDonald's sells a hell of a lot of hamburgers, and makes a fast and easy breakfast, lunch, snack, or dinner.

So, in closing, let me praise McFadden for attaching 3 string of cans to the tail of a ponderous and clumsy white elephant.

Ken Norris  
Montreal

### ... MCFADDEN

Sir:

In his review (May) of *Canadian Poetry: The Modern Era*, David McFadden was taking a good-natured poke at two groups of people:

(1) The people who think you can pot a book together by polling the potential readers about

what they want to read.

(2) The nincompoop poets who would feel offended at being left out of the "Top Thirty" so compiled.

Sandra Martin's reaction (October) to McFadden's article was in my reading hilariously off-base. No one could have misread the article that badly. It seemed almost deliberate. She must have some stake in the book and is afraid to admit it was a disaster.

Wilbur Snowshoe  
Caledonia, Ont.

### LOGICAL GRAMMAR

Sir:

I'm writing with reference to Ron Waldie's review (August-September), under the heading "Time to Hit the Books Again," of our *English Skills Program*.

We appreciated the amount of space given to the *English Skills Program*, and we were pleased that the review was basically favourable. However, Mr. Waldie's concern with the place in each book of the unit on sentence building seems to take up a disproportionate amount of space, as well as being likely to be positively misleading to readers. Several members of our company have commented on this, so that I feel obliged to draw the following comments to your attention.

The "basic building blocks" are not "tucked into the least section of each text." Sentence Building, a complete, independent unit is #6, while Editing and Proofreading in which there is some reference to punctuation, is #7 in Books 1 and 2 and #8 in Book 3.

The Sentence Building unit is not "rigorously traditional in approach." It's not rigidly anything; rather, it's eclectic, designed to give the student more flexibility in the use of language and its structures. The unit appears traditional, so as not to frighten most teachers, but it combines insights from structural grammar (as in the treatment of auxiliaries and sentence patterns) and transformational grammar (as in the treatment of transformations and active/passive in Book 3).

The placement of the Sentence Building unit is intentional — partly so that teachers will not work methodically through this unit before letting the students learn something about other aspects of writing. Moreover, it is assumed that students will have done some writing in earlier grades. Basically, though, it is not intended that a class should work through any of the three texts from beginning to end. Each unit is designed to be self-sufficient, so that it may be used when most appropriate to a particular teacher's program. For instance, the Editing and Proofreading unit is intended to be introduced early and referred back to by students and teacher throughout the year. It is put at the end of each text on grounds of convenience and logic — not because it is considered less important than the other units.

The intention was not that grammar should be "shuffled out of the way," but that individual grammatical concepts should be available for teaching and discussion when required. There is, in fact, a strong professional support for teaching grammatical principles as the need for them is revealed in students' writing...

Finally, the point is not that grammatical principles are "supplemental to writing skills" but that they are subsequent to other skills in the actual development of a piece of writing. Such matters as choice of topic, assessing the demands of audience, purpose, and situation, out-

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ling (and so establishing an organization), and recognizing the requirements of a given format, all normally come before one puts many sentences together. It must be admitted that all such rationalizations for sequencing the units of a language text break down somewhere. But anyone who nit-picks at one aspect of a sequence without attempting to see the logic of the organization as a whole deserves to spend a lifetime reviewing textbooks and eating his reviews for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

I really feel that your review of the *English Skills Program* was written on the basis of too superficial an examination of the books themselves, and I'm concerned that this type of irresponsible reviewing is likely to mislead readers and to erode the usefulness of your normally excellent and valuable publication.

Patrick D. Drysdale  
Co-ordinating Editor  
Dictionaries & Senior English  
Gage Publishing Ltd.  
Agincourt, Ont.

## CanWit No. 28

*Across the wire the electric message came,  
"The king is no better; he is much the same."*

THIS BRITAIN'S Poet Laureate of the day, writing in *The Times* of the impending death of Edward VII. Obviously, what this country needs in its time of trial is its own Poet Laureate. The ideal candidate must be

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a committed federalist and have a tin ear. Some grasp of metre and rhyme useful but not essential. Submit samples (maximum: 10 lines) on the general theme of unity in '78 to: **CanWit No. 28, Books in Canada, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 1N4.** The winner will receive \$25 and the deadline is Jan. 1.

### RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 26

**MABELL** has much to answer for. The fine old art of telegrams is clearly a thing of the past in Canada. Only old regular Bruce Bailey of Montreal caught the true spirit of our contest. He is rewarded \$25 for these exchanges:

Trudeau to Lévesque: ACCEPT OUR TERMS OR COUNT US OUT. Lévesque to Trudeau: UN DEUX TROIS QUATRE CINQ SIX SEPT HUIT NEUF DIX.

Madame Benoit to Margaret Atwood: JUST READ EDIBLE WOMAN STOP NOT MUCH OF A COOKBOOK. Atwood to Benoit: JUST ATE YOUR COOKBOOK STOP NOT MUCH OF A MEAL.

John Kenneth Galbraith to Jean Chrétien: YOUR ECONOMY IS A MESS STOP GIVE UP AND JOIN THE UNITED STATES. Chrétien to Galbraith: WHY SHOULD WE JOIN THE UNITED STATES QUERY HAVE THEY COME APART QUERY.

Laura Secord to Peter Gzowski: WILL APPEAR WITH MY COW ON YOUR SHOW IF YOU THINK YOU CAN AFFORD US. Gzowski to Secord: HAVE GRASS FOR COW BUT IF YOU EXPECT GREEN STUFF YOURSELF BRING CHANGE OF DOLLAR.

#### Honourable mentions:

Trudeau to Joe Morris of the Canadian Labour Congress: CONSIDERING CONTINUANCE WAGE CONTROLS STOP SOLICIT YOUR OPINION. MORRIS TO TRUDEAU: STOP.

Charles Templeton to Pierre Berton: HAVE WRITTEN BOOK STOP ITS AN ACT OF GOD. BERTON TO TEMPLETON: ADMIRE YOUR HUMILITY STOP SUGGEST YOU TAKE SOME CREDIT YOURSELF.

— Peter Gorrie, Ottawa

• • •

Author to Jack McClelland: GREAT CANADIAN NOVEL IN THE MAILS STOP PRAIRIES SEX SURVIVAL GOD FEATURED STOP SEND ADVANCE. McClelland to author: NOVEL ARRIVED STOP TITLE A SELLER STOP REST BACK IN MAIL STOP NO ADVANCE.

— R. A. Kawallak, Burnaby, B.C.

## Books received

THE FOLLOWING Canadian books have been received by *Books in Canada* in recent weeks. Inclusion in this list does not preclude a review or notice in a future issue:

*The Mackenzie River: Yesterday's Fur Frontier, Tomorrow's Energy Battleground*, by James K. Smith, Gage.  
*Vladimir Solov'ev and the Knighthood of the Divine Sophia*, by Samuel D. Cirona, Wilfrid Laurier University Press.  
*The Immigrants*, by Gloria Montero, James Lorimer.  
*A True History of Lambton County*, by Don Outerbridge, Oberon.  
*Harvest of Salmon*, by Zoe Laidale, Hancock House.  
*Sunrise on Mackenzie*, by Dick Turner, Hancock House.

*The New Confederation*, by Brian A. Brown, Hancock House.

*Our UFO Visitors*, by John Magor, Hancock House.

*Bel Rita*, by Sheila Burnford, M&S.

*Debate*, by Cleve Wall, Atlantic Institute of Education.

*Snowflakes and Sunshine*, by Fran Newman and Claudette

Boulanger, Scholastic-Tab.

*Stabbed to Death with Artificial Respiration*, by Opal L.

Nations, Coach House.

*The Decay of Trade*, by David Alexander, U of T Press.

*Everywoman's Almanac 1978*, by Lois Pike, Woman's Press.

*Lacerating Heartwood*, by Judith Fitzgerald, Coach House.

*Quince Jam*, by Jacques Feron, Coach House.

*A Guide for the Perplexed*, by E. F. Schumacher, Fitzhenry &

Whiteside.

*Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, by A. Ross

McCormack, U of T Press.

*Dictionary of Book Publishing*, by Philippe Schawer, Cercle

de la Librairie.

*The Political History of Newfoundland 1832-1864*, by

Gertrude E. Gunn, U of T Press.

*No Particular Season*, by Helen Ball, Tower Poetry Society.

*Creampuff Waves*, by Vincent Francis, Tower Poetry Society.

*The Sorcerer's Flower*, by Laura Baldwin, Tower Poetry

Society.

*This Golden Fire*, by Helen Dougher, Tower Poetry Society.

*Lamp in the Northern Wind*, by Marjorie Wilkinson, Tower

Poetry Society.

*Night Light and Half Light*, by Stuart Godfrey, Tower Poetry

Society.

*The Raptured*, by John Tomblar and Hubert Fonk, Trumpet

Press.

*Urban Canada*, by Donald J. H. Higgins, Macmillan.

*Reading, Writing and Radio*, by Winston Schell and Marston

Woolings, Longman.

*Point Pelee*, by Darryl Stewart, Burns & MacEachern.

*Criminal Law and the Criminal Code*, by Clarke, Barnhorst,

and Barnhorst, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

*Women in Canadian Law*, by Linda Silver Dranoff, Fitzhenry &

Whiteside.

*Herstory 1978, Saskatoon Women's Calendar Collective.*

*Green Things in Small Spaces*, by Marnie Collins, Methuen.

*Sir Basil de Bold*, by Joan Raeside, Wynkyn Press.

*The Green Wizard*, by Joan Raeside, Wynkyn Press.

*77 Best Canadian Stories*, edited by Joan Harcourt and John

Metcalf, Oberon.

*Wild Rose Country*, edited by David Carpenter, Oberon.

*Politics: Canada*, by Paul W. Fox, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

*Fundamentals of Marketing*, Stanton, Sommers, and Barnes,

McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

*One Half of Robertson Davies*, by Robertson Davies,

Macmillan.

*Island Between*, Margaret E. Murie, University of Alaska

Press.

*Canadian Foreign Policy and the Law of the Sea*, edited by

Barbara Johnson and Mark W. Zacher, UBC Press.

*The Changing Earth*, by G. C. Milligan, McGraw-Hill

Ryerson.

*Whispers*, by Paul C. Brown, Three Trees.

*Cleaning the Bones*, by Joseph McLeod, Press Porcépic.

*Grey Feathers*, by Wenceslas Hornk, Three Trees.

*Mirror & Letters to an Escapee*, by Roland Giguère, translated

by Sheila Fischman, Press Porcépic.

*14 Barrels From Sea to Sea*, by James Reaney, Press

Porcépic.

*Right Hand Left*, by Dorothy Livesey, Press Porcépic.

*English Montreal Poetry of the Seventies*, edited by Farkas

and Norris, Vehicule.

*Great Golf Humour*, edited by Mervyn J. Huston, Hurig.

*The Scorched-Wood People*, by Rudy Weibe, M & S.

*The Blood People*, by Adolf Hungry Wolf, Fitzhenry &

Whiteside.

*Condominiums*, by John Clarke, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

*The USSR vs. Dr. Mikhail Stern*, edited by August Stern,

Leiter & Orpen.

*The Painted Cougar*, by Elizabeth Margaret Hopkins, Talon-

books.

*Nighttouch*, edited by Gerry Goldberg, Stephen Storoschak

and Fred Corbett, General.

*George Simpson and the Hudson's Bay Company*, by Keith

Wilson, Book Society of Canada.

*A Hundred Years of Enting*, by James P. Johnston,

McGill-Queen's University Press.

*Kuhn & Augustyn*, by Christopher Darling and John Fraser,

Macmillan.

*Skillog Cross Country*, by Ned Baldwin, McGraw-Hill

Ryerson.

*Jacques the Woodcutter*, by Michael Macklem and illustrated

by Ann Blades, Oberon.

*The Loon's Necktie*, by William Toye, illustrated by

Elizabeth Cleaver, Oxford.

*The Princess*, by Jacques Benoit, translated by David Lobdell,

Oberon.

*Variable Cloudiness*, by John Robert Colombo, Houslow.

*With Downcast Guys*, by Andrew Hodges & David Hunter,

Pink Triangle Press.

*Tin Roofs & Palm Trees*, by Robert Turnbull, J. J. Douglas.

*Mrs. Duke's Million*, by Wyndham Lewis, Coach House.

*Canadian Battles & Massacres*, by T. W. Patterson, Macmil-

lan.

*Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady*, by Edith Holden,

Thomas Nelson & Sons.

*Colony to Nation: A History of Canada*, by Arthur R. M.

Lower, M & S.

*The Corvette Navy*, by James B. Lamb, Macmillan.

*The Naked Nun*, by Mary Shaver, PaperJacks.

*Pro Hockey NHL '77-'78*, by Jim Proudfoot, PaperJacks.

*A Divine Case of Murder*, by Charles Dennis, PaperJacks.

*Indigo Nights*, by Olivia O'Neill, PaperJacks.

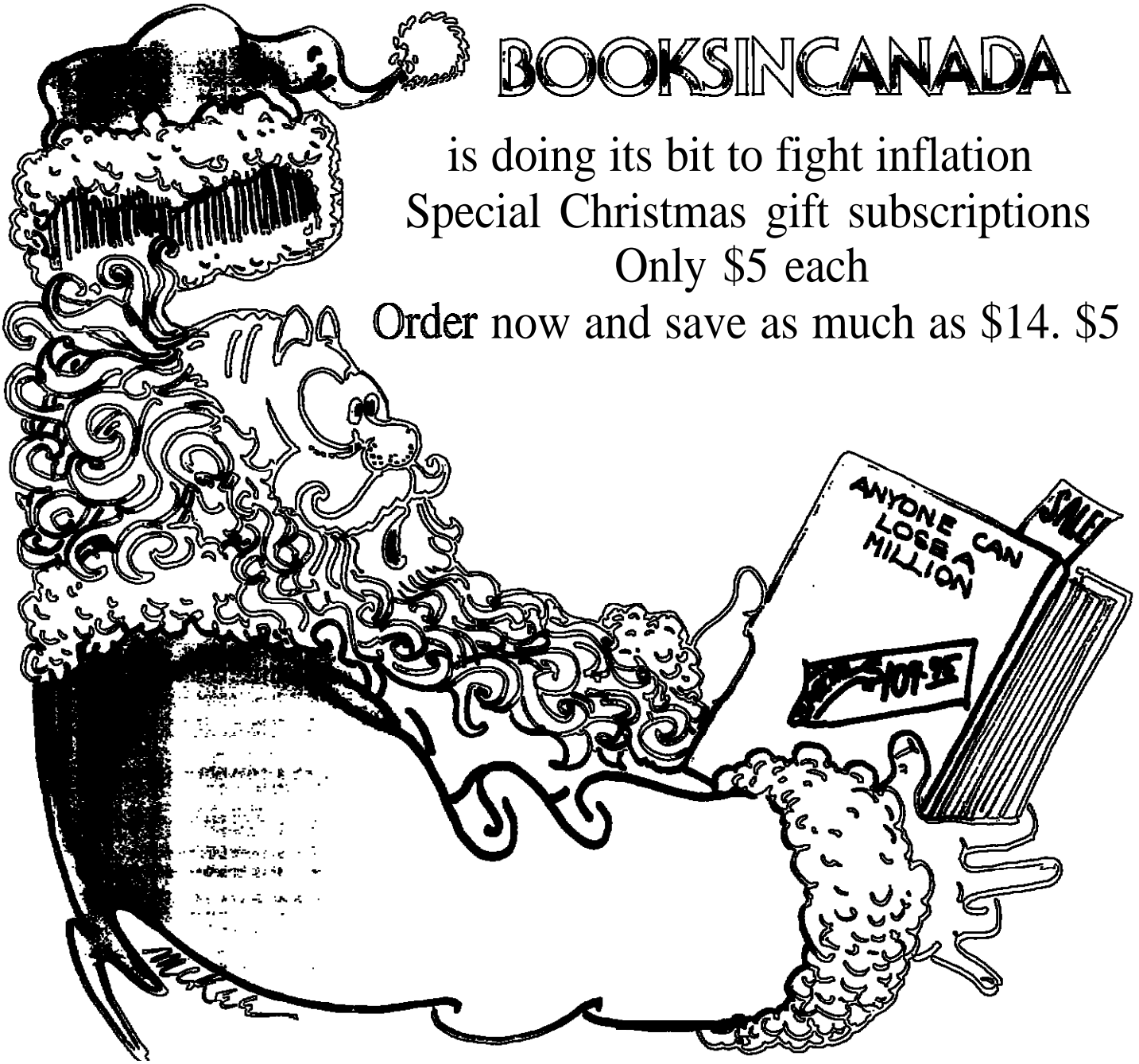
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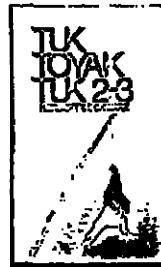
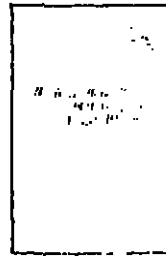
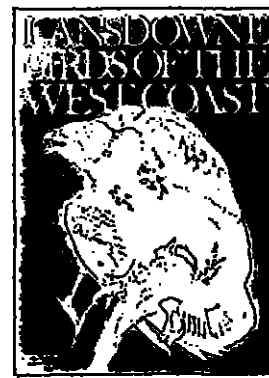
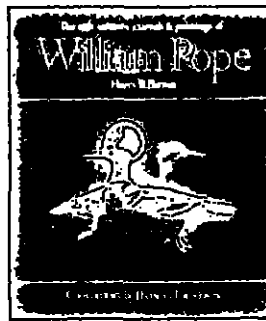
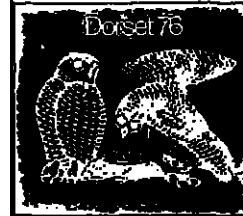
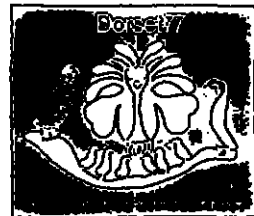
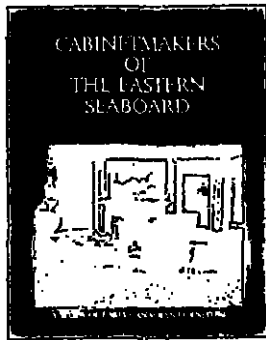


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