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BOOKS IN CANADA

LITERATURE



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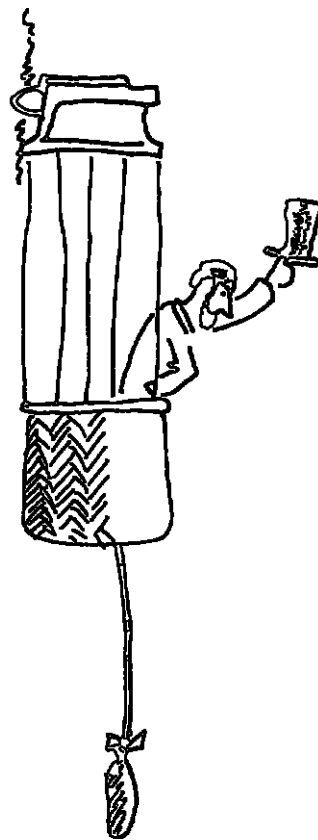
BOOKS IN CANADA

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In this valedictory, the editor who founded *Canadian Literature* looks back over 18 years of creativity and criticism and concludes that

WE'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY

by George Woodcock

LAST SUMMER I ceased to be editor of *Canadian Literature*, handed over the files, the goodwill, the obsession, the glory, such as it was. Eighteen years — or rather 19 from the Ant days of planning in 1953 — one third of a life!

For the last issue of *Canadian Literature* I edited, I wrote a review-nick on recent fiction in which I discussed Jack Hodgins' novel, *The Invention of the World*. Written about the vanishing frontier life of Vancouver Island, with its loggers and doxies, its English remittance men, its strange sects led by fraudulent prophets, the book reminded me of the west coast of Vancouver Island as I had known it when I returned to Canada in 1949. I indulged myself by prefacing the real review with some of my recollections, and I ended them with the remark:

I intended, for years, to write the *not-so-plain Tales of the Sooke Hills*, but while I lived there the rigours of manual work left me no energy even to keep a proper diary, and in the years immediately after leaving the village other interests and travels supervened; gradually the memories lost their sharpness, until no more remains than will fill a short passage of an autobiography. But I always believed that this strange combination of people, washed up on that far shore of Canada by the tide of westering which made it the best of our frontiers, needed its chronicler, even if I had failed my memories. . .

On the day I handed over *Canadian Literature*, a letter arrived from Al Purdy, commenting on my review and challenging me with a regret that "those memories got vague and blurred. It's probably the only part of your life you haven't written about." As I read his letter, in the mood of mental liberation that followed my abandonment of the task of editing, I began to wonder if the memories were really lost. A day or two later, by a touch of what Jung called synchronicity, the curator of manuscripts at the University of Victoria sent me copies of some letters he'd found in the Herbert Reed collection. I'd written them to Reed in 1949-50, about those very Vancouver Island experiences. And suddenly, with Proustian brightness as I read the letters, memories began to sparkle like fireflies on the edge of a dark wood and I thought it was time to start writing my autobiography after all and give those early years in Canada their proper vividness.

SUCH A MOOD of creative liberation would not have been possible if I had been in a state of regret over giving up *Canadian Literature*. In fact, I gave it up gladly, though I would not like that statement to be interpreted in any negative way. I did not feel bored with editing; it's a task I enjoy as I enjoy writing reviews, without feeling that in itself it's the most important thing in life. But about a year ago, it seemed to me that *Canadian Literature*, besides its everyday task of presenting a running commentary on Canadian writing and literary scholarship during the past 18 years, had also done what I hoped for when I started it: created a nucleus around which a real tradition of criticism could grow up in Canada. That tradition existed in no perceptible form in 1959; it exists today,

and I believe *Canadian Literature* played a major part in fostering it. Having achieved that much, did I want to carry on, or did I want to migrate to the fresher if not greener pastures of freelance writing and devote my time to the books I want to see finished while there is time? Obviously, the latter.

Having made this decision, I was tempted at first to treat *Canadian Literature* as a personal creation, and bring it to an end, as Eliot did the *Criterion* and Cyril Connolly *Horizon*, rather than hand it on. But I saw there were differences between the situations. In one sense I had personally created *Canadian Literature*, and to this degree created the critical movement it represents, though the peculiar statements by some writers that I created the idea of a Canadian literature are patently absurd; D'Arcy McGee was talking of it 110 years ago! Yet in 1959, and for years after, *Canadian Literature* was the only magazine devoted entirely to Canadian writers and writing; now there are at least seven such journals, and that alone says something about the need *Canadian Literature* encountered and in its own way satisfied. It always seemed to me that *Canadian Literature* was as much the creation of its period as it was my creation; I was there at the right time with the editorial experience and the appropriate attitude of slightly distanced objectivity.

Such being the case, obviously *Canadian Literature* was never my magazine in the same way as *Horizon* was Connolly's or — an example nearer the Canadian bone — *Contemporary Verse* was Alan Crowley's. In any case, both Connolly and Crowley killed their magazines because they felt the supply of good material was drying up. I had no reason to think that; I had two years of essays stockpiled for my successor to start with, and was rejecting a great deal of material I was sorry to let go. So to kill the journal would

All this time I was reading Canadian books — the few that then came off the presses — and the two or three literary magazines, and at first I was puzzled by much of what I encountered.

be pointless, provided a good new editor could be found.

He was, in Bill New, whom I respect as a critic, value as a friend, and know as a man with independent views, so that I expect soon to see *Canadian Literature* a magazine transformed. Phoenixes, I have always felt, should come out of the fire of change with different plumage.

so I FIND myself liberated to poetry, to reminiscence, to the massive book on the French novel I started 20 years ago, to the even more massive book on inter-relationship of cultures in the ancient

world with which I hope to follow it. But reminiscence. the shaping of an autobiography. is most in my mind at present, and as my memory flashes back to those years of my return to Canada. and my indecision as to whether I would remain, which lasted from 1949 to 1951, I realize how astonishing it is that I should have founded a journal like *Canadian Literature* and should have moved into whatever modest position I may hold in the world of writing in this country. For my initial qualifications were scanty.

In France. before I returned here, I had read translations of Mazo de la Roche (but no books by Quebec writers, who were then not much thought of in Paris); in London I had read *Grey Owl* and the Penguin Sunshine *Sketches of a Little Town*. and wondered at Leacock's reputation. Roberts was for me the writer about

The writers were there, but the necessary infrastructure of a literary world — good magazines and dedicated publishers — hardly existed.

animals I had read as a child, and my father had brought Ralph Connor's novels and Frederick Niven's early books back when the family returned from Canada to England in 1913. (My first ideas of British Columbia were shaped by Niven's *Lost Cabin Mine*.) One of my friends in London was Paul Potts, who used to sell broadsheets of his verse in Hyde Park and was mildly notorious as the Canadian Hick Poet, but Bob Weaver is the only person I know in Canada who had ever heard of him and he has no place in *Colombo's Canadian References*. I knew A.J.M. Smith's poems because we were both contributors to Geoffrey Grigson's *New Verse*, and one day in 1948 Muriel Spark, who was then editing the *Poetry Review* in London, gave me Birney's *Strait of Anian* to review. And that was about the scope of my knowledge of Canadian writing in 1949.

Though thin, I suppose it was not an entirely unrepresentative selection of Canadian writing up to the late 1940s. But except for Smith and bits of Birney and Niin. I was not impressed. And when my wife and I did arrive on Vancouver Island. led there by the nostalgic eulogies of a Canadian seaman who wandered into the anarchist bookshop in Red Lion Street. it was a matter of proving ourselves in the wilderness that most interested us. Looking at those letters I then wrote to Herbert Read, I find them as innocent as Susanna Moodie's memoirs of any awareness of Canadian writers, but full of interest in the last Canadian frontier and its strange but unitary human fauna.

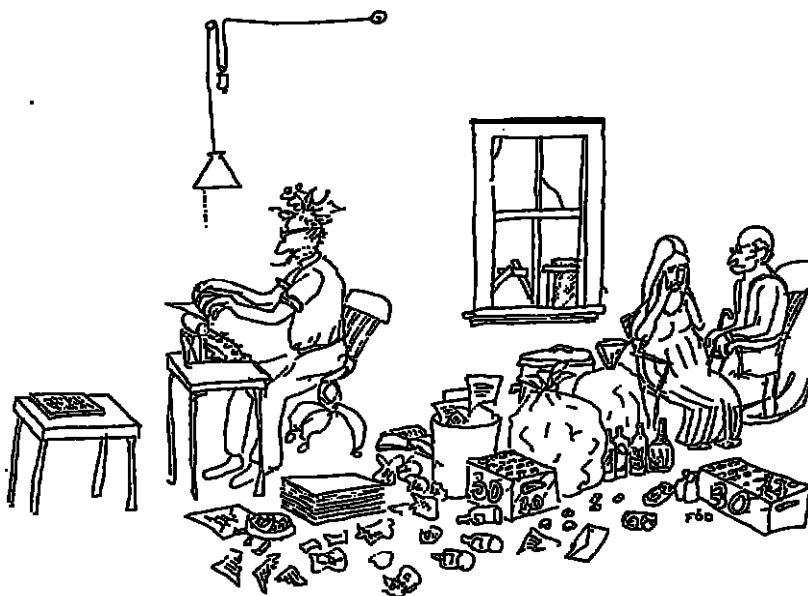
Yet obviously the writer was anxiously looking over the would-be pioneer's shoulder, and just as Susanna, once she had endured enough roughing it in the bush. was glad to know that the *Literary Garland* existed in Montreal and that there were writers as near as Loyalist Belle ville, so after a few months I started to establish my own literary contacts. I wrote to Earle Birney, then at UBC. and he came over — a brown-bearded. caustic-tongued man then in his 40s — to see us in our trailer at Sooke; not long afterwards Marya Fiamengo appeared. and they were my first writer friends in Canada. Birney arranged for me to give a lecture in Vancouver on English poets. It took place on a day of blizzard and only a few people turned up. but one of them was Roy Daniells, and another long friendship began. There was also a delayed. remote audience. for my lecture was printed — now it is a bookshop rarity — and E. J. Pratt wrote to me out of the wintry distance, my first contact in Eastern Canada. On the night of the lecture. Birney gave a

party, and one of the guests. shaking the snow from his coat as he walked in. told me that the CBC news had just announced George Orwell's death. With a curious vividness. at that moment I knew my past as an English writer was ended; my future would likely be in Canada.

The months that followed — 1950 going into 1951 — were a time of abandoning my pretensions to becoming a Canadian frontiersman, and finding my way into whatever literary world then existed in Canada. In Victoria I encountered Floris McLaren and Alan Crawley, that man of such multiple perceptiveness that one forgot his blindness almost the instant one met him. I contributed to Alan's *Contemporary Verse* the few poems I made in those early years in Canada. and wrote for him my first Canadian book reviews. Later I began to go over to Vancouver fairly regularly to record with Ross McLean, then a CBC-Radio producer, talks on English writers and reviews for *Critically Speaking*; one was then paid only \$25 for local talks. but these small cheques formed a major part of our tiny income, and I supplemented them by spreading turkey manure on strawberry farms for 75 cents an hour and later digging ditches for \$1 an hour. Through Ross I came into contact with Bob Weaver, and through him with John Sutherland, for whose *Northern Review* I wrote fairly regularly in its final years. And through Bob Weaver I became one of the early advisory editors of *Tamarack Review* when it started in 1956.

All this time I was reading Canadian books — the few that then came off the presses — and the two or three literary magazines. and at first I was puzzled by much that I encountered. Coming from Europe, where we had gone through modernism and come out bedraggled at the far end. where we had endured the whole thematic tangle of the 1930s, I was inclined to lay great stress on form, and the respect paid to such writers as Pratt and MacLennan, Callaghan and Grove. at first astounded me. I saw in Pratt a Hudibrastic archaist, an academic versifier using poetic measures long laid aside in England except for a few eccentrics like Roy Campbell. I found MacLennan much of the time heavily didactic, and strangely like Ethel M. Dell when he dealt with sex. For all his ability to produce direct, clear prose, and his courage in taking the stance of a moralist, Callaghan struck me as insipid in his treatment of human emotions and relationships. As for Grove, while I delighted in the poised landscapism of *Over Prairie Trails*, I found his novels agonizingly ponderous. as if they were left in mid-travail. and thought — and still think — that he never developed an ear for any kind of English dialogue, including Anglo-Canadian.

Of course, there were exceptions. *Under the Volcano* delighted me, but I did not then think of Lowry any more than I thought of myself on first returning. as a Canadian writer. I read eagerly every novel by Ethel Wilson as it came off the press. Found her the most urbanely ambivalent of all the Canadian novelists of that time, and



was happy when she and her husband Wallace later became my friends. I thought Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House* one of the best Canadian novels, though I have liked nothing by Ross that has appeared since then. As I had written my own early poems in England during the 1930s and 1940s, I was naturally first attracted by the Poets who came nearest to the English tradition — poets such as Smith and Scott, P. K. Page and Dorothy Livesay, and I suppose my closest poetic affinities are still with them.

An extraordinary qualitative change in fiction — and a moving into formal experimentation that I did not expect from the novels being written here in 1959!

From those earliest days, visiting Vancouver from the bland, and from 1953 living there. I remember with most uneasiness the writers' circles that were then symptomatic of the state of Canadian letters. Their tone was not the arrogant hopefulness of the affinity groups of young writers needing the resistance of each others' ideas that I had known in London and Paris. It was rather the peevish desperation of writers who were often old enough and mature enough to be publishing their work and seeing it intelligently criticized in print, but who saw no chance of either of these things happening. By 1953 *Contemporary Verse* was dead, *Northern Review* was moribund, and the popular magazines were going slow on fiction: in publishing it was still the cautious ear, and in poetry that meant mostly the Ryerson Chapbooks. It was hard to publish verse, even harder to publish short stories, though Bob Weaver kept the genre alive almost single-handedly through CBC-Radio. And the facilities for responsible criticism of what did appear were almost non-existent. The writers' groups of which I am talking grew out of this situation. Painful occasions I remember them, for all the frustration of merit unrecognized would break forth, and criticism — though invited — was resented, for the very good reason that these occasions were really substitutes for publication: what the participants most desperately needed was not critics, but readers. Canadian literature, circa 1950-3! The writers were there, but the necessary infrastructure of a literary world — good magazines and dedicated publishers — hardly existed.

ALL THAT IS long past in a Canada where any reasonably competent writer can achieve publication without much difficulty. But it preoccupied me greatly at the time. Yet gradually I found the edges wearing off my initial reactions to Canadian writing. John Sutherland induced me to write for *Northern Review* a long essay on MacLennan in the course of which I began to see the thematic reasons why he was the leading figure of the Canadian 1950s. I began to find myself accepting with reservations (though I did not know it at the time) Frye's opinion of the inappropriateness of trying to evaluate writing in an emergent literature according to the gradations of a critical hierarchy. Poetry, I saw, was needed before great poetry could exist. One's expectations changed from the ideal to the historically appropriate and, indeed, the historically possible.

One thing I knew even then was that the time was coming when in Canada a critical tradition most emerge, as it had done in older literatures, to complement and sustain what are often called the "creative" genres, that is poetry, fiction, drama (though I have always agreed with Wilde that the best criticism is creative also). Echoing A.J.M. Smith, who as early as 1928 had published his celebrated "Wanted Canadian Criticism" article, in which he called for a philosophic criticism to "examine the fundamental position of the artist," I wrote for the *Dalhousie Review* in 1953 "A View of Canadian Criticism," in which I outlined my theory of the historic necessity and indeed inevitability of criticism as part of a developing literary tradition, and suggested that the time had come in a critical journal devoted to Canadian writers and their works.

Six years later I began to publish that magazine. I had spent a year away in the United States teaching English in what I soon realized could never be my country, and a year in France studying

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Gide and Proust. Each time I had come back to Canada with a growing sense that here was my long-time and final home, and had found the literary movement of the 1950s a little more advanced: James Reaney and Phyllis Webb. Eli Mandel and Margaret Avison and Mordecai Richler appearing. Sheila Watson changing the course of our fiction with *The Double Hook*, Layton moving into maturity and the public eye.

When I got back from France — or from Provence to be more exact in terms of cultural traditions — I took up teaching again at UBC, and a group of people there who had been thinking of a journal of Canadian studies approached me with the suggestion that I edit the very magazine I had been talking about, a magazine entirely devoted to the study of Canadian writers and their work. It seemed even to me that they were taking a risk. I wasn't an academic expert on Canadian literature. There were writers and whole periods with which I was unfamiliar. It was continental European fiction and drama that I had come back to teach. But I was a critic of some experience. I had edited a literary magazine — *Nova* — in England from 1940 to 1947, and those who invited me obviously thought professional experience of this kind, plus my relative lack of personal attachments at that time among Canadian writers, was more important than a knowledge of every phase of Canadian writing. Perhaps they were right: I like to think so. One doesn't expect the conductor of an orchestra to play the flute or the, or *anglais*, but to control the ensemble of instruments, and so it is with editing. As for me, I welcomed the opportunity to learn as I went along, and have been doing so ever since.

WHAT IS THERE to say about *Canadian Literature*? The issues are there for anyone to look back on. There are anthologies, published by Oxford and in the New Canadian Library, of some of the best essays. *Canadian Literature* has become a necessary tool in the ever-proliferating CanLit courses in universities and colleges, but I am not sure that I appreciate that rather artificial academic fer-

ment, and I prefer to see the long shelf of 18 years' issues of the magazine as a sensitive chronicle, a sort of ongoing history for anyone who cares to study it, of the extraordinary changes that have taken place in writing and in the ambience in which writers work since *Canadian Literature* first appeared in 1959.

And what changes! An explosion in poetry, with 10 times as many books appearing each year as appeared in the 1950s! An extraordinary qualitative change in fiction — and a moving into formal experimentation that I did not expect from the novels!

The precisions of poetry and the precisions of criticism seem to correlate marvellously, and many of the best essays and reviews I published were by poets.

found being written here in 1959! A moving of drama out of the shadows of radio on to the stage, and the emergence of a whole school of vital new playwrights! History and biography and criticism flourishing, with scores of new titles every season! Literally dozens of new magazines and new presses appearing and — surprisingly often — surviving! *Canadian Literature* has been only one small detonating factor in — to quote Northrop Frye, writing in the latest edition of the *Literary History of Canada* — “the colossal verbal explosion that has taken place in Canada since 1960.” I think the magazine's success was owing most of all to the fact that it appeared just when it was needed; to mangle Volta &, “if *Canadian Literature* hadn't existed, it would have been necessary to invent it.” Another magazine, another editor, would have appeared to meet the need.

One reason why I feel so certain of this is the ease with which I found contributors. Sceptics prophesied that there would be neither enough material to write about nor enough critics to write; in a year *Canadian Literature* would collapse. But Frye's “verbal explosion” released an ever-growing flood of books to be criticized, and soon I had to abandon my early practice of reviewing every new Canadian novel and book of verse. After spending two years badgering people to write articles, I found new critics emerging at a steady rate, and some of them exceptionally good ones, such as D. G. Jones, who first published parts of *Butterfly on Rock* in *Canadian Literature*, and Margaret Atwood, who wrote criticism for me before she wrote *Survival*.

These names — Jones and Atwood — say something important about the new criticism that has emerged in Canada in recent years. It is a criticism largely written by practising poets and novelists. In editing *Canadian Literature* I was always encouraging such people to write for me: I got Ethel Wilson to recount her memories, got Hugh MacLennan and Mordecai Richler and Margaret Laurence and Earle Bimey to talk about their own writing, got Al Purdy and George Bowering and A.I.M. Smith and Margaret Atwood to write about the work of other poets. I found one interesting fact from all this: few fiction writers make good or even willing critics, though they are happy discussing the problems of their own writing. But the precisions of poetry and the precisions of criticism seem to correlate marvellously, and many of the best essays and reviews I published were by poets. Which, of course, is nothing new, when one thinks of Dryden and Eliot, Coleridge and Baudelaire. There is a strain of pure intellectuality in a lot of poetry that combines with intuition in very much the same way as these elements combine in good criticism.

In saying this, I do not wish to belittle the contributions scholarly critics have made. *Canadian* criticism would have been a good deal thinner in content and insight if it had not been for the work of such people as Malcolm Ross and Milton Wilson, Desmond Pacey and Doug Spettigue and Germaine Warkentin, all of whom have contributed notably to *Canadian Literature*. One important critic alone — but the best — chose not to be included. Except for a brief memorial piece on Ned Pratt, Northrop Frye has always — with faultless courtesy — avoided writing for *Canadian Literature*. A criticism without words? Perhaps — but unproven. A lamented absence? Indeed! □

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WILL FLORENCE SINK CANADIAN PUBLISHING?

It's a far-away agreement about which we know little. But if we finally ratify it, the effects on our industry could be devastating

by Phil Surguy

No matter how complex it [the Florence Agreement issue] is, if you look at it in the right way, it becomes even more complex.

— publisher Malcolm Lester

AS RED SKELTON used to say, "Pay attention now, Folks, because this is the plot."

It seems likely that, in the near future, Canada will finally sign the Florence Agreement, a treaty worked out in the 1950s that allows the tariff-free movement of (among other things) books across international borders. Canada has already approved the treaty in principle, but has yet to ratify it; and there are many people in Canadian publishing who feel that ratification will, if not wipe the industry out altogether, drastically damage it.

Educational books already come into the country duty-free, so non-text or "trade" books are what concerns us here. And it should be noted that Canada now is the *only* developed country that has not signed the agreement.

The first big push toward Canada's ratification of Florence came in Toronto in 1968. Representatives of publishing houses, printers, binders, and the trade unions involved agreed that they would urge the Canadian government to ratify the treaty if the United States exempted Canada from something called the Manufacturing Clause — which is, to put it very simply, a part of American copyright legislation that requires books by American authors to be printed in the U.S. if they are to be protected by American copyrights. Now, after a decade of negotiation, on Jan. 1, 1978, the U.S. will drop the Manufacturing Clause as it applies to Canada and we'll be morally bound to sign the Florence Agreement. The big kicker, though, is that at the time of the 1968 Toronto agreement it was felt that exemption would give Canadians easy access to the American market, because publishing and printing costs were so much lower in this country. But now costs have risen to such an extent that it seems extremely unlikely that Canadians will be able to compete for U.S. business. Furthermore, with the removal of tariffs, there will be little to stop American book wholesalers and printers from coming up here and grabbing a big chunk of our market.

Yet no one seems to know what can or will happen.

The Secretary of State recently produced a hastily written study of the impact Florence might have on the publishing and book manufacturing industries and invited comments from all interested parties. At the Secretary's request, the Book and Periodical Development Council co-ordinated several meetings of the various groups — printers, publishers, binders, authors, unions, book-

sellers, and so forth — and, at the time of writing, the industry seems to be reaching a consensus. That is, the industry as a whole will probably ask the government not to sign Florence until a Four-year study of all the ramifications has been completed. The industry will request that the tariff on books remain in effect for another year, and during that period the current condition of the Canadian market will be closely studied, tabulated, and evaluated. Then, for the next three years, the tariff will be zero-rated — that is, Customs will still be legally empowered to collect duty on books, but they won't do it; and that will give us some time to see



When informed of Hurtig's view, McClelland said: "If he's in favour of ratification, it's clear to me he's gone completely out of his mind."

the effects of ratification before it actually happens. It would be hard to get out of the Florence Agreement once we've signed it.

But what kind of consensus has the industry reached? I found only one publisher who is outrightly in favour of Florence. The rest are actually just saying they are in favour of waiting and seeing. Indeed, many publishers feel that the government has already decided to ratify the agreement, regardless of what they think. They suspect the government has traded off the publishing industry for concessions in other areas — perhaps the GATT negotiations, or the dispute with the U.S. over advertising on border stations — so all they can do is ask for time to prepare for the inevitable.

Jack McClelland is one of the publishers who feels the issue has already been decided. As for the agreement itself, he says: "It will be unfortunate but not catastrophic. I see no merit for Canada in making American books cheaper here. At a time when we're trying to preserve our own cultural identity, it's a step in the wrong

For his part, Hurtig says: "People who want to charge duty on books are dinosaurs and should be regarded as such."

direction. I think it will damage Canadian publishing in the sense that Canadian books will appear more expensive. I think it will damage the existing structure of the book-distribution system in Canada and the agency system will be weakened. Many American publishing firms will have to examine whether they should sell or ship directly to Canada. And, my ultimate point is that I can't imagine who's going to benefit. Certainly not the book manufacturing trade. Certainly not the Canadian publishing industry, authors, or libraries. And in the long run, I don't think the retail book trade will benefit. Will the Canadian consumer benefit? If getting American books cheaper can be considered a benefit, then he will. But I don't think that's a benefit."

Actually, we are in no danger of getting American books cheaper. As it is now, the actual duty on American books is minuscule, but is commonly used by Canadian agencies as a further excuse to jack up their prices. It works this way: duty is paid on the wholesale, not (as some publishers imply) the retail, price of a book; so, when a Canadian publisher buys a \$10 book at a 60 per cent discount in the U.S., the duty he pays is only 40 cents — 10 per cent of four dollars. And that duty, plus customs brokerage fees and extra freight charges, all provide additional occasions for marking up the book's retail price in Canada, sometimes as much as 20 per cent. However, even if the tariff comes off, books will still have to be freighted and brokers will still be needed to get them through customs. Only the 40 cents will disappear from the equation — but certainly not from the prices we'll be paying up here.

It is the entire system of book publishing in Canada — not the dollar-and-cents interests of the consumer that is at stake. Most Canadian publishing houses are branch plants, subsidiaries of foreign firms; and they and a majority of domestic publishers derive a huge part of their revenue by acting as agents for the foreign publishers that don't operate in Canada. But if book tariffs are removed, librarians and retailers will be able to buy directly, and at considerable savings, from American wholesalers. All Canadian agencies will suffer from this, of course; but, at least initially, it's the branch plants that will sustain the greatest damage. For it's conceivable that the foreign parent companies, realizing they can deal directly with this market now, will shut down their Canadian operations (in terms of distance, for example, it makes more sense to service British Columbia from Seattle or even San Francisco).

There are all sorts of speculative horror stories going around. One of them has Canadian retailers — particularly the chains — wrecking the agencies by buying a token number of books from them, but getting the bulk of their orders of the same books from the U.S. and then, to save on freight and brokerage fees, returning their unsold books from both sources to the agencies. However, the main feat rests on the argument that the agency system sup-

ports and subsidizes domestic Canadian publishing. If the agencies vanish, or are seriously damaged, the price of Canadian books will have to go up. Publishers will be forced to print in the U.S., smaller domestic publishers will go out of business and, as a result of all that, the publishing and book manufacturing industries in this country will be crippled forever.

An authoritative observer of the Canadian book trade (who doesn't want to be identified) recognizes some threat to the agencies, but feels that competition from the U.S. will "sharpen up the industry." He points out that the Canadian librarians who are already buying more than \$17 million worth of duty-free educational books from American wholesalers every year are doing so not only for economic reasons. They go to the U.S. because they can get good service there. Booksellers, No. have long complained that, while it can take up to eight weeks to get an order filled by a Canadian company — even in Toronto, where most of the warehouses are — they can get most books from the U.S. within 10 days. With that in mind, and with the gun at its head now, the Canadian book trade is beginning to think about improving its distribution system; and one of the reasons the government will be asked to keep the tariff on for another year is to allow time to look into ways of doing that.

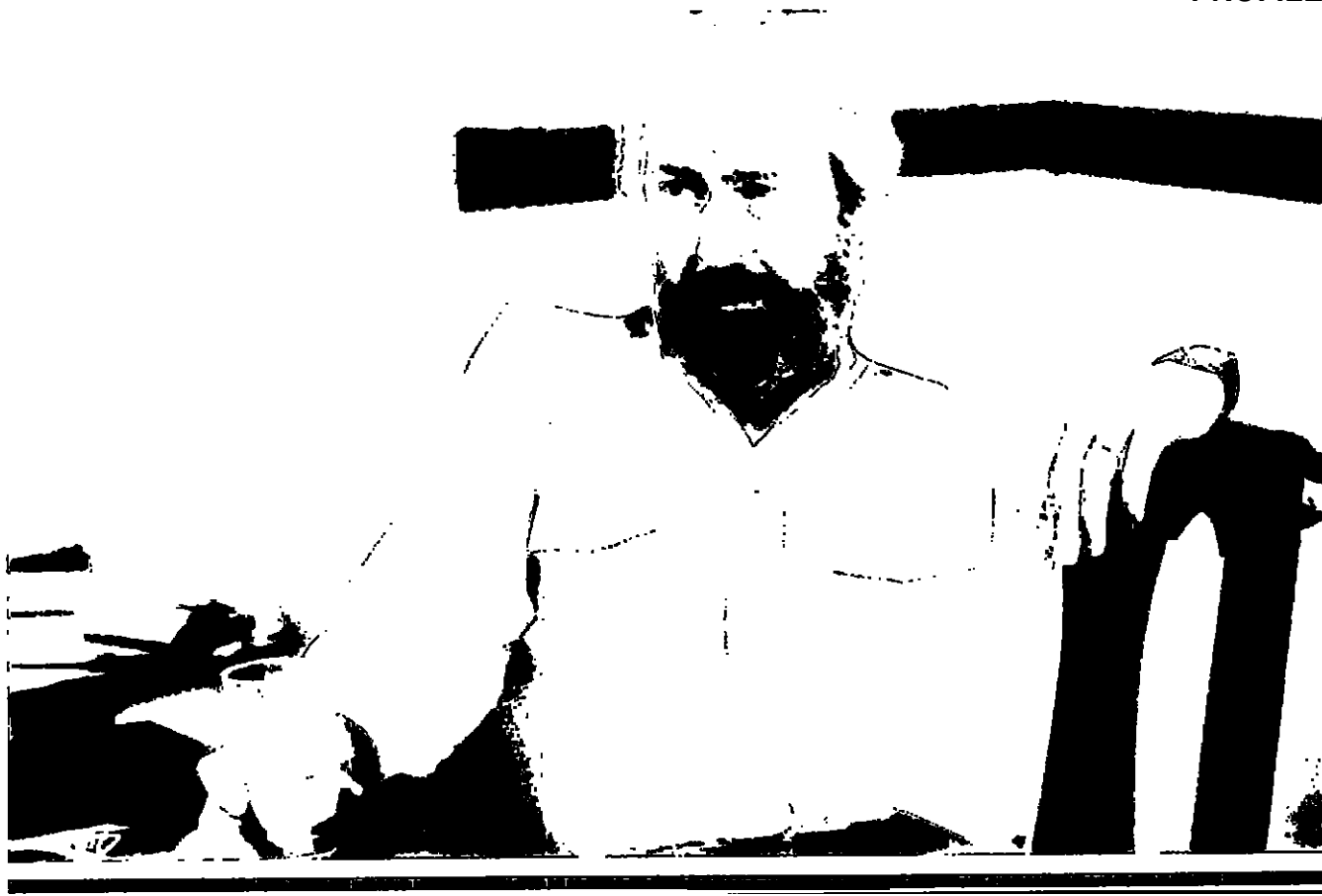
Maybe the time of the agency system and branch plants will soon be over. That at any rate appears to be the view of Edmonton publisher Mel Hurtig. Surprisingly, considering the fact that he's as active and outspoken a nationalist as Jack McClelland, he feels Canada should have ratified the Florence Agreement 10 years ago. He says: "Any country that charges duty on books or any other kind of educational materials can hardly be classed as civilized. If you want to help Canadian publishing, there are many non-negative ways that don't penalize the Canadian book-buying public."

Hurtig believes that at one time, with our small and widely scattered population, the agency system was good; but now it is a totally artificial arrangement that is being perpetuated by the tariff. And the main effect of the tariff, perhaps the reason for it, is that we're paying unnecessarily high prices for American books. Hurtig claims that Canada did not join Florence right at the beginning because the branch plants lobbied strenuously against that move. He says Canada originally had a secret agreement with the U.S. to join if the U.S. did, and we later reneged on the promise and clouded the issue by making the Manufacturing Clause part of the deal.

Hurtig feels that, of the "non-negative" ways Canadian publishing can be helped, "the major one is to remove the artificial limitations now placed on Canadians who now are unable to act like publishers in other countries." Canada is still an appendage of the British and American markets. In other countries, publishers bid for the right to publish international best sellers within their own borders; and profits from publishing these best sellers (where the real money is in trade books) is used to underwrite their domestic programs. In Canada, on the other hand, a publisher rarely gets to bid on the domestic rights to an international best seller. Who handles a particular book here is dictated by the winner of the American or British rights, and our publisher simply acts as his agent and distributor. He is not a publisher in the fullest sense of the word.

When informed of Hurtig's views on the Florence Agreement, McClelland said: "If he's in favour of ratification, it's clear to me he's gone completely out of his mind. I love him dearly, but I'm sorry that that has happened." For his part, Hurtig says: "People who want to charge duty on books are dinosaurs and should be regarded as such."

Regardless of who's crazy and who's a dinosaur, it's clear that the system of Canadian publishing will change radically within the next decade. In the face of continuing massive competition from English and American publishers, our domestic industry will still have to be protected in one way or another. Government support will probably be needed — for instance, to make book distribution in this country more efficient. However, extended support and protection of the publishing industry will be pointless if, in the long run, they only serve to perpetuate a system that has had its day. □



THE MAN FROM VAUDEVILLE, SASK.

Since he grew up amid the inalien corn, comedian John Newlove has been half in love with teaseful death

by A. F. Moritz

"I've had a lot of trouble with people and reviewers saying how gloomy my poetry is," says John Newlove, leaning back in his chair with a grin and cradling his tall glass of scotch and water. "I happen to think it's realistic. Moreover, I think of myself as a comedian, by and large. Maybe the comedian of death . . . but still a comedian."

He radiates, at the same time, quiet amusement and intense awareness. He's just introduced his listener to another of the complexities that deepen and enrich his poetry, and that seem to be the heart of his everyday talk as well. Newlove is a man of generous talk. Racy, witty, concise and eloquent by turns, he mixes literature and football, autobiography and character portrait, politics and history, into a personal and engaging blend.

The interview took place some months ago in Newlove's Massey College office at the U of T, when he was writer-in-residence for 1976-77. Outside, the college courtyard filled with snow as

he meditated on the traditional question about literary influences:

"Everybody who writes long enough gets asked sooner or later, 'Who influenced you?' Right now, I feel it was probably [radio comedians] Bob and Ray. . . Human life is simultaneously so funny and so sad that I never know what the mixture is. So I can't help joking in the middle of a poem about death. I'm a vaudevillian."

It quickly emerges from Newlove's conversation that he's fascinated by the fact of mixture and combination under a variety of guises: the mixture of genres and facts that help generate a poem; the combination of traits in people and nations; the combination of life and death in human consciousness; the vaudeville blend (for so he presents it) of humour and hard times in his own past.

Since the early 1960s, Newlove the poet has moved from the profoundest small-press obscurity to his current position of great popularity with the poetry-reading public and even greater respect among writers, critics, and students. His clean, vivid style, with its

economical lines and streamlined forms, is a major factor in the revolution of manner that has reshaped Canadian poetry during the last two decades.

And he is perhaps even more a leader with regard to matter. His uncompromising explorations of history, landscape, and psychology have helped open new territories of the world and the mind to younger Canadian poets.

The man and his work are clearly of a piece, and interpenetrate one another. His talk often runs on the intricate blendings of things. As in his poems, he enjoys them and is moved by them, but does not try to solve them:

"Don't be so sure you know what you're saying. That was one of the messages of the title of my last book [*Lies*, McClelland & Stewart, 1972]. Another was that I was tired of being told what a truthful poet I was. Every poet tries to tell the truth one way or another. That book was almost on the edge of prevarication. Sometimes you can only tell the truth by hinting, by being devious.

"Sincerity. Geez, that's an ugly word! Truth isn't necessarily in every case a virtue. It can be used to hurt people. I think the supreme virtue is an incredibly moderate thing called kindness — not even love, but kindness, decency."

Like his writing itself, Newlove's conversation about writing is open on the world, not limited to a narrow range. It continually moves toward other subjects, whether grave or weighty: Bob and Ray, or kindness versus love.

Formal public recognition came in 1973 when *Lies* won the Governor General's Award. Before that he had published several small-press books and three major collections: *Moving In Alone* (Contact Press, 1965); *Black Night Window* (M & S, 1968); and *The Cave* (M & S, 1970). Last year he edited an anthology, *Canadian Poetry: The Modern Era*, for M & S, which has generated a certain amount of controversy among his younger contemporaries, and published a volume of selected Poems, *The Far Man*, which is reviewed on page 26. Later this year M&S will be bringing out his first volume of new poems in six years; the tentative title is *The Soft Tirade*.

As might be gathered, Newlove has a close association with M & S. He worked there as senior editor from 1970 to 1974, fighting his way up to a magnificent \$11,000 a year from a starting salary of \$8,000 while pondering such problems of style as the serial comma. He left M & S to become a professional writer-in-residence, accepting posts at Loyola University and the University of Western Ontario before his arrival at the U of T. This year he is more or less on sabbatical. He says the year at Massey College was perfect for him from the selfish point of view of getting on with his own work:

"I didn't get many students and didn't have to talk to many classes, which may have been a waste as far as the university was concerned. But sitting in that rather nice room with the 350 books I had brought down end with some privacy, I began to write again after a dry period of some six months. And I felt very, very secure.

"As a writer-in-residence, you're about 75 per cent social worker and 25 per cent editor. With the students who come back several times, you eventually get involved in their personal lives, their disastrous love affairs, their despair — which a lot of kids have about university and about what's going on generally.

"Personally, I don't think creative-writing — creative-writing, I call them — classes work. Writing is a one-to-one thing."

The conversation wanders toward the subject of money and the freedom of a writer's soul. Newlove says:

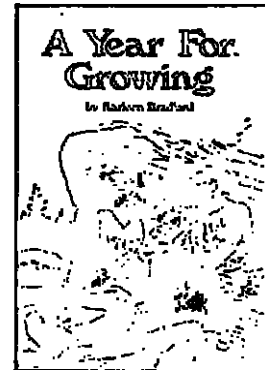
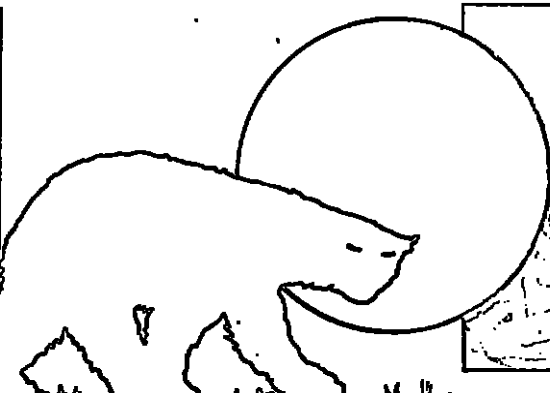
"God knows, in this trade anywhere or any way you can get money, you'd better grab it. My mother always used to say, 'Never lose a chance to spoil the Egyptians.' Professional, in terms of poetry, means you've been getting away with it for 15 or 20 years.

"I've heard some people worry about getting Canada Council grants. If you're the kind of person who's bribed that easily, you're going to turn out to be a rat-shit writer anyway."

Newlove is totally committed to poetry, much in the manner of his first influence, John Keats. And he's extremely conscious of his craft. Both his abstract discussion of poetry and his comments

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on the work of other poets are almost exclusively concerned with form, rhythm, and sound.

"I'm not committed on any issue. I tend to react to the individual thing. It's too easy to become a propagandist. I'll believe that propaganda can make good poems, but that isn't the way I make them."

What is the way he makes them? He professes not to understand the genesis of his poetry, but that doesn't prevent him from offering many facts and opinions on the subject.

"I'm really a packrat, a magpie, collecting bright shiny pieces of things in my brain. And these sometimes they amalgamate. The question of what to take "of and what to leave in, and how far to go in either direction, is something I've always been involved with."

For Newlove, the consideration that always determines his selection is poetic form. "It's involved in the initial tone of the poem," he says. "It seems to decide for itself what you may or may not put in. And it has to do with rhythm, not in the sense of rhythm curving down along the line or rhythm curving down through the poem, but the dramatic rhythm of the poem."

He seems to construct a book in the same way that he constructs an individual poet: "by a sense of feel that has more to do with an intuited rhythm than with any overt, rational attempt to impose form. He'll deny that his books are anything but collections, yet his comments reveal that this is certainly not the whole truth:

"The poems in my mind have to be separate from each other. Of course, because they come "out of the same mouth and the same brain, there are going to be similarities in them. But sometimes for me, unlike other poets, a book is simply like putting a given number of poems in a box."

On the other hand, he immediately adds: "When I put the order of the poems together, I put them together for euphony, not for one sense following another sense, but for one sound following another sound. What is the difference between prose and poetry? My own feeling is that it's this different sensibility of rhythm."

He agrees that his work has moved away from simple narrative and description, into a style in which fragments are rhythmically

juxtaposed. "Life is fragmented. And I really do like welding fragments together, which is what 'Quotations' [a major poem sequence from *Lies*] literally does.

"That poem is made out of quotations from about 130 books welded together. Because I wanted them to come randomly so that they could have come from any civilization, at any time, in any part of the world, and see what the result would be. It was a sort of survey of our history, and it became full of death."

As Newlove talks of poetry, he strays regularly into the subjects of politics, history, and death. "They're just about the same thing," he says, when it's pointed out to him.

"I'm soaked in history," he continues, and relates that fact to another aspect of his poetic development. "Might as well be straightforward and say that the later books are more literate than the earlier ones."

"History in *Moving In Alone* is very local, it comes from a very small area. Toward the end of *Lies*, it deliberately tries to encompass both the world and time. First, I had to define and write all my little histories."

Newlove's private history is interesting for its own sake and for its importance to current Canadian letters, since it has helped to determine the theme, style and even the tone of much contemporary poetry.

"Basically, I began in ignorance and had to invent it all for myself," he says of his approach to modern verse. The first poetry that impressed him in school was a single line — in fact, a single word — by Keats: "Ruth amid the alien corn."

"I wanted to write to astonish people as that word 'alien' astonished me.

"When I came from Saskatchewan to Vancouver — I was 22 — I hadn't really known except in passing anyone who ever read poetry. I'd gone to university one year and made some undergraduate literary attempts for the student newspaper. Anyway, I didn't know at that time that Saskatchewan was not a fit subject for a poem in the common estimation, unless you wrote a great sweeping epic about the snow. I didn't know you weren't supposed to

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write about a town like Kamsack. So ignorance helped me quite a bit.

"It's such an accidental life. I'd been in a few little mags in the early 1960s. What really set me off from small private-Press books was that I was doing my laundry in a laundromat on Fourth Avenue in Vancouver when George Bowering waked in to do his laundry and said there's some guy cut East named Colombo who's putting together an anthology for Ryerson. Why don't you seed him some of your clap?"

"So I did and he took 10 or 12, and he was then also connected with *Tamarack* so he took six or seven for *Tamarack*. You get into a few good magazines. an anthology or two, one full-sire book, and suddenly you're en 'arrived' poet."

Today, his poems have appeared in Canada, the United States, Mexico, England, France, Germany, Roumania, India, Australia, Italy, and Greece. He seldom sends poems to magazines, with the exception of a few that aided him in the early 1960s.

At 39, Newlove calls himself "one of the older younger poets." He's of middle height and gives an impression of stockiness that comes mainly from the looseness of comfortable clothes. Prema-

turally grey-white hair and a beard of the same colour make him seem older, at first glance, than he is.

His father was a Prairie lawyer and his mother a teacher. The family moved rather often, so that Newlove lived in many parts of Saskatchewan. He left the Prairies in 1960 and spent the next 10 years in British Columbia. He has been based in Toronto since 1970. He was married in 1964. His wife Susan is a graphic artist and a professional organizer for the NDP. He has two stepchildren: Jeremy, 16, and Tamsin, 14.

As a fitting jest for the comedian of death to conclude an interview with, Newlove pointed to a framed drawing by his friend Joe Rosenblatt and comments:

"He calls it 'Canadian Literature.' Now, that sums up Canadian Literature to me. You can't quite tell what's going on, but something is killing something."

However, he didn't really want the talk or comedy to end, so it continued for 12 hours, several bars, a Chinese restaurant and a blizzard. It continued in Newlove's impulsive, unorganized, often brilliant way, reminding you of what he considers his craft:

"You're not selling a world view. You're selling the beauty of a damn phrase." □

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On being his age

Robertson Davies once again demonstrates that he has one of the finest 19th-century styles in Canada

by Robert Cluett

One Half of Robertson Davies: Provocative Pronouncements on a Wide Range of Topics, Macmillan, 286 pages, \$10.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7705 1579 7).

A NEW BOOK from Robertson Davies should be an immediate object of attention for all reading Canadians --and indeed for readers in other parts of the English-speaking world. His work, especially his recent fiction, has added considerably to the strength and stature of Canadian literature, and as a literary figure he has exhibited qualities of character and temperament that are admirable and perhaps even worthy of emulation. Unlike many of his fellows, he has no self-hatred: he knows who and what he is and is not made unhappy thereby. He deals with his own kind of material in ways that extend but do not go beyond his gifts: no reaching after themes for which he lacks the moral clout. He soars loftily above visible political causes. He is unafraid to be old-fashioned. Indeed, he wears many of his old-fashioned views like badges of merit, and there is no ruefulness in him when he says, "My novels are a moralist's novels."

This book is described on its title page as "provocative pronouncements on a wide range of topics." It is true that some people might be provoked by its linguistic conservatism, its upper-Wasp tone, its resonances from private schools. But of things "provocative" --in the sense of things new that challenge or move us to reshape our thoughts and thinking -- there are none. We have heard nearly all the major things in the book before, in one guise or another, from the same source.

The title of this book is taken from an old proverb: "The tongue is one half of a man, but the other half is the heart." The Half that we are given is the tongue: Davies the public speaker. All of the 22 pieces collected in the book, in five "sections," were written to be spoken aloud. The occasions for the speaking vary enormously in solemnity and formality: a few are unspecified; others include memorial tributes, professional association meetings, a meeting of the Cosmos Club (Washington D.C.), a meeting of the Association For Canadian Studies in the United States, the 1976

L&in-Smart Lectures at the U of T's Trinity College, and a commencement at Bishop Strachan School. Even given Davies' high-profile social and moral attitudes as a cohering force, it is hard to make a book that is unified in any sense out of such a motley lot of occasions. The editors could have prevailed upon Mr. Davies to omit from the collection at least five of the 22 pieces; specifically here I think of the three ceremonial pieces in the first section and the first two of the four *jeux d'esprit* in the third. Even then the range is too big. There are six well-organized, carefully considered pieces about literary history ("Jung and the Theatre," "Insanity in Literature," and the four Larkin-Stuart lectures); these are mixed in with bits of froth here and there and with other pieces such as "Ham and Tongue" --about the arts of oratory -- and "The Canada of Myth and Reality" that jump off in promising fashion, only to droop and slouch groundward sooner than we had hoped. Even with a five-piececut, still toomotley. But there are those high-profile attitudes, and there is the insistent personality of the author throughout, and probably the most fruitful way to consider the book is to examine these.

The personality is unmistakable. It lives in a Christian moral framework and in a world in which some people are, For what

they are, belter than others; it expresses no great satisfaction with the passing of the hierarchical things venerated by our grandparents, and it holds no wild secular hopes for future progress. Where but in Robertson Davies would we find, in the year 1977, lines like the Following? "The whole suggestion is distasteful to people of refined feeling. Let us dismiss it." "I have always greatly liked dinner-parties, and hated picnics. But then I am a classicist by temperament, and I think the formality and the pattern, either in love or in entertaining, is half the fun." "The most carefully brought up girls come to know things that we might imagine were unsuitable for them, and the song Ophelia sings she might easily have heard soldiers singing in the royal castle of Denmark." "A surprising number of people can get Ph.D.s in criticism; to be a worthy reader of what writers of conscience have written is a very different matter." "I know nothing about Welfare." "The antique resonances are visibly and deliberately out of step with the times. He is diffident about using the word "motivate" and is quite unashamed of the Fact that he has "become a fossil, in this respect at least." "In the country of the West where Aleksander Solzhenitsyn and his struggles have received the least approval and attention, it is Davies that speaks of him with open admiration. And who, need we ask, calls the members of the 40-plus fitness cult "shrivelled Peter Pans who dare not be their age"?"

Davies' true time is the 19th century, and his true turf. Jung notwithstanding, is England. The framework of allusion is revealing as to both lime and turf. From the early modern period there is Shakespeare, always and in abundance. From our own century there are Shaw, Huxley, and Waugh. From the last 200 or so years there are oddities and eccentricities such as the ones to which he gave such fruitful attention in *A Voice from the Attic*. And there is also the standard opera repertory (almost entirely 19th century). Nearly all the rest is both British and from the 1800s: DeQuincey, Carlyle, George Eliot, Dickens, Trollope, Byron, Thackeray, Wordsworth, Keats. Those who can accept his where and his when can get a lot from him.



Robertson Davies

One Half of Robertson Davies will not add to the stature of its author, and to many it will seem a meagre half measure to be getting in return for their 10 bucks. But out there somewhere there is a significant body of Davies devotees — people like the votaries of Casals who thought it an ecstasy just to be able to sit and listen to the maestro tune his instrument. They are the proper buyers of this book, and they are the ones that will give it the response that a serious artist, even in his most offhand moments, deserves. □

Mirror, mirror show us all

The Scorched-Wood People, by Rudy Wiebe. McClelland & Stewart. 351 pages. \$12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 77108979 1).

By ROBERT KROETSCH

RUDY WIEBE is a writer who has an ecstatic vision of time. In all his work the temporality of narrative threatens to surrender to the pod-view of the God-inspired author. In his new and fine novel, *The Scorched-Wood People*, the dilemmas literally acted out by two men.

Gabriel Dumont, holding aloft a gun ("Le Petit, I've worn out five of them. I live by killing things") is the man who lives in the world, in narrative, in conflict. He is the man who survives physically at the end, the hero as clown. Louis Riel, holding aloft a cross (of words; and the word "word" recurs throughout the text) is the man who lives by transcendent vision. He is called mad. He has elected or is fated to be the hanged man; and by that hanging he earns eternal life.

Wiebe, superficially, resolves the dilemma through the voice of a narrator ("Pierre, you little chip of scorched wood, they'll sing your songs long after we're finished by the worms"): he suggests a resolution through art. His singer is reminiscent, in a distant way, of Laurence's ringer in *The Diviners*. But Wiebe's Pierre, by the end of the novel, speaks unabashedly in the voice of the author.

When I was half-way through the book, in the brilliant chapter on writing and sex and religion and history (pages 170-188) that is the book's literal centre, I turned first to Dennis Lee's *Savage Fields* — and surely Lee's sense of earth and world illuminates that complicated and hallucinatory chapter. But I went finally to Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text*.

Wiebe is in some ways the most profoundly sexual of our writers. His endless flirtation with God and history finds its true resolution in an erotics of reading. Wiebe writes along the stretched, hysteric edge of (time-consuming) orgasm. Nothing else so

adequately accounts for the paradigm of his sentence, his abjuration of mere meaning in the confrontation with word/Word.

With Barthes, he elects to recognize the text of bliss, not of mere pleasure: "The text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language."

Wiebe cannot quite accept that he writes novels: He feels Christian guilt about writing fiction; a patriarch might catch him out lying. Thus we are affronted page after page by his neurotic need (Barthes again: "Sane I do not deign to be, neurotic I am") to give supporting detail. The pitiless mitt of detail obscures shapes, obscures meaning, into the reassurance of apparent truth.

Wiebe, crying out history and detail against his longing for vision, bespeaks the Canadian fear of fictions. We are a people who cannot approve even that necessary fiction, "nation." We too are as hopelessly schizoid as those two halves of possibility represented by Dumont and Riel. The book is a frightening mirror.

Wiebe and I, one summer in Saskatchewan, at the annual acting out of Riel's trial in Regina, were selected from the audience to sit on the stage as members of the jury. I remember my own wild impulse to declare Riel innocent and to try to set him free. Wiebe, all the while, assuaging my clownish impulse, understood that Riel must die. There are lies and there are lies.

If you dare to believe mirrors, read *The Scorched-Wood People*. □

Swift currents

A Short Sad Book, By George Bowering. Talonbooks. 191 pages, \$4.95 paper (ISBN 0 88922 127 8).

By FRANK DAVEY

THIS SHOULD be the most controversial Canadian book of 1977. It is reminiscent of Richler's *The Incomparable Atuk*, but more serious; reminiscent also of *Gulliver's Travels*, but both more painful and more comic. As in *Atuk*, we're not quite sure A Short Sad Book is fiction. Its characters are all public Canadian personalities. The dead ones (John A. Macdonald, Tom Thomson, Evangeline, Lester Pearson, Louis Riel) and many of the living (Robert Fulford, lack McClelland, A.I.M. Smith, Robert Weaver, Laurier Lapierre) carry their full names. As in *Gulliver*, many others (notably Margaret Atwood, Al Purdy, Robin

Matthews, Stan Bevington) are not fully named but are identifiable, or should be, to the keen eye.

Superficially, the events of A Short Sad Book are outrageous. John A. Macdonald plays lecherous old man to virtuous Evangeline. Margaret Atwood keeps suspicious assignations with the drowned Tom Thomson at the bottom of Lake Baskatong, Ottawa's most outspoken Marxist/literary/Canadian chauvinist labours for the CIA to discredit Canadian nationalism. Robert Fulford sits in a Toronto subway reading a column by Robert Weaver about a new Canadian novel by Robert Kroetsch concerning a Scottish-Indian artist named Robert Six Beavers. But metaphorically these events ring true. Toronto is a manufacturing centre for beaver-novels. Nationalist extremists do discredit Canadian nationalism and scare off potential mass support. The "underwater" cult that surfaced in the last decade in Canadian writing is an Ontario posture, a pretension, as if indeed "the beaver is an underwater animal, thus a candidate for Canadian literature."

Much of the humour of A Short Sad Book comes from its being written outside the would-be tyranny of centralist Ontario myth — from outside the provenance of hockey, beavers, loons, the Group of Seven, and maple trees, from where mountains are larger than lakes, baseballs more familiar than hockey pucks. Doukhobor hats more common than Indian feathers, from where "cigars mean more to Canadian literature than snow." It mocks the glib categories of the cultural detectives — "The Great Canadian Novel," "the edible beaver," "the longest undefended border," "The Immigrant Experience," "the problem of the one-book (Canadian) novelist," "the great Canadian culture hunt." Additional humour comes from the scores of (mostly Canadian) book titles hidden in the text. Test your literary IQ. Hunt your culture.

In style, A Short Sad Book should also be controversial. Is it a novel or a literary essay? Biography or poetry? Like Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's *Jack Kerouac*, it is a novel about writing or not writing a book. In its outer structure it plays delightedly with the traditional novel-form. Its narrator toys with such stock novelistic elements as character, setting, plot, theme, and orderly development by introducing spurious versions of these intermittently throughout his book. Characters enter and exit at his whim. The modernist novel of invisible craftsmanship and reality-illusion is ridiculed and becomes, by implication, another part of the Central Canada con job, another myth by which to create history and invent Text-book Ontario survival.

The prose of A Short Sad Book is the "innocent" prosé traditional to the satiric novel, a combination of the ingenuous tone of *Gulliver*, the inquisitive tone of *Tristram Shandy*, and the rhythmical matter-of-factness of Stein's *Three Lives*. It is a style in which syntax, puns, and image reveal

more than the narrator appears to know, in which the objects of satire drown themselves in their own lakes, trap themselves in their own beavers, hoist themselves on their own cigars, and so on. To help you directly to your favourite beaver, *A Short Sad Book* concludes with an eight-column index to Canadian and non-Canadian names and places. □

Low compression and high octane

It's Easy to Fall on the Ice, by Elizabeth Brewster. Oberon. 128 pages. \$9.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 247 4) and \$4.95 paper (ISBN CI 88750 248 2).

The Love Parlour, by Leon Rooke. Oberon. 158 pages. \$9.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 231 8) and \$4.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 232 61).

By RONA MAYNARD

FINE SHORT stories strike a rare balance between economy and nerve. Each detail pulls its own weight; an incident can reveal a life. Yet what good is all that compression if the writer's aims were modest to begin with? A memorable story strains against its form, risks appearing too long, too ambitious, or just plain absurd but somehow meets the challenge and seems larger than it is. Then there are the painstakingly crafted stories that fit so neatly into a five-page or 10-pages slot that they wind up a little smaller than life.

That's the trouble with *It's Easy to Fall on the Ice*, a new short story collection by Maritime poet Elizabeth Brewster. A sharp observer with a flair for irony, Brewster shapes a story tightly, but she's too deft for her own good, and her penchant for artful touches continually gets in the way. Consider the first sentence of "Comfort Me with Apples": "Helen, having decided to kill herself, thought she could afford a better lunch than she would otherwise have done." Clever, yes, but aphorisms jar in fiction: they make you distrust the writer. Brewster condescends to her heroine and her readers, as if we would miss the point unless she put the whole story in perspective right away. She doesn't risk letting us discover her intentions gradually, and so deprives us of one of the chief pleasures a short story can offer.

Equally tricky is the conclusion of "Understanding Eva," which explores young Kate Summer's obsession with her worldly psychoanalyst, Eva Fischer. Brewster makes a strong start, but can't resist the temptation to wrap the whole story up with the narrator's musing: "And what about Kate Summers? If I have never understood Eva, do I understand Kate?" By now the astute reader has already asked that question.

These stories purport to deal gently but wryly with human foibles, with the small things that bind people together or keep them apart. There's no better focus for a writer of short fiction. But Brewster's primary concern appears to be a passion for order. The characters have no breathing space: you can observe them from a safe distance, as the author does, but you can't feel with or through them.

Brewster's best stories (and the title story is one) would fare well individually, but lose impact in this collection. It's hard to read the whole book without feeling oppressed by the narrowness of the author's range (vaguely unfulfilled relationships between friends and lovers) and the sameness of the heroines — mostly bright, observant but hesitant women who regard life as cautiously as Brewster seems to regard his fiction.

By contrast, Leon Rooke experiments with styles and moods: in *The Low Parlour* he tries his hand at a low-key, almost Chekhovian slice of life ("If Lost Return to the Swiss Arms"), a dazzling flight of fancy ("Leave Running," in which a middle-class woman joins her burglar lover on his nocturnal rounds) and surrealism ("Memoirs of a Cross-country Man" — a first-rate little, though the story lost me). An adventuresome writer, Rooke charts his own course and dares the reader to follow.

The rewards are mixed. Stylistically, the man's a delight, with a playful yet workmanlike feeling for words, and a poetic sensitivity to the rhythms of language. You can't help admiring the nervous, jazzy energy of the prose in "Leave Running," a story that demands to be read aloud. The writing here is so good that I almost forgave Rooke his cavalier attitude to the formal requirements of short fiction (he goes on too long, pursues too many tangents, and, worse, is not wholly convincing).

Similarly, loose ends mar the potentially excellent "If You Love Me Meet Me Then." Another fine title, but Rooke never fully explores its significance as he sketches the ambivalent feelings of a city-bred couple for their down-home country neighbour whose wife has just died. With painful clarity, we see the city couple's guilt that they never dropped in at the pink house next door, with its Coca-Cola clock: but we only glimpse what should, I suspect, have been the heart of the story. "I want you to love me the way he loves her," says the protagonist's wife of the couple in the pink house. Why she feels that way remains a mystery; and so for me, at least. "If You Love Me..." is not completely satisfying. All the same, it's moving and evocative; it lingers in the memory to hint at feelings and experiences outside itself — no small achievement.

Rooke's short stories miss the first rank, but their vitality and boldness point the way out of the constricted space where too many form-conscious writers ate content to linger. □



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FIREBALL

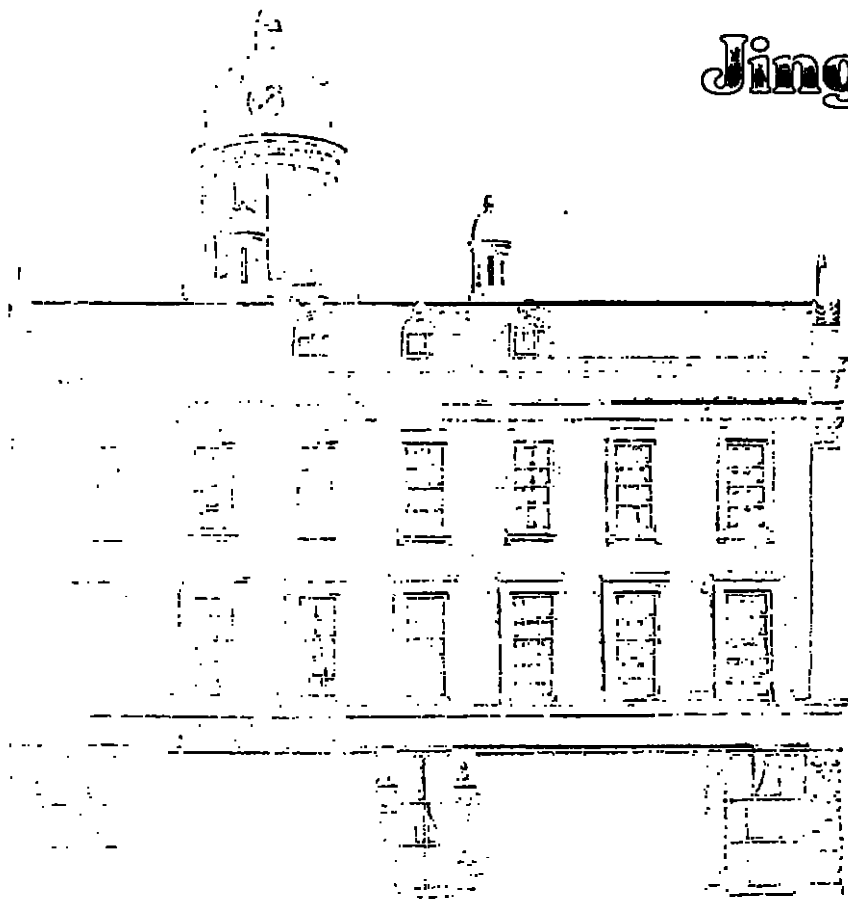
Vic Mayhew and Doug Long \$9.95
Explosive action, political intrigue and tense drama come together in a nerve-jangling and surprising climax that make FIREBALL a powerful thriller.

METHUEN PUBLICATIONS

Jingo all the way

'As promised, here is the second roundup of this season's pedigree herd of gift books

by Hubert de Santana



West elevation of St. Lawrence Hall, one of 20 fine watercolour paintings by William Roberts in Houses of Old Toronto, text by Mary Anne Roberts, Pagurian Press (Macmillan), 96 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88932 063 2).

THE STRAGGLERS that missed the Christmas stampede have been limping in, and they've been corralled for review in this issue:

A Cree Life: The Art of Allen Sapp, introduced by John Anson Warner and Thecla Bradshaw (J. J. Douglas, \$24.95). A Plains Cree Indian born in 1929 with a felicitously named Kiskayatum (He-perceives-it) Saposkum (He-passes-through). He survived a childhood stricken with poverty and disease, and grew up to become the punter known as Allen Sapp. Drawing on a powerful visual memory, Sapp's pictures are a remembrance of things past, as he observed them on the Red Pheasant Reservation in Saskatchewan. His painting, printed here on fine paper, show an intense love for the land and his people, who accept the bounty and endure the destructiveness of nature with equal stoicism. Sapp's palette is subdued, and his primitive technique is ideally suited to conveying the textures of bark and grass and animals. At the centre of his art is the immemorial stillness of a people overtaken by a giant tragedy that robbed them of everything but their indestructible dignity.

The authors' respect for Sapp's work prevents them from burdening the paintings with tedious commentary and analyses. They have generously given us instead the

artist's own words, and his remarks have the same rough-hewn integrity as his paintings. Congratulations to all concerned in the production of this book.

FURTHER evidence of the richness of our native artistic heritage will be found in **Dorset 77** (M. F. Feheley, \$12.50 cloth, \$10.00 paper), a collection of prints, stone cuts, engravings and lithographs by the Eskimo artists of Cape Dorset. It is hard to resist the charm of these pictures. Most of them are reduced to abstractions: all extraneous matter is discarded, and what is left is a geometrically exact image of the artist's chosen subject. The artists' sophistication, discipline, and control of their media is astonishing. They have supplied their own potted biographies, and the book is enhanced with evocative black-and-white photographs of the Arctic by John de Visser. This is the third volume in the annual Dorset series, and the 1978 collection will be awaited with keen anticipation.

Ontario Fraktur by Michael S. Bird (M. F. Feheley, \$18) deals with manuscript illumination, a Pennsylvania-German folk tradition that was practised in Ontario Mennonite communities in the 19th century. The book concentrates on three of those communities in southern Ontario —

the Niagara Peninsula, Markham Township, and Waterloo County. Michael Bird examines a broad spectrum of *Fraktur* art, which includes illustrations of family records, book plates, bibles, prayers, pictorial drawings, and calligraphy. Apart from its obvious ornamental function, *Fraktur* was a religious art; but though its roots go back to medieval Europe, it has none of the beauty and refinement of the European illuminated manuscripts that were being produced as early as the 8th century. Compared with some of the exquisite work done by medieval monks, *Fraktur* is crude, unsophisticated, and dull. As a folk art it is not without value, but it never achieved the sublimity of the early religious art from which it took its inspiration.

THE Graphis Annual 1977 (Hurtig, \$39.50) is a sumptuous collection of the year's best work in international graphic design. The book is handsomely designed and beautifully printed, and includes the work of many outstanding Canadian graphic artists, among them Heather Cooper and Stuart Ash. The cover illustration is a startling piece of surrealism: it shows the clay head of a screaming man, whose cranium has been lopped off as neatly as the top of an egg. Emerging from the cranial cavity are Mickey Mouse, a

rainbow, the figure from Edvard Munch's "The Scream," and the towering wave from Hokusai's famous woodcut.

Cabinetmakers of the Eastern Seaboard by Charles Foss (M.F. Feheley, \$29). Admirers of fine furniture will love this book. It is a comprehensive and readable survey of the furniture made in the Eastern provinces of Canada during the last century. Charles Foss is curator of the King's Landing Collection, and writes of each piece in this book with quiet authority, describing its materials, design, and finish. He discusses the Loyalist influence, and the evolution of furniture design, and has added biographies of master craftsmen such as Thomas Nisber, Alexander Lawrence, J. W. Moore, and Charles Thompson. One can only lament the passing of their craft, the more so since Richard Vroom's excellent colour photographs offer so many examples of pieces which are now collectors' items, out of reach of all but the very wealthy. The elegant proportions, the wine-like sheen of mahogany, the glassy polish to accentuate the woodgrains — all these are evidence of a pride in craftsmanship that has been lost in an age of plastic.

THE STORIES collected in Canadian Frontier, edited by Brian Antonson and Gordon Stewart (Antonson, \$5.95 paper) are of sufficient intrinsic merit and interest to attract readers, whether they are Canadian or not. What the book doesn't need is the chauvinistic "Invitation" used as a preface, with its tone of carping provincialism: "Canadian history has been shown time and time again to be incredibly vital and stimulating. Its greatest fault is that it suffers from an under-exposure on a world market: the effusion of American history has eclipsed that of the second largest nation in the world... we have our own heroes, our own expansion, our own problems, our own pride." Of course we do. And only an imbecile has to be told in so clumsy a manner. Flaunting our inferiority complex is not the best way to convince the world of our greatness.

Pacific Seashores, by Thomas Carefoot (J. J. Douglas, \$12.95 paper). This is "a guide to intertidal ecology" — a fascinating and compelling study of the teeming marine life that exists between the tides. It begins with the evolution of coastlines, discusses water movements, describes the plants and animals of the seashore. There are sections on phyto-plankton and seaweed growth, intertidal carnivores and herbivores, mariculture (sea farming) and the problems of marine pollution. The text is a model of concision and clarity, which makes the subject easily accessible to the general reader. And it is complemented with 176 delicate and accurate drawings by Doug Tait, as well as 80 weirdly beautiful colour photographs and watercolour paintings, the

latter by the author's wife, Elizabeth Carefoot.

Vancouver's First Century, by the editors of the Urban Reader (J. J. Douglas, \$19.95) is a nostalgic photographic record of Vancouver from 1860-1960. Some of the photographs have been printed from the original glass negatives, and they make a marvellous scrapbook. A logger lies supine in the great gash hewn out of the trunk of an immense tree in a logging camp. A line of unemployed single men marches grimly down Hastings Street. A crowd of despairing Sikhs huddles forlornly on the deck of the Komagata Maru. A policeman stands before the shattered windows of a Japanese grocery store after an anti-Asian race riot. Elegant picnickers in Stanley Park beam smugly at the camera. Quotations from diaries, journals and newspapers recreate the beady atmosphere of the city in its pioneering days.

NOSTALGIA addicts can get another fix from The Shopping Guide to the West, introduced by Robert Watt (J. J. Douglas, \$9.95 paper). It is a reprint of the 1912 and 1929 editions of Woodward's Catalogue, along with excerpts from catalogues of other years, up to 1953. When "The Great Mail Order House of the West" discontinued its mail service. The prices are unbelievable: in 1912, a man's two-piece suit cost \$5; an all-wool English worsted tweed suit was marked at a princely \$11. Writers of modern advertising copy would find it hard to match ads such as this one: "Dainty discrimination of our Canadian women prompts her [sic] to demand the purest and best in Toilet Requisites for the bath mom. She is giving increased thought to the selection of Toilet Tissues. Pacific Mills' Tissues are manufactured from virgin forests, a smooth, firm sheet, soft as fleece down." Woodward's slogan was "Write for anything, we are almost sure to have it. Anyway we'll get it." And they meant it.

Borden, by John English (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, \$14.95). An excellent biography of Sir Robert Borden, who was Prime Minister of Canada when the young country's innocence was brutally ended in the mud of France during the First World War. Borden considered that war "the suicide of civilization"; but in its hellish incubator Canada hatched to maturity, and Borden watched over it like a broody hen. His own staling qualities helped to preserve the civilization which had been threatened with extinction. This book is illustrated with portraits, scenes, posters, war photographs, advertisements, and colour reproductions of Canadian paintings.

After Ninety, by Imogen Cunningham (J. J. Douglas, \$16.95). Those of us who are repelled by old age, and the bodily and mental decrepitude that often accompany it,

will find it salutary to look through this portrait gallery. Imogen Cunningham was 92 when she began taking most of the pictures in this book, and she did not live to see them published (she died in June, 1976, at the age of 93). The people immortalized by her camera live on in these pages, a testament to the dignity and resilience of old age. There is wisdom, too, and loneliness, and resignation. Few of us will remain unmoved when we put down this book.

Canada: Symbols of Sovereignty, by Conrad Swan, York Herald of Arms (U of T Press, \$29.95). A beautifully printed book in which the author describes the arms, seals, and flags of Canada. They are reproduced in faithful and meticulous colour plates. Swan writes of arms and seals as the expression of principles of constitutional as well as of international law: "The arms of sovereign states identify not a given geographical area but rather that intangible supreme authority — sovereignty vested in one person, persons, or institutions of the state concerned, depending upon its particular constitution." Swan has provided separate chapters on each province and tie territories, and has rounded off his impressive and authoritative study with a glossary of heraldic terms.

Modern Firearms, by Yves Cadiou and Alphonse Richard (McClelland & Stewart, \$19.95). Guns exert a horrible fascination. They are often marvels of precision engineering, but they are also instruments designed to kill; and it is sad to see how much human ingenuity has been bent to such a sorry purpose. This profusely illustrated book is strictly for aficionados.

The Pacific Princesses, by Robert D. Turner (Sono Nis Press, \$24.95) is "an illustrated history of Canadian Pacific Railway's Princess fleet on the Northwest coast." It contains more than 280 illustrations, photographs, maps, and scale drawings. None of the pictures are in colour, which makes this a rather dull book to look at, though it is an interesting one to read.

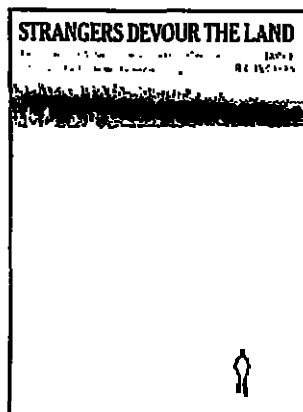
Rideau Hall, by R. H. Hubbard (McGill-Queen's University Press, \$25). An exceptionally interesting history of Government House; Ottawa. The high price tag should have entitled the reader to see a lot more of the portraits and photographs reproduced in colour. But that's my only quibble.

LAST, AND certainly the least, is The Colour of Ontario, with colour photographs and text by Bill Brooks (Hounslow, \$9.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper). It's a slim volume in every sense, with a paucity of imagination and talent between its covers. Ontario deserves better than this minor monument to mediocrity (the author's, not the province's). □

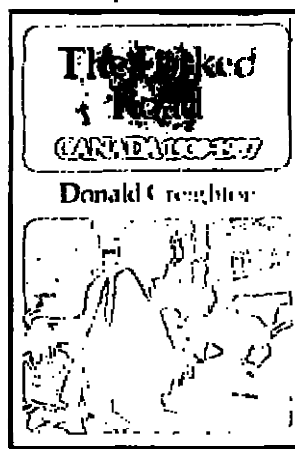
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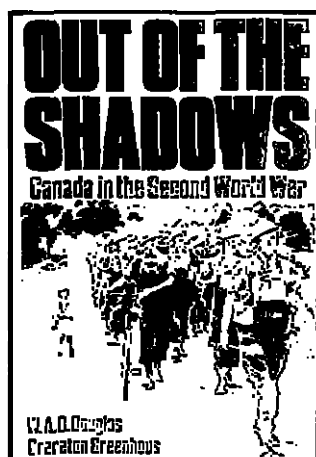
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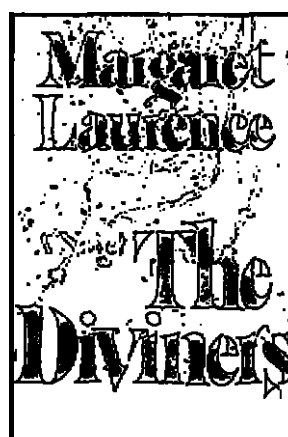
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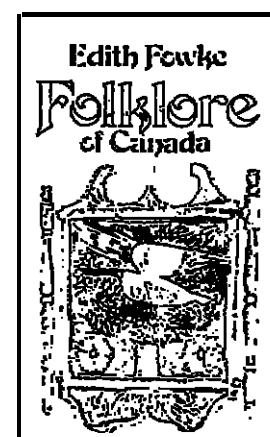
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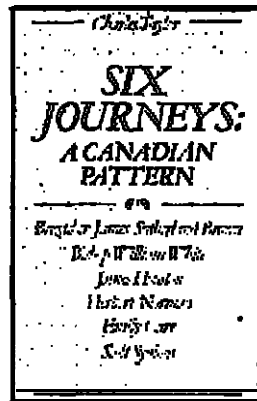
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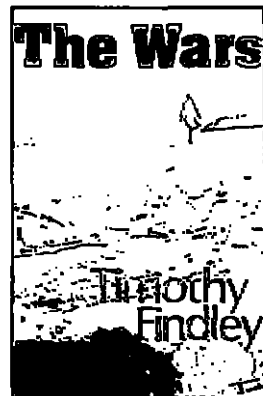
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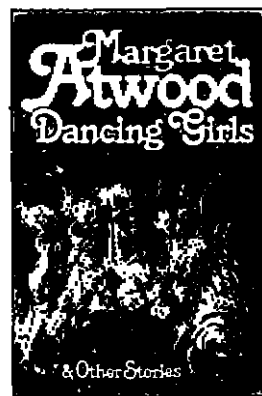
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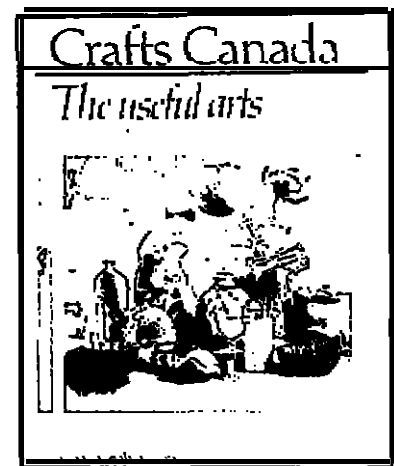
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The sunset, stained with mystic wonders

The Painted Cougar. by Elisabeth Hopkins. Talonbooks. unpaginated, \$6.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88922 125 1).

By JOHN HOFSESS

"It's a RACE against time." Elisabeth Hopkins told me early last year when she was working on the drawings for *The Painted Cougar*. "I don't want to be one of those posthumous authors. They miss all the fun."

At 83, Elisabeth Hopkins perhaps had cause to worry. The *Painted Cougar* is her first book-m illustrated story for children that will give delight to readers of all ages and benign temperaments. It's a special book because Elisabeth Hopkins is one of life's great originals. She lives on Galiano, a gulf island off the coast of British Columbia. She lives alone but is never lonely, surrounded by a closely knit community. She starts work each day at 6 a.m., stopping briefly around eight for a snack and the CBC news, then goes back to her painting until noon. She not only prepares all her own meals but also entertains others. Seventeen miles to the north lives her good friend Audrey Thomas. A mile across the way, live two other close friends, Jane Role and Helen Sonthoff. Playwright Margaret Hollingsworth lives down the mad. Well-known West Coast painters, such as John Korner and Toni Onley, are regular visitors at her cottage. No less important to Elisabeth are her many neighbours and their children: so many lives needing the wise

perspective of a nanny or a granny. She gives similarly enthusiastic attention to the local animals and plantlife, subjects of many of her watercolors: breadcrumbs and pieces of suet for the birds; sun for the plants; and light conversation for the cats.

In Vancouver, where her paintings are sold exclusively through the Bau-Xi gallery, 150 copies of *The Painted Cougar* were sold at one autographing party; another 80 copies were sold on Galiano. After one more book-signing party on Saltspring Island (50 copies sold in two hours) and several radio interviews in Victoria and Vancouver, Elisabeth Hopkins decided that that was enough flackery for someone her age: the book would have to sell itself from then on. Besides doing a new series of paintings (all of which are sold as fast as she can produce them), she has hopes for a new book. It's back to the race-against-time as she prepares for her 84th birthday in April.

The Painted Cougar has a minimal storyline. A young cougar, Leon, wants to win over a ladyfriend, Lurline, and knowing he is neither beautiful nor clever, besets out in the world to find a way of distinguishing himself. After a series of adventures, he finds several fantastic creatures — a friendly dragon, a snake that does tattoos — and enlists their help in changing his appearance. The snake paints designs all over Leon's body; the dragon blows the paint dry with his breath of fire; a jackdaw presents him with a gold watch and chain; and Leon goes home with the splendour of Louis the Sun King. Lurline is certainly impressed but not by the trimmings, which turn out not to be permanent anyway. She has secretly loved Leon from the start. They have a lovely wedding and live — plainly — ever after.

The charm and fun of the book is in its drawings, which are done with evident joy and uncalculating humour. The spirit of this

book is valuable and rare, and while there may be illustrators of children's book who are technically more proficient, there are certainly not many who have Elisabeth Hopkins' guileless and generous love of giving pleasure. The book is handsomely produced, in a nine-by-11-inch format, sturdily bound with good reproductions.

"The thing I wish for most is not success for myself," she told me. "I just wish that many more people will see that old age is a beautiful sunset. I always knew it could be." There have been times in Elisabeth Hopkins' life when she grew tired, and temporarily accepted the stereotypes of old age that prevail in the ready-made world. Go one occasion, a few years ago, she booked herself into a "retirement village" on Saltspring Island, and joined other "senior citizens" in "waiting for the end." But it soon became apparent that such man-made desolation, and isolation of the old, was "simply not his scene." Her paintings of the past two years, culminating in this book, are a glorious triumph of life. □

Of loons and northern lights

Children of the Yukon. by Ted Harrison, Tundra Books, unpaginated, \$7.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88776 092 9).

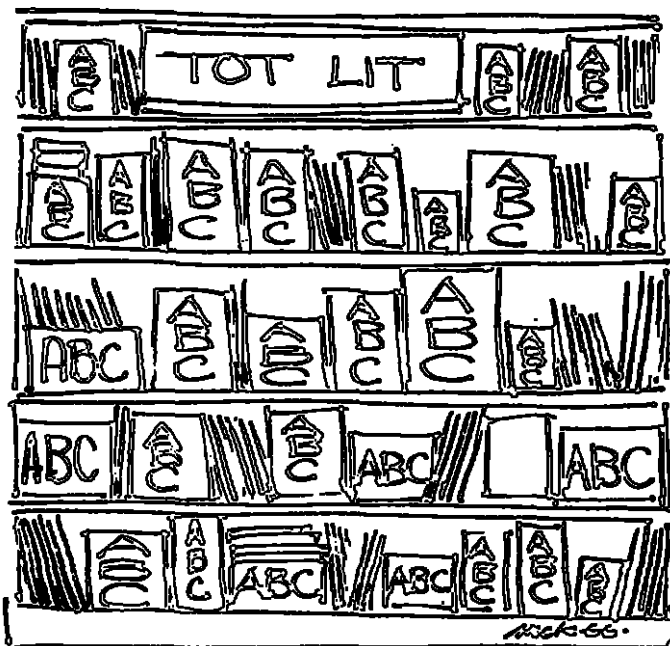
The Loon's Necklace, illustrated by Elizabeth Cleaver, retold by William Toye, Oxford University Press, unpaginated, \$5.95 cloth (ISBN 0 19 540278 2).

The Finding Princess and Prince Paul's Adventures, both by Sue Ann Alderson, illustrated by Jane Wolsak, Pforbez Enterprises Ltd., both 31 pages, unpriced.

The Odd-Lot Boys and the Free-Fort War, by J. Robert Janes, illustrated by Affie Mohammed, Scholastic-TAB Publications, 144 pages, \$1.15 paper.

By JANICE STEIN

TUNDRA BOOKS of Montreal has released another in their series of books on children around the world. In *Children of the Yukon*, painter Ted Harrison has recorded some of the more memorable scenes of life in the Yukon. His paintings try to capture "not how the Yukon is the same, but how it differs" from what we know — abandoned gold mines, ghost towns, Dawson City, showshoe and dogsled races; hunting and ice fishing, Indians. Always as a backdrop he paints the wild colours of the vivid northern skies. Accompanying the paintings are brief captions about their content and two explanatory pages. This book is an all-too-brief introduction to a subject that is bound to fascinate children and encourage them to delve further. Unfortunately, the paintings do not contain enough detail to



warrant the neglect of the text. They are a vivid impressionistic view of life in the Yukon that will strike chords in all those who have experienced it. But, since most children will not have any other northern experiences, much of the meaning of the colours will be lost on them without explanation. As part of a picture story-book, the illustrations would have been superb. As an attempt to portray a lifestyle to outsiders, there should have been more effort expended in constructing a text that would interpret and extend the flavour of the paintings. However, in the hands of an imaginative parent or teacher, the book would be a beautiful instrument for communicating a feeling for the grandeur of our northern lands.

In *The Loon's Necklace*, on the other hand, the sensitive inter-twinning of text and illustration brings to life a folktale of extraordinary simplicity and power that can be understood on all levels. According to Tsimshian legend, a blind old man goes to Loon with his "misery and helplessness." In return for his sight, he gives Loon a precious necklace that is said to have become the bird's white collar and speckles. There is a witch who plagues him and his family, and in the end they are forced to leave their home forever. The elements of life as a mixture of both good and bad are subtle and powerful, as is often the way with legends.

It is not the first time that author William Toye and illustrator Elizabeth Cleaver have combined their talents in the re-telling of Canadian Indian legends. Both are already highly respected award-winners in the realm of children's literature. Just recently, Toye received the 1977 annual book award of the municipal chapter of the IODE (International Order of Daughters of the Empire) for his contribution to this book. His writing remains true to the flat unembroidered folktale style, with its effective use of understatement.

Elizabeth Cleaver is developing into an illustrator of exceptional skill. She is using the linocut increasingly in her collages and with greater dexterity. The depth of expression she achieves through this stark medium, mixed with torn paper and paper cutouts, is remarkable. There is a sense of timelessness and implacable nature in the telling that communicates not only a real feeling for Indian life and legend, but also a moral that cuts across culture. To offset the rather heavy element of understatement, Cleaver uses bright colour-wash backgrounds to bring vitality and the visual splendour of the British Columbia interior into the story. It is an exceptional book and its price brings it within easy reach of most children.

Two small books by Sue Ann Alderson and Jane Wolsak are about to be published as part of Florbez Enterprises' new Karpel series. *The Finding Princess* tells of a princess who is surrounded by a synthetic

world and sets out to find something real. *Prince Paul's Adventures* is simply that. Both are so slight as to be inconsequential. In trying to incorporate all the tried and true ingredients - successful with young children - a text that's large and widely spaced, typical royal hero/heroine, childlike conversation, and repetition - the author has succeeded only in being patronizing and mediocre. The composition of the text is stilted and overdone.

In *The Odd-Lor Boys and the Tree-Fort War*, author J. Robert Janes has constructed a typical situation story for younger readers. Five boys have built a tree fort at the back of a vacant lot. When an unscrupulous real-estate agent plans to sell the lot for development, they most work fast to outwit him. The author attempts too much within the scope of the book. He portrays the boys as coming from a wide cross-section of cultures, but stereotypes them to an unacceptable degree. He includes an unrealistic attempt at pathos through a lame member of the group who learns to walk. Meanwhile, what should have been a fairly straightforward storyline becomes bogged down quickly in unnecessary wordiness. Few young readers will manage to plough their way beyond the first pages. □

Cats and Jacques, grams and yams

Catlands/Pays des chats, by Felix Vincent. Tundra Books, 45 pages. 59.95 cloth (ISBN 0 91276684 0).

Jacques the Woodcutter, by Michael Macklem, illustrated by Ann Blades, Oberon, \$8.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 239 3).

At Grandmother's House, by John Lim. Tundra Books, unpaginated, \$9.95 cloth (ISBN 0 912766 82 4).

By DORIS COWAN

FELIX VINCENT'S *Catlands/Pays ses chats* is a dream-like tale of Juna and her seven cats, named after the days of the week. It takes the reader happily off into the old fantasy of being extremely small and entering magic worlds. When cats close their eyes, we learn, they are instantly transported to strange catlands. Juna is invited to visit, and they set off - she draped around her cat Monday's neck, as he is usually draped around hers. Vincent, an artfully "primitive" painter (who has exhibited his works at the *Musée d'art naïf* in France), skilfully creates strange atmospheres as his heroine is miraculously whisked from Wednesday's cold and snowy world to Thursday's wind-blown treetop one, and then to Friday's hot dark jungles. There is hardly any story at all (in both English and

French) but with pictures like these, it doesn't much matter.

In *Jacques the Woodcutter*, the story is much more important; it is an old Québécois folktale brought over from France in the 17th century, re-told here by Michael Macklem and illustrated by Ann Blades, who won a major award for *Mary of Mile 18*. Her drawings are vivid and dramatic; in fact, they do a rather better job of telling the story than the text does. It is a tale of oppression, jealousy, and deceit; of Jacques, his wife Finette, and the rich evil seigneur, Monsieur Louis. The characters' feelings are clearly and powerfully visible in the drawings. Here again the words are an accompaniment to the pictures rather than the other way around.

John Lim's *At Grandmother's House* is also a beautiful book. Lim has created, Kurelek-style, a series of scenes from his childhood in Singapore that juxtapose the exotic and the exceedingly familiar. On the one hand we have "Hide and seek in the bamboo grove," "Harvesting mangoes," and "A yam leaf as an umbrella"; on the other, "In Grandma's kitchen," "Under the family portrait," and "Walking in the garden." My only objection is that the pictures, though elegant, may be a little too stylized to be as immediately meaningful and emotionally accessible to children as the illustrations in the other two books are. □



PUBLICATIONS FROM UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations Disarmament Yearbook 1976

This first volume of the United Nations Disarmament Yearbook, prepared by the United Nations Centre for Disarmament, gives an account of developments in the field of disarmament, within and outside the United Nations, during the year 1976. It also includes a brief history of the various subjects. The primary aim is to supply up-to-date, comprehensive and detailed information to those who deal professionally with disarmament issues. At the same time, an effort has been made to present the material in a form that will make it available and useful to the general public.

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He in his Back Forty and we in ours

Auntie High Over the Barley Mow, by Dennis T. Patrick Sears. McClelland & Stewart, 303 pages, \$12.50 cloth (ISBN 0 77108026 31).

By WAYNE GRADY

"REGIONALISM," Cyril Connolly wrote in 1943. "is the remedy for provincialism. Only by decentralizing can we avoid that process which ends by confining all art to the capital." And it is true that much first-rate Canadian literature, from Haliburton to Carrier, has had little to do with Toronto or Montreal. It is almost undemocratic to believe otherwise, and certainly disloyal to the government's policies of decentralization of the arts and economic expansion of the regions. So firmly, in fact, has the ro-called frontier thesis of history been wedded to literature that Roy Daniells, introducing Sinclair Ross' *As For Me and My House* in 1957, could say confidently, that any "analysis of the Canadian scheme of things" most be regional."

Before the publication of Dennis T. Patrick Sears' two novels, *The Lark in the Clear Air* (1974) and the posthumous *Auntie High Over the Barley Mow*, it would have been easier to join Daniells in agreeing with Connolly. Sears has, however, managed to make regionalism an ally of provincialism by his sublime lack of concern for anything that has not taken place on his own Back Forty. In fact, Sears provides us with a practical definition of provincialism when he declares in his preface to *Lark* that his characters "are real enough to anyone familiar with the time period and the locale." The unspoken corollary to that is, of course, that to anyone not so familiar the characters and their motivations must remain a perpetual mystery. Surely one purpose of literature ought to be to make those things intelligible that are not already so: not to want to do that is to be arrogantly and artlessly provincial. Sears doesn't, and doesn't seem to want to.

The sins of the first chronicle are not redeemed in the second, which simply carries on in the "episodic nature" of the earlier book the themes and events already used up there. His characters are still common men talking in the language of Wordsworth (or rather in that pseudo-Irish brogue too often passed off for the true Gaelic lilt of Brendan Behan and Flann O'Brien.) The shooting murder/suicide of Danny-boy's parents in *Lark* is totted down to the more socially acceptable adultery and death-by-collision of Padraic (Patch) Fallon's parents in *Auntie*. And the random

adolescent ardour expended into the clear air in *Lark* is in *Auntie* given an object borrowed most directly from *Love Story*: Patch's sister Brigid (Bride), who dies.

There is no selection or ordering of events, hence no plot: episode is piled upon episode with emphatic monotony and only chronological distinction (to wit one of Sears' phrases, "Christmas came and went and the New Year followed after.") Of such hard-headed facts are universal truths made in the provinces: a rose is a rose, dammit! Patch neither develops nor regresses as a result of this composting of Time: things merely happen and are recounted with typical bucolic sang-froid. The death of Patch's father, for example, is told in much the same singsong as the ingestion of Bride's doll by the farm's sow, perhaps because "the unrealities of death most forever give way to the realities of living."

By the realities of living is simply meant the daily reduction of human beings into horse fodder. Neither Patch nor Sears seem to have learned much by the time Bride dies (we don't even learn how she dies, only when — 1942, during a hiatus in the action caused by the war.) And the reader is left with little more than a sense of that terrible human reduction, the eternal foightin' and drinkin', the curious blend of self-denial and self-indulgence that the novel embodies rather than conveys. In the end, *Auntie High Over the Barley Mow* (the title, by the way, comes from the name of a children's game that no one in the book plays) is the fulfillment of a fear expressed in 1944 by E.K. Brown. That "regional art will fail because it stresses the superficial and the peculiar at the expense of the fundamental and the universal." □

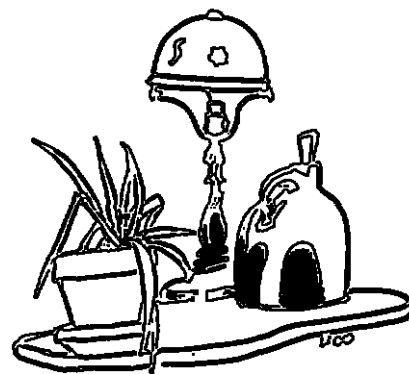
Once more in Oberon's court

77: Best Canadian Stories, edited by John Metcalf and Joan Harcourt, Oberon, 217 pages, \$15 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 237 7) and \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 238 5).

Stories from *Alberta*, edited by David Carpenter, Oberon, 175 pages, \$15 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 235 0) and \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 236 9).

By MICHAEL SMITH

IT SEEMS DIFFICULT not to quarrel with somebody else's notion of the best fiction produced by a country, province, or region. Short stories, after all, can hardly be judged like a singing star's Greatest Hits — on the basis of sales alone — since so many of our literary magazines suffer from bed circulation. We all have our favourite writers (many of us also have our own ideas how a story should be written) and not to find them



in a book of "the bat" is grounds enough to dissent.

This appears to be one of the problems with Oberon's annual short-story collection, which until last year (when it was still known as *New Canadian Stories*) used to accept only previously unpublished material. For *77: Best Canadian Stories* the editors have broadened their policy, and report that their search for excellence led them through 23 Canadian magazines plus CBC-Radio's *Anthology* series. Even after this ordeal — which must have left them shell-shocked — they reached still further. One story, by Elizabeth Spencer, is from *Southern Review*, which is published in Baton Rouge, La., and another is Judith Penner's first story to be published anywhere.

The story that dominates the collection is "More Than Conquerors" by Jack Hodgins, which examines the grotesquely entwined lives of a group of people who live on three levels of an A-frame house on Vancouver Island. It features Hodgins doing what he does best — more or less religious allegory narrated from a number of points of view — but I wonder whether its length, at 66 of the book's 217 pages, unfairly limits the space where other stories might have appeared. I notice, for instance, that Oberon had originally advertised a collection of IO stories, but in the final book those by Leon Rooke and Robert Gibbs have been dropped.

A second, somewhat religious story is Ann Copeland's "At Peace," a sensitive, well-structured character study of a rebellious lay sister whose true sense of charity is subverted by the rules of her order, even in death. There are also stories that are pretty good, but not superlative, by Kent Thompson, W. P. Kinsella, and W. D. Valgardson, whose "Trees" is marred by a plot as old as yesterday's TV shows: a farm woman's determination to withhold a grove of walnut trees from the inevitable dues of progress.

Stories from Alberta offers a nice cross-section of authors both present and past (Georges Bugnet, for example, who was born in 1879), home-grown and outsiders (Margaret Atwood and George Bowling). Quite a few are familiar from other books, but the editor, David Carpenter, could have helped by supplying biographical notes. All 13 stories are presumably supposed to be

united by setting, though a couple could just as easily be placed in other parts of Canada. Carpenter says something in his introduction about shared "regional psychology," which he spends a long Lime hying to define.

Setting is *really* important. it seems to me. in such stories as Edward McCourt's "The White Mustang." Bugnet's "Mahigan's Atonement," and Rudy Wiebe's "Along the Red Deer and South Saskatchewan." Wiebe's Indian battle tale, in particular, is rooted in the province's mythical past, though the biblical-epic cadences both here and in Bugnet's story (imagine them being read by Chief Dan George! sometimes tend to be excessive. Robert Kroetsch's sentimental "The Harvester" also invokes a legendary time when threshing gangs worked the huge Prairie farms, while both Atwood in "Polarities" and Bowering in "The Elevator" find in the Alberta winter a metaphor for alienation.

I liked Helen J. Rosta's "Magpie" in which the torture of a magpie by some unthinking schoolboys parallels the death of a rural girl who has apparently gone wrong in tie city. And "Patterns" by W. O. Mitchell is a classic rendering of a rogue's revenge on his so-called "betters" — involving five jugs of Old Wolverine (fortified bootleg catawba), 47 goats, and a meeting of the Shelby and Greater Shelby Emergency and Disaster Relief and Civil Defence Committee. □

By the seat of her trance

Murder Among the Well-to-do, by Ellen Godfrey, Press Porcépic, 187 pages. \$8.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88878 155 5).

By PHIL SURGUY

THIS IS Ellen Godfrey's second Rebecca Rosenthal mystery. The first, *The Case of the Cold Murderer*, appeared a year and a half ago.

Rebecca is a seventy-ish, financially secure widow, a retired anthropologist and an amateur detective. AL the beginning of *Murder Among the Well-to-do*, she says: "I have devoted a great deal of time and effort to making myself an expert in certain kinds of problems — problems of the human heart, problems where the other forms and clues and the inner hungers must be understood and weighed against each other." And, "By solving mysteries I gained mastery over the unknown aspects of life, and over the illusion that the numinous presence of death, the only real mystery, was being held at bay."

The main problem is a lack of drama.

The plot involves a search for a black-

mailer that turns into a murder investigation; and the story ends with Rebecca identifying the murderer by putting herself into a yogic trance, having a dream, awakening, and immediately interpreting the dream with a speed and precision that would stun even the most religious Freudians. Such a display of Rebecca's powers could only have worked if the information she took into her trance had been gathered in exceptionally dramatic circumstances. But the clues were too easily come by. Mostly all Rebecca had to do was have the lock to be standing in the right places at the right times to overhear crucial conversations. She is not a *working* detective. And her suspects and their various personality conflicts are simply not sharp, interesting, substantial, or exciting enough to generate the psych@ energy required to fuel convincingly a productive trance.

As was the case with *Cold Murderer*, Rebecca is the most interesting person in the story, and it is ha emotional concern for the rest of the characters that holds the book together. Indeed, the author seems to be in the process of evolving a rather revolutionary new detective. The concept of a sleuth whose beat is the human psyche and whose main weapon is her "mastery over the unknown aspects of life" is one that has many refreshing possibilities for the genre. At the moment, however, Mrs. Godfrey still has to And a dramatically satisfying way of melding her heroine's powers with the traditional elements of the mystery novel. □



porcépic — spring '78

Dorothy Livesay

The Woman I Am

Ms. Livesay travels the country and her work is loved and read by women everywhere. This book consists of the poems, new and old, most appreciated on her reading tours.

\$2.95/paper

Caroline Bayard & Jack David

Out-Posts/Avant-Postes

Interviews with eight Quebec and English-Canadian poets: Brossard, Chamberland, Duguay, Pelouquin, Birney, Bissett, Bowering, Nichol. Includes poems and a critical bibliography for each poet.

\$6.95/paper

\$15.00/cloth

Dave Godfrey

Dark Must Yield

A new collection of short stories. Godfrey's work has always been greeted with enthusiasm and interest by critics and book buyers alike; it intrigues by its literary quality and by its controversial, political nature.

\$6.95/paper

\$12.00/cloth

Victor-Levy Beaulieu

Don Quixote in Nighttown

Translated by Sheila Fischman.

Winner of the Governor-General's Award for fiction in 1975, this book is an influential, politically conscious novelist's view into the troubled psyche of Quebec.

\$10.00/cloth

James Reaney

The Dismissal

This new revue/satire/comedy of manners records the story of Canada's first student strike, at the University of Toronto in 1895. *The Globe and Mail's* Bryan Johnson wrote of the stage production: "Casual, quick and funny. Easily the highlight of the [U. of T. Sesqui-centennial] season."

\$3.95/paper

Theatre Passe Muraille

The Last Best West Show

Connie Brissenden, editor.

The West Show toured over 10,000 miles in Western Canada, where it was extremely successful. History and comedy entertainingly mixed.

\$4.95/paper

We are pleased to announce that as of January 1, 1978 the books of Press Porcépic will be distributed in all market areas throughout Canada by Burns & MacEachern Ltd.

Dorothy on the red-brick road

Right Hand Left Hand. by Dorothy Livcsay. Press Porcépic, 288 pages. \$15 cloth (ISBN 0 88878 104 0) and \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88878 105 9).

By IAN YOUNG

DOROTHY LIVESAY'S memoir of her life as a student, poet, communist, and political activist dotting the 1930s is much enlivened by being liberally interspersed with her letters and other writings of the period, and with contemporary drawings, photos, and commentary. She and her editors, David Arnason and Kim Todd, have put together a valuable document of the Canadian intellectual life in those days, which were among the most engrossing in this country's history.

The time when Ms. Livcsay came to maturity was one of economic depression, political polarisation and ideological naiveté. As in the U.S. and Europe, many intellectuals became engaged with communist movements, seeing in the Depression the prophesied apocalyptic end of capitalism, and in fascism the "last stage" of bourgeois development. These were the years when Nathan Cohen was praising Stalin as a champion of the people, and Earle Bimey was part of the Trotskyist "left opposition" (which he later vividly described in his novel of Depression -and depressing — Toronto, *Down the Long Table*).

The gospel of socialism was spread by magazines such as *Masses*, *New Frontier*, and *Canadian Forum* and by the "progressive arts clubs" and "workers' theatres" that attempted to reach the "masses" with "agit-prop" dramas staged in parks and from the backs of trucks, since they were not always welcome in Canadian theatres. Livcsay documents the banning by the Toronto police of one collaborative play about the trial of eight communists, *Eight Men Speak*.

Dorothy Livcsay was born into a liberal and cultured household; her sympathy for the oppressed and a vague radicalism had crystallised by the early 1930s into belief in the historical dialectic and membership in a Communist Party cell. She took part in the spirit of the times by writing radical articles and propaganda plays with such titles as "The Beet Workers" and "Struggle" (both reproduced here), and was a founding member of the first Progressive Arts Club along with a group that included the Marxist historian Stanley Ryerson and Oscar Ryan, later the biographer of Tim Buck.

A short sojourn in the émigré capital, Paris, did nothing to change her commitment to socialist realism, though her dis-

covery of the poems of Auden, Day Lewis, and Spender shook up her conceptions of what politically committed poetry could be like.

It was important for her, she says, to have her poetry approved "not only by intellectuals of the [Leon] Edell ilk, but more important by workers and communists." Some of her earnest remarks in a 1936 radio talk entitled "Decadence in Modern Bourgeois Poetry" now read almost like school howlers. "There is an absolute lack of socially valuable meaning in Eliot," she harrumphed, going on to deplore as arcane the opening lines of "Prufrock" as well as the "depraved and decadent, homosexual" Verlaine and Rimbaud and the "sterile" Laforgue. She ended her talk with "the certainty that bourgeois art is dead. That a new art, the art of the proletariat is being born." Elsewhere she wrote: "Until our writers are social realists (proletarian writers if you will) we will have no Canadian art."

Right Hand Left Hand conveys those days well: the "Bluebird" boycotts of Jewish goods in Montreal; the modest hand-printed menu of Charlotte's Coffee Shop, a students and writers' hangout on St. George Street in Toronto; a photo of a daringly topless young Dorothy with two equally liberated friends.

What also strikes one here, as in Bimey's novel, is the dreariness and isolation of Toronto in those days, and the stultifying Presbyterianism that could fire Andrew Allen as editor of *The Varsity* for suggesting that 80 per cent of the U of T student body was atheistic. How, one wonders, did anyone bear it, especially after a trip to Paris?

The radical days of the 1930s culminated in that "last cause," the Spanish Civil War, and ended with the Russo-German pact of 1939, which entailed, among other readjustments, Stalin's handing over of hundreds of anti-Nazi political refugees to the Gestapo. Ms. Livcsay skims over and excuses the pact (which stunned the entire Left at the time) by saying it has not been "fully understood."

Nor does she have much to say about the shattering revelations of the true nature of Stalin's Russia or their impact on the intellectuals who had taken their "moral leadership" from the Communist Party. In view of her recent sojourn in Bulgaria and her subsequent high praise of that People's Democracy's treatment of its (approved) writers (spacious offices, holidays by the sea). Ms. Livcsay's political education appears to have stalled in the 1930s. Her differences with the CP are minor and she seems to dismiss any substantial criticism as "red-baiting."

We should be grateful that Dorothy Livcsay has been brazen enough to reprint her early work alongside the other documents here, and without editing the unsubtle opinions she held then. What is depressing is the thought that, 40 years later, she still believes it all. □

The plough has its stars

Remembering the Farm: **Memories of Farming, Ranching, and Rural Life in Canada Past and Present**, by Allan Anderson, Macmillan. 287 pages, \$12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7705 1572 x).

By SHARON MARCUS

NOT MEMOIR, not saga, and certainly not rural eclogue. What Allan Anderson has gathered here is "just... fond memories of something that's entirely gone... a hundred and fifty years of the most glorious era in Canadian farming: The Years of the Family Farm." With great warmth and friendliness Mr. Anderson "made one trip right across Canada and another one across most of it" to collect these stories and reminiscences for a CBC broadcast and this book. A quasi-countryman himself, by choice, Anderson's sympathy for the Canadian rural experience, and his years as a freelance documentary broadcaster made him ideally suited to roam this country eliciting yarns, tales, talk, wistful and not-so-wistful memories. This collection reflects that warmth, that sympathy, that documentary skill.

This book is dited primarily toward city dwellers, showing and explaining farm life during the middle ages of this century (the mid-1920s to the 1960s), describing the cycle and rhythm of events, the struggle at birth, the innocence of childhood, the dedicated and unflinching work of maturity, the remarkable simplicity at death --all set against the sometimes yielding, sometimes implacable elemental forces of earth, air, fire, and water that shaped people's lives.

Some of the most apparently trivial observations are the most dramatic for the city mind:

And when I came to Toronto when I was sixteen, I went up and down Yonge Street smiling and saying hello to everybody, because that's the way I'd been brought up. And I soon found out when I had people following me home, "You're not in the country my more. You're in the city; you can't smile at people and say hello to them and pass the time of day."

* * *

We had a pair of horse, and they're pretty conscious of their politics down there, and one of them was called Tory and the other one was Whig. He was born Tory and he'd say: "Come on Tory." And the other one being Whig, he'd say: "Get up Whig, you old slut."

* * *

Today the farm is completely gone. It is now a playground for an orphanage, I

believe. The river is gone, although it was a natural drainage river; they put pipe in and it is all levelled over, all the huge beautiful elm trees have vanished of course. The house is gone, and the last time I was down you couldn't really tell where it had been — it's just gone, gone, disappeared.

Most of the talk, the recollections are from people who have left the country, come to the city and lost their country way of speaking. I thought, at first, when I noticed that everyone across the country spoke the same dialect in the same accent that this might have been the side-effect of polished transcribing and deliberate editing, but when I listened to the CBC program, I realized that no one's voice had been tampered with. In this book just about everyone was raised white, Anglo, and grammatically correct. City and television combine to make a potent leveller of tongues. I know, but that sameness of inflection soon began to roll monotonously in my ear. Where are the French. I wondered uneasily, and the European, and the non-European? And where is the genuine country voice, the one that, like a neighbour of mine, always says, "I can mind the lime," not "I remember," and "Wife" not "Gladys" when speaking to his wife. Perhaps Mr. Anderson sought and collected what he knew, what he wanted, like the scientist predisposing the results of an experiment with his understanding and his expectations.

These "fond memories," anecdotes, tales and one-liners are clustered together in

chapters on related themes (the weather, courting, school-teachers, accidents, ranching, women, work, and so on) with an introduction by Mr. Anderson to each chapter and a large, intrusive, boldface caption for each piece (often two or three to a page). The heavy editorial presence and the continued, good-natured hovering of Mr. Anderson above his work are distracting. They come between the story and the reader, between the narrator and the story. They prevent any of the characters from developing and emerging (even the photographic collection doesn't help), and the point of many of these tales probably depends heavily on a knowledge of, or at least a familiarity with, the teller of the tale. Most recollections are chopped and served at intervals through the book according to subject, while the characters, diffuse as ghosts, vanish in the uniform twilight of their talk.

With almost invisible characters, a no-story line, and faded accents, this book was clearly not intended to imitate literature. It is, in spite of Anderson's disclaimer, oral history: friendly but vague, warm but indistinguishable, a composition with no dynamics, a canvas, all background, no foreground: just Allan Anderson encouraging us to love it as much as he does. □



Are all collages 'creativid' equal?

Out Post/Avant-Poste, edited by Caroline Bayard and Jack David, Press Porcépic, 256 pages, \$15 cloth (ISBN 0 88878 102 4).

By JEAN-GUY CARRIRR

THIS BOOK attempts to be and do so many things that it becomes as puzzling as some of the material it contains. It is, on the face of it, recorded interviews with the "avant-garde" poets: George Bowering, Earle Birney, bp Nichol, bill bissett, Nicole Brossard, Claude Péloquin, Raoul Duguay, and Paul Chamberland. It is also a sampler of the work of these writers and a complete bibliography of their output. Finally, it is half in French, half in English.

The interviews fall in line with the current notion that placing a microphone in front of a talking mouth is enough to produce a book. The problem here is that poets who attempt to dilute their poetry with explanations usually sink well below their own meanings.

At one point George Bowering, whose interview and that of bp Nichol are the most informative, says of Earle Birney: "I'm

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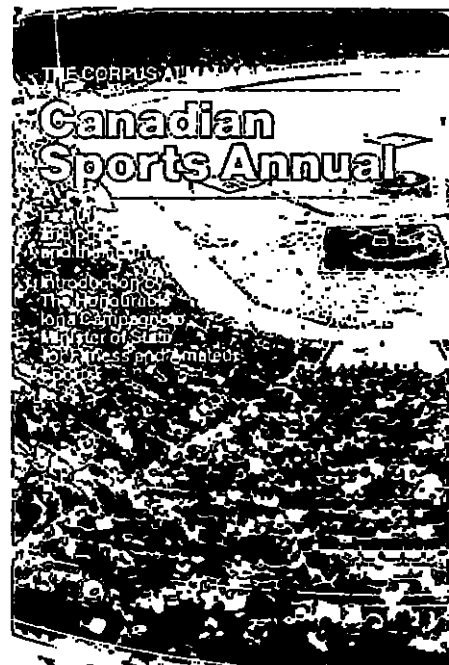
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personally kind of embarrassed by Birney's little poems in which he draws pictures of things with words." This feeling recurs frequently as one proceeds through the book.

The interview with Bill Bissett is a composite of his poetry and the answers that he provided in letters to the editors. He calls it a "creativ collage." I don't know what to call it or what to make of it, for that matter.

bp Nichol states that the reader likely to "get off" on his kind of writing is the "writer-reader who is obsessed with the issues of writing." He concedes that this is a highly specialized group. I suspect that this book will also appeal only to that group, and only to those in that group capable of reading French and English.

It is because of this last point that I find the book disappointing. The inclusion in this work of English-speaking and French-speaking poets would seem to have provided an opportunity to explore and compare their similar and respective concerns about the use of language. The opportunity is not exploited and the two groups of interviews remain firmly separate; two books in two different languages.

I can only view this book as an experiment, very much in the spirit of the poetry it represents. As George Bowering says: "Most experiments fail, right?"

Whether this is a complete failure is hard to say. The thing is, I don't think many people will care one way or the other. □

... they licked the platter clean

The Fat Man: Selected Poems 1962-1972. by John Newlove. McClelland & Stewart, 127 pages. 33.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 6733 x).

The Woman I Am. by Dorothy Livesay, Press Porcépic, 96 pages. \$3.95 paper (ISBN 0 88878 139 3).

By HANS JEWINSKI

JOHNNEWLOVE is one of those rare Canadian poets who sets himself high and exacting standards and then does not publish another book until he has met or surpassed them. The 127 pages of *The Fat Man* certainly prove this.

It now seems unfashionable for poets to add an introduction to their selected or collected poems. In Newlove's case, an introduction to *The Fat Man* would have been the one addition that would have made the book truly great. This is not to say that the poems cannot carry the weight of the volume by themselves; they most definitely do. But it just seems that Newlove ought to say something about the poems he chose, why he chose them, the order he put them in, and so on. There are no introductions or

afterwords to any of his books -with the exception of the unsigned preface to *Canadian Poetry: The Modern Era* -and this book would have been the perfect place to end the silence. [See page 9 -Ed.]

The question that tantalizes most is why Newlove chose to call the book *The Fat Man*. "The Fat Man" is not his best poem; it probably does not even place among his dozen best. That it is made the emblem work for Newlove's first 10 years of writing seems unfortunate. "Feeling safe with strangers," "If I cease desiring," and "Fighting until dead" are Newlove phrases that better represent the themes of this latest book.

Nevertheless, *The Fat Man* is an important book. It catches Newlove in the range of his work, as a book of selected poems should do. He is witty and humorous ("The Elephant"), raging ("Ride Off Any Horizon"), despairing ("Company"), and ugly ("My Daddy Drowned"). And, of course, there are "The Well Travelled Roadway," "The Hitchhiker," "The Pride," and good poem after good poem.

This collection is well worth its price, even more so because it reintroduces many of Newlove's best pieces, poems that have been almost inaccessible because his early books ate all cut of print. "Four Small Scats" is representative of their quality:

*This scar beneath my lip
is symbol of a friend's rough love
though some would call it anger,
mistakenly. This scar
crescent on my wrist
is symbol of a woman's delicate anger
though some would call it love
mistakenly. My belly's scar
is symbol of a surgical precision:
no anger, no love. The small
fading mark on my hand
is token of my imprecision,
of my own carving, my anger and my love.*

Such poetic quality is, unfortunately, not as evident in Dorothy Livesay's new book. *The Woman I Am*. It also is a selection of sorts, bringing together poems written over the last five years. In the book she thanks several people for helping her develop as a person and as a poet. It is too bad that none of them (presumably) was able to read this book in manuscript and save her from herself. Over the many years that Livesay has been writing, she has built a formidable reputation as a woman and writer. Neither is helped by this book. It contains many flawed poems like "Lament," where the rhymes are obvious and monotonous:

*The hand so neat and nimble
Could make a tennis partner tremble
Write a resounding round
Of sonorous verbs and nouns -
Hand that would not strike a child, and yet
Could ring a bell and send a man to doom.*

'Most of the selections have a strong beginning but no satisfactory end, and in one after another she is childish, silly, and mawkish. Few rise to the poetic heights of

"News from Nootka" or "Collared." The book should really have been pared down to the length of a Ryerson chapbook and left at that. And *The Woman I Am* will be even more disappointing to those readers who compare it to *The Fat Man*. The stature of these poets allows for such a comparison and it is a shame that Livesay's work cannot begin to measure up to the Newlove selection. □

Too long at spool

This Is Where We Came In: The Career and Character of Canadian Film, by Martin Knelman, McClelland & Stewart, 176 pages, 55.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 4533 6).

By JOHN HOFSESS

"ROBERT FULFORD is the best writer of short critical articles in this country," a well-known Canadian editor once told me. "But at anything over 1,500 words or so, he gets increasingly fuzzy and disorganized. He has strong opinions and a short attention-span - a combination that prevents him from becoming a first-rate critic with a coherent philosophy of criticism." The publication of *Marshall Delaney at the Movies* (1974), an anthology of Fulford's film reviews from *Saturday Night*, confirmed that estimate. Judged by the prevailing standards of Canadian journalism, Fulford was (and is) an entertaining gadfly; but judged by the intellectual standards set by such books as, say, Susan Sontag's recent work, *On Photography* (a brilliant study-one grows by arguing with it), the ideas and values that are Fulford's stock-in-trade seem wholly unremarkable. Anyone wanting a study of Canadian movies with the liveliness and insight achieved in such literary studies as Margaret Atwood's *Survival*, or Dennis Lee's *Savage Fields*, has to look elsewhere.

Advance word on Martin Knelman's *This Is Where We Came In* was initially more promising. It wasn't supposed to be a spin-off from already-published journalism (the book was funded by a Senior Arts grant from the Canada Council). The result however, three years later, is a curious book that starts off with sturdily written chapters on John Grierson, the National Film Board, and the formation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation. Little of the information is new (especially to anyone familiar with *Grierson on Documentary*, edited by Forsyth Hardy, id 1972; *The National Film Board of Canada: The War Years* edited by Peter Morris, in 1971; and various articles over the years in *Cinema Canada*). But since Knelman's book has no bibliography, and he rarely acknowledges that anyone has written about Canadian movies before this book, all the information

contained *seems* to spring from his own mind and personal experience. There follow a series of chapters ("Corpses end Snow," "Culture and Ketaine," "Politics end Quebec," and others) in which he combines review and interview material (written over a period of years in most cases and involving such directors as Claude Jutra, Gilles Carle, Dcnys Arcand, and Don Shebib) in a manner that is elliptical at best, and slapdash at worst. Practically all of this material has been published in some form before, and the final chapters ("Hollywood North," "Notes Toward a Screen Mythology") consist of nothing except shortened versions of old reviews of such movies as *Only God Knows*, *Black Christmas*, *Act of the Heart*, ending with his review of *Outrageous* and *Who Has Seen the Wind done for Toronto Life*.

I kept asking myself while reading this book what there was in it that took three years to write? Did Knelman lose interest in his subject? Was he so busy doing other journalism that the book only got small amounts of his time — end finally he just threw in 40 pages of minireviews to flesh out the text? Despite the assertion made throughout that all of us should take a greater interest in the film culture of Canada, I kept wondering — if he believes it — why didn't Knelman devote himself to writing a better book? Is this his limit?

Consider the style. In chapter four ("From Documentaries to Features") he writes about Pierre Perrault's *Pour la Suite du monde* (1963), "one of the finest movies ever produced in Canada":

[Perrault] chose for his collaborators Michel Brault, the son of a Westmount stockbroker, who was already earning recognition as the most gifted cinematographer in Quebec, and Marcel Carriere, a soundman who had been at the NFB since 1956 and who had just done some stunning work in a marvelous NFB short called *Lonely Boy*, about Paul Anka, the Ottawa teenager who became an American pop star. The subject and the spirit of *Pour la Suite du monde* were centuries removed from Anka's star trip — the film had greater affinity with the works of Robert Flaherty than with the *cinema vérité* devotees who hung out with Rolling Stones groupies — but Perrault's film did have something in common with *Lonely Boy* and also with the outstanding documentaries produced in English Canada in the late sixties, Allan King's *Warrendale* and Don Shebib's *Good Times, Bad Times*. It freed itself from the stodgy conventions we had all come to associate with NFB documentaries, especially the voice-over commentary.

This is writing with a tin ear. Not only are there too many lame adjectives ("stunning," "marvellous," "outstanding") and irrelevant facts (who needs to be told who Paul Anka is, or what the occupation of Michel Brault's father was) but also the entire paragraph is a verbal clutter gracelessly moving to an anti-climax. All we really learn by the end of this higgedly-

piggledly thought process (what are Rolling Stones groupies doing in there?) is that *Pour la Suite du monde* didn't have a voice-over commentary (except that Knelman adds a footnote pointing out that the English version, known as *Moontrap*, did have such a commentary). It hardly seems worth the effort.

whatever the state of Canada's film industry, the state of Canadian film criticism appears to be worse. Partly this is owing to the apparent indifference of newspaper and magazine editors in utilizing such talent as there is available (*Maclean's* currently uses film reviews by the American critic John Simon; *The Globe and Mail* abdicated all sense of intellectual responsibility in making Robert Martin, an affable but idealess writer, its film critic). We simply do not have, at this moment, in any of our major publications, the kind of film critics who can pmd, provoke, stimulate, and help make Canadian movies a lively art that is well appreciated.

If a book such as *This Is Where We Came In* were produced in any other field except Canadian film, it would be dismissed. It would be practically unthinkable for a literary critic to publish something this sliiht end disorganized. Knelman had a good chance to produce something substantial; instead (lazily? cynically?) he settled for the merely serviceable. None of us gains when such a basically talented writer becomes disconnected from his integrity. □

For the hashes of our fathers

Out of the Shadows: Canada in the Second World War, by W. A.B. Douglas and Brereton Greenhous, Oxford University Press, 288 pages. \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 19 540 257 x).

Canadian Battles and Massacres: 300 Years of Warfare and Atrocities on Canadian Soil, by T. W. Peterson, Stagecoach Publishing (Box 3399, Langley, B.C.), 248 pages, \$15.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88983 008 8) and \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88983 006 11).

By ROGER HALL

IT'S A COMMONPLACE to label Canada a non-military nation, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain that opinion — at least in terms of publishing interest in the country's military past. The armed forces might shrink but publishers' lists lengthen es more and more books portray and analyze the effects of wars or war measures upon the country's development. Scholarship generally has been well-served



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in this outpouring, both in terms of "official" histories sponsored by the government and academic efforts. Popular accounts, however, continue to be of a "badges and buttons" variety. The two books in question demonstrate everything that could be right, and most of what is wrong in popular Canadian military history; for that matter, in popular Canadian historical writing.

T. W. Paterson's *Canadian Battles and Massacres* is a minor monument to incompetence. It is difficult to determine who is more at fault — author or editors and publisher. Whoever, the book should never have seen printer's ink. It purports to be "5 books in 1," and to trace "300 years of military strife" on our "native soil," from "inter-tribal rivalry to the Riel Rebellion." The preface promises "atrocities galore" and the author provides more than he knew: 160,000 words of prose that meanders from turgid to sentimental, beginning with "Terror of the Tomahawk" and slumping forward to "The March West". En route we are provided every possible cliché of the traditional Canadian chronicle: Champlain and Frontenac vanquish the savage foe; the Jesuits are duly martyred; scrappy Madeline de Verchères stoutly stands her ground; noble Montcalm meets glorious Wolfe; and Laura and her cow win the War of 1812. To his credit Paterson suggests that not all historians would agree with his assessments, and he provides a bibliography for further reading. The trouble is that on the whole the books selected are more misleading than his own wearisome effort. He comments how "rewarding" it was for him to discover "such an early day historian as Francis Parkman" without ever stopping to consider Parkman's sources or prejudices. (Advice to any reader who wants a romantic saga: read Parkman and forget Paterson.) The book, incidentally, is littered with factual errors, spelling mistakes, and typos, but the most glaring fault is with some of the illustrations. For example on pages 170-171 there begins a chapter entitled "Battle of Yonge Street" dealing with the rebellions of 1837. It is remarkable enough that the illustration of battlefield ruins that accompanies the chapter heading is supposed to be of St. Eustache ("St. Eustace" in the text, site of a bottle in Lower Canada in 1837). More astonishing is that the illustration is not St. Eustache but Quebec City itself, and not in 1537, but in 1761 shortly after the conquest: Virtually none of the illustrations are acknowledged anyway, so it is difficult to judge whether the cut-line explanations are accurate or not.

Out of the Shadows is precisely the opposite of Paterson's effort. W.A.B. Douglas and Brereton Greenhous are both seasoned military historians: in fact Douglas is director of history at National Defense headquarters in Ottawa, and Greenhous is senior historian under him. Together they have produced the first general, illustrated overview of Canada during the Second World War. It is a popular account intended for a wide audience but it incorporates into a

brisk narrative the results of much recent scholarly research. The authors' professional expertise and insights bring an additional lustre to the book. And it is much more than simply a chronicle of the military struggle, unit by unit, or theatre by theatre. The military effort is graphically retold, but strategy and tactics are drawn against their political, economic, and especially social backgrounds.

Canadians might not have been a military people in 1939 but by 1945 they had become one, and had shifted "out of the shadows" to a position of some significance as a middle-status power. This theme, neither original nor profound, forms the core of this book, and it is advanced not only in the text (which is admirably augmented by pointed quotations), but also in some 150 photographs, many of which have never before been published. Oxford University Press deserves a bow for its attractive design and format; besides, the illustrations are carefully wedded to the text.

The book has a few limitations. The critical bibliography does not incorporate books mentioned in the textual notes. So the reader has to dig through the notes to get a reference, and that is limited because no critical evaluation of the book is made. And the navy gets rather short shrift, surprising

since Douglas was a naval officer himself.

This book would not, by the way, have passed the scrutiny of Lord Beaverbrook. The Canadians are not made the centrepiece of the war effort, and the reasons why not are carefully exposed. Canada's war effort and the effectiveness of Canadian troops have a legendary quality 30 or so years after VJ day. Part of that good press was the result of a superior propaganda machine. Douglas and Greenhous undermine somewhat the pristine, sanguine view of Canada's accomplishments. Canadian generalship in the field is shown to be of a poor quality. Canadian equipment was often inferior, not only to that of the enemy but also of our allies. Conscription, potentially the most divisive force in the country and the prime political football, the authors conclude, was not necessary after all. There are many more warts in their portrait — the unnecessary Hong Kong expedition, and the savage, unwarranted treatment of our Japanese to mention only two. But they don't tackle one aspect of Canada at war: the whole question of the propaganda machine and the whole nature of the wartime government bureaucracy. Perhaps they still feel the proximity of that bureaucracy. Nevertheless this is generally a fine, fulsome book, and should be sincerely flattered. □

of some import

Self-parody by Le Carré, the last of the Tiny Giants, and a social Drabble

With this issue, Books in Canada departs from tradition by introducing an occasional review column devoted to foreign books. The titles selected will be those that, in the opinion of the editors, stand out for one reason or another in the larger world of literature in which CanLit plays an increasingly important role.

The Honourable Schoolboy, by John Le Carré, Random House, 533 pages, \$10.95 cloth (ISBN 0 394 41645 7). In the beginning there was a "mole," Bill Haydon, recruited by the Russian spymaster, Karla, and unmasked 20 years later by George Smiley, who is given the job of cleaning up "after the full." Shunned by the Cousins (the CIA), its networks rolled up, void of hard intelligence, the Circus is in disarray. Even its HQ is a shambles, wrecked by the "sniffers" after a search for the mole's extinct bugs. Meanwhile, life goes on as usual: Smiley's wife has left him. Again.

Using a team of "burrowers" to comb the files, Smiley plots the "back bearings" (the intelligence Haydon suppressed), which lead to Karla's paymaster in Vietnamese and \$500,000 in a Hong Kong trust

account under the name of Drake Ko, an ex-mission boy turned opium dealer. Lacking trustworthy fieldmen (the local "spook house" has been closed as a result of Haydon's depredations), Smiley recalls the Hon. Jerry Westerby, a Tuscan dallyance. "You point me, and I'll march," says Jerry, and so he does, masquerading as a journalist on a Far Eastern junket. Hong Kong round trip via Bangkok. Phnom Penh, Battambang, Saigon. (Le Carré, having done the wars, has to show his slides—The Honourable Schoolboy comes trailing a list of acknowledgements, warm thanks to genial hosts, etc., like an American academic's text.)

Drake Ko speaks the Queen's pidgin with a north-country accent, gleaned from Mr. Hibbert, the Macclesfield missionary who saved him and his brother, Nelson, from the Lord. But Nelson Ko, his mind "poisoned by religion" became a Communist and Karla's mole in Peking — hence the trust account. When the Circus learns of Drake's attempts to exfiltrate his brother, Westerby is ordered to move in on Liz Worthington, Ko's English girlfriend. The resultant entanglement almost destroys Smiley's op-

eration "Dolphin." though in the upshot Karla suffers a tactical defeat and lives again to spook another day, presumably in a sequel.

The book's scenes are played out by caricatures: Liz Worthington's insular suburban husband, a schoolmaster, telling Smiky that his wife is "free" to come back; her parents, also interviewed by Smiley; Mr. Hibbert, reminiscing to Circus investigators who've told him that Drake Ko is up far a knighthood; the Cambodian official who tries out his atrocious French verse on Westerby -amusing, wry scenes. A minor character confesses to having read Graham Greene and not liking the popery; alas, one searches this book for any theory of character. (When Smiley gives his "Our war began in 1917" speech, even Westerby squirms.) The exposition, the procedural details, and the atmospherics are excruciating. (Do we really need to know that the bus fare in Hong Kong is a flat-rate 30 cents, or that the port office was "built [in] 1911 and since pulled down"?) There are three books here: the spy story, the travelogue, and the social novel, and finally, at the five hundred-and-thirty-third page, they have like the Cheshire cat, vanished.

The jacket blurb calls *The Honourable Schonbury* a "supreme entertainment," which is inaccurate, and "a major novel," which is bunk. The book reads like a long parody on the early Le Carré, and that is very sad.

--CHRIS SCOTT

Essays of E. B. White, Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 227 pages, \$15 cloth (ISBN 0 06 014576 5). This small collection of too few essays, a companion to White's *Letters of a year ago*, is a book of lasts.

E. B. White is the last of *The New Yorker's* Tiny Giants -Thurber, Wolcott Gibbs, and others whose modest, even condescending title tells how much we value the humanity of wit and humor but how little we reward it. Giants? Of course — but tiny giants, on whom the words "serious" and "important" never seem to light. It may also be the last book we will have of White, now frail and old, alone on his salt-water farm in Maine, his wife three months dead.

Casals at the cello. Georgia O'Keefe at the easel. Wanda Landowska at the harpsichord. Even in their great age they kept on working, in work to find the last of their youth. White at a keyboard of his own is also in possession of his youth, briefly, tenuously. These 30 or so essays span 30 or so years, but the wood in which they are cut is still green and sweet, full of the stamina and vigorous integrity of youth. The grace is unself-conscious; the polish is not mannered; the ear is alert to the harmonies of the language. At 78, he can still provide the illusion of effortlessness.

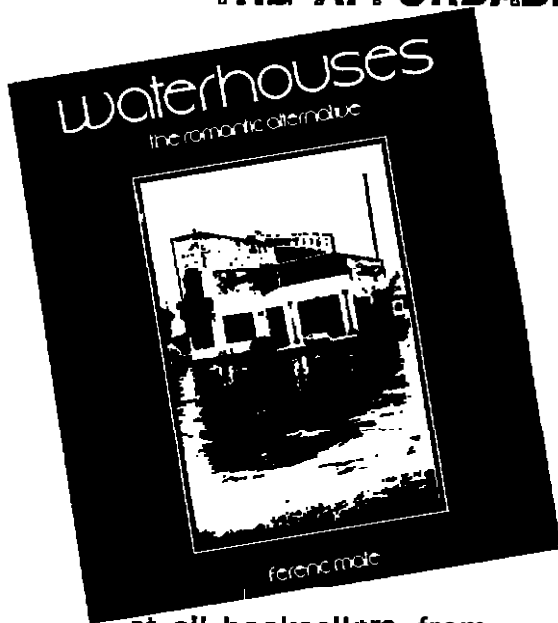
White's style does not yield to clichés; it does not beggar or defy description, but eludes it. In varying measures it consists of country philosopher, Manhattanite, humane observer and nature-lover, blended

with wit and melancholy, kindness and honesty, courage and worry. All very well so far, but the attempt to add them up and produce a sum ends in failure. Brendan Gill, a *New Yorker* colleague, tried to do it once. "Back of White," he wrote, "some dying knight out of Malory lit his gleaming sword against the dust." That came close, but only in a personal way. The reader who seeks here images of splendid combat, of coursers all caparisoned and knights in glinting armour bold arrayed, seeks in vain. The lists White enters are in clutches of goose eggs, in the streets of New York, in the labour of writing, in the awkwardness of youth, in the shrinking list of Model-T Ford parts in a Sears, Roebuck catalogue, in memory and in folly. Indeed, I have seen White in open combat only once: two years ago, when, with a single letter to a rural newspaper, the tiny giant with a single stroke felled the mighty Xerox, which had undertaken to commission magazine articles and pay for their publication. Xerox surrendered unconditionally. White prefers deflation to demolition. One of these essays, "Riposte," provides the gentlemanly ruination of an English writer who thought to define America by its apparent fatal weakness for white eggs.

The conventional advice to those who say they want to write is "Write, and keep on writing." That is a lot of romantic nonsense: good writing is not thrashed into existence by assaults of persistence. Better advice would be "Read." Read the best

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writing you can lay your hands on, and re-read if. Read the acknowledged masters mud routine immortals, of course. But do not neglect those we fondly dismiss as tiny giants; Len, sooner or later, you will come to the unpretentious, Shaker-chair beauty of E. B. White.

— WILLIAM MARSANO

The Ice Age. by Margaret Drabble, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, \$11.95 cloth (ISBN 0 297 77368 2). The tide of Margaret Drabble's newest novel is an apt metaphor for the state of the Britain she sets it in — a country transfixed by a welter of strikes, lethargy, and the typically British pleasure of making do.

It is no green and pleasant land now; the dark satanic mills of the property developers have taken over large parts of it, and their concrete walkways, tower blocks and weeping motorways devastate the land. But the developers have to be admired — they still have vitality, at least, even if their motives are not particularly noble.

The book opens with Anthony Keating, a former TV producer and minor property developer, watching a pheasant plummet to the earth, killed heguesses by a heart attack; it closes with Anthony again watching a bird, this time from a prison camp somewhere in Eastern Europe. In between, we have had a journey to self-knowledge and God.

And as Anthony has changed, says the

author, so may, so will the state of the nation. She is clearly optimistic about Britain. The book is prefaced by a long quotation from Milton's *Areopagitica* ("Methinks I see a nobel and puissant nation musing herself like a strong man from sleep") and the opening lines of a sonnet by an early 19th-century romantic poet ("Milton, thou shouldst be living et this hour").

The difficulty is that what she has written is not a novel. I did not find myself caring very much about Anthony's incarceration in the prison camp, or even believing Drabble's account of how he had got there. A high moral tone may be good for the soul, but in this case it was death for reader involvement.

The Ice Age is clearly Drabble's most ambitious work so far. She has come long

way from the gilded antics of *A Summer Birdcage*, a long way even from the super-abundant vitality of her last-but-one novel, *The Realms of Gold*, whose heroine Frances Wingate is one of her most engaging creations. Part of the trouble is Keating himself, a cold, lifeless consciousness that paralyzes the centre of the novel.

Another is her attempt to write a social novel in the mode of Mrs. Gaskell or Arnold Bennett. Her minute documentation of the British way of life one gloomy November day smacks of investigative journalism (to be illustrated with grainy weekend-supplement photos?). Her observations of people's quirks are there — her eye is still marvelously attuned to small eccentricities — but one feels that a wealth of footnotes will all too soon be necessary to explain it all.

— ARAMINTA WORDSWORTH

first impressions

by David Helwig

Once over lightly on matters of *miracles, tomatoes, and literary taste

Lightly, by Chipman Hall, McClelland & Stewart, 130 pages, \$8.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 3770 8).

Bloody Harvest, by Grahame Woods, McClelland & Stewart, 355 pages, \$12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 9049 8).

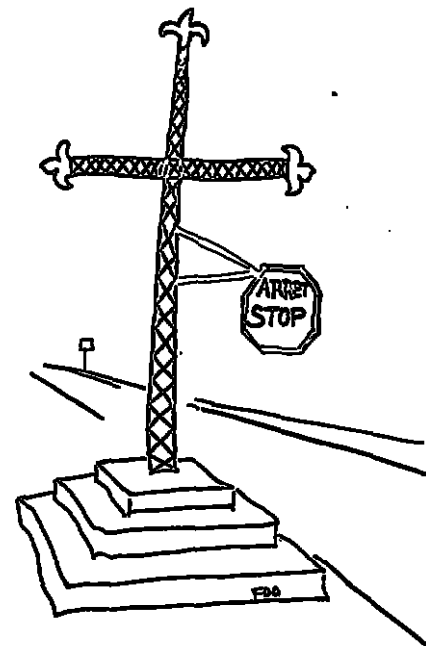
I SET OUT ONCE to find the source of that infamous bit of Latin, *De gustibus non disputandum est*, but without success. Probably it's the invention of some humourless 16th-century English schoolmaster. Certainly the business of arguing taste has gone on vigorously in spite of the aphorism.

After the publication of a recent column of reviews, I received an understandably angry letter from David Young, author of *Agent Provocateur*, that I did not finish reading. "If you choose to dislike a book," he says, "you simply must, as a professional, have the guts to attack it with some specificity — any other approach is irresponsible and unprincipled and, in my opinion, a rather sad reflection on the rigour of your intellect." He includes with his letter a long and favourable review by George Bowering that Coach House Press has reprinted and is using as advertising.

I read the Bowering review, and it gives a good account of what the author's intentions in the book must be, but it does not convince me that the particular realization of those intentions on the page would ever reach or touch me. Which has nothing to do with choice or intellect or my professional standards and everything to do with: that assembly of intuitions and memories that we call taste.

Is it a matter then of cheese-tasting? Yes to Cheshire, no to Brie. Perhaps. Sensitive critics such as George Orwell have often pointed out how much of "good taste" is conditioned by social class and experience. There are lower-middle-class attitudes that will be with me till I die, and I recognize a good deal of middlebrow in my pleasures. Still, I like reading books and prefer simple enjoyment to the luxury of hostile dissection.

Chipman Hall's first novel, *Lightly*, is another case where my taste rebelled. The



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book is told in the first person by a young boy named Bayo who lives in a small cove village in Nova Scotia. His mother is a whore of sorts, his grandfather a life-long fisherman and sailor who, in the course of the book, retires from the sea and returns to the cove to live.

Bayo is sensitive. Bayo is SENSITIVE. So is his grandfather. Between them they make discoveries and move toward Wisdom. Some of the more portentous and aphoristic parts of the book reminded me of Jonathan Livingston Seagull, though the intention of Bayo and his grandfather is not trick flying but walking on water. The grandfather makes them long white robes and leather sandals.

It strikes me that there should be a law passed that writers must leave Jesus alone until they have written at least a couple of books on other subjects.

It's clear enough that *Lightly* is a parable. It could be argued that I'm an unregenerate realist and hostile to other fictional forms, but I liked David Kellum's *The Falling World of Tristram Pocket*, and my reaction against *Lightly* comes down to specific sentences and the mysteries of taste:

I know when an old man wants to be young again all he needs to do is rediscover the innocence we are born with.

We are all heart and hands, and if we can make the work of the heart and the hands the same, as I never really have, I think we would be happier for it.

Those sentences are representative of one strain in the novel that made reading it a struggle.

There are other elements in it, though. The sense of life in the cove is sometimes evocative, and there are moments when Bayo's response to the world is enlightening.

Grahame Woods' *Bloody Harvest*, a first novel by an experienced television dramatist, is a realistic account of the life of an ordinary man whose life, looked at carefully, proves to be as extraordinary as all our lives. Eldon Harris, born in a dead end of Northern Ontario, becomes first a hockey hem and then a war hero, but when we meet him, in the middle of his life, he is a tomato picker on a farm in southwestern Ontario. The novel covers a few days time in the life of Harris, his wife and daughter, but flashbacks show us how he got to where he is.

The author was born and raised in England, began his career as a news photographer and film cameraman. To tell the story of a hockey player from Northern Ontario is an impressive imaginative leap. There are good scenes throughout the book, but for me it never quite came together into a whole. There's a curious ambivalence about sex. The narrator is somewhat fashioned in his attitudes: what he wants is love. Yet there's a kind of sexual explicitness in the

book that seems out of key with this.

The war scenes are among the most effective, with a powerful suggestion of how a man becomes a hem by some inevitable accident, and the mixture of

strengths and weaknesses in Harris is intriguing. Still, in some peeling way, the book never quite came off for me.

But you'd better decide for yourself. It's probably a matter of taste. □

interview

by Karen Mulhallen

A funny thing happened to Constance Beresford-Howe on her way to freedom

NOVELIST Constance Beresford-Howe, born in Montreal in 1922, graduated from and later taught English at McGill. In the late 1940s and early 1950s she wrote four historical romances (all now out of print), the last of which was *My Lady Greensleeves* (1955). There then followed a long hiatus before Macmillan published *The Book of Eve* in 1972. The second novel of her modern period, *A Population of One* (Macmillan), was reviewed in the August-September, 1977, issue of *Books in Canada*. Constance Beresford-Howe now teaches English literature at Toronto's Ryerson Polytechnical Institute and is planning a third novel on the theme that has dominated her past two — freedom. Karen Mulhallen found her holed up in a dark, grey, windowless cell in one of Ryerson's towers and asked her about her career:

Books In Canada: *The Book of Eve* was widely acclaimed but *A Population of One* has had a mixed response. How do you feel about the reaction to your work?

Beresford-Howe: What amazes me is that people tend not to be interested in what interests me in my books. I regard them as literature rather than as handbooks or case histories or advice to feminists.

BiC: There was a gap of nearly 20 years between *Greensleeves* and the publication of *The Book of Eve*. What happened?



Constance Beresford-Howe

PETER PATERSON

Beresford-Howe: One never knows. I certainly had no sense that I had ever stopped being a writer. I had been thinking about *The Book of Eve* for years, but in between I had looked after my mother, gotten married, raised a child and taught full time as well as having a domestic life. When we moved to Toronto I didn't work, so that at last I had four full hours free each morning to write, and I did. *A Population of One* grew directly out of *Eve*. The theme of freedom wouldn't leave me alone. I hadn't even finished *A Population of One* when I knew there would be another book. I didn't anticipate a trilogy but it is happening that way. The next book I am thinking of working on now. It's about a much younger woman in the "classic trap," suburban housewife with children, tied to dishes, her kitchen, and in her early 20s. My thesis is going to be that you must be sure you know what a trap is. Isn't the frontier tight there in the kitchen?

BiC: Women's studies groups and feminists acclaimed *The Book of Eve*. Don't you anticipate a revulsion because of this novel?

Beresford-Howe: Oh yes. I've already had a tremendous squawking. But the important thing is that if you feel a book should be written, you must write it. Critics of *A Population of One* have all failed to see the levels of irony and the themes. They miss all the value. The plot is simple, childish so. I know how to do a plot deftly, but there is much more. Writers have appreciated this book best. Lover Dickson and Hugh MacLennan, especially. Hugh has called it a masterpiece. I admire them both too; Dickson has remarkably polished prose.

BiC: Have any contemporary writers been particularly important for you?

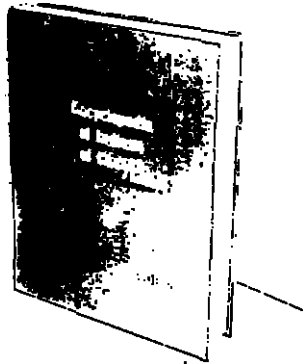
Beresford-Howe: I can't really say. I read widely and I admire writers who are producing literature on a high level — Fowles, Updike, Margaret Laurence.

BiC: Do you find it hard to write?

Beresford-Howe: Yes, I have trouble writing. The hard thing is to express one's imaginings. To imagine is the easy part, but one has to discipline the structure. There's an agonizing gap between what I want to do and what I do. I always go through agonizing

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depression neat the end. There is always something that eludes me.

BiC: *Do you feel, as Faulkner did, that there is a Golden Book, always behind the one you are wiring, and if you could write that book you would be through?*

Beresford-Howe: No. I'd always want to write another novel. My early novels were apprenticeship novels, domestic novels. They were written and published in the happy days when novels sold. There is a common thread among all of them, however. Bob Fulford says I've always been a rebel, interested in the maverick. I suppose that is me, the little girl in Sunday School clothes, thinking rebellious thoughts, blasphemous notions about Christ. I've always written and when I was 14 I decided I would write a novel about Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. I thought all the research I'd need would be the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

BiC: *Do you think of yourself as a teacher or a novelist?*

Beresford-Howe: I don't like that distinction. Teaching keeps me in touch, it's an enriching experience. I need to be in touch with my students generation. In *A Population of One*, Willy is older than her 30 years, but she's younger too.

BiC: *I've always wanted to ask you whether that sardonic reference Mordecai Richler makes in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz to "Canadian lady novelists with hyphenated names writing historical romances" is to you?*

Beresford-Howe: I don't know. Richler did take a swipe at me in a piece he wrote on the Canadian novel, but he wouldn't like my work anyway. For Richler the only genuine themes grow out of his own experience. He wouldn't allow the experience of growing up in Notre Dame de Grace, of always moving, of being Depression people in NDG, rather than on St. Urbain Street. But one's work is to an extent biographical. A lot of private memories go into the women I create. Yet, they are detached and independent.

BiC: *Do you feel there is a winding down between The Book of Eve and A Population of One? Both women attempt to change their lives, but Eva acts and Willy is not successful.*

Beresford-Howe: No. I don't see Willy as downbeat. She accepts loneliness as a condition. It's hard to achieve, to suffer alone, to rid oneself of baggage. Willy is ready now to have an affectionate interest in people, without seeing people as an extension of herself. One knows that the natural dynamics will provide her with happiness.

BiC: *You said earlier that you regard your books as literature, not handbooks. What do you mean by literature?*

Beresford-Howe: Literature takes an individual experience and makes it universal, in prose that is comely and pleasing, using all the resources of the language, so that you can revisit each book and see it anew. That's what I am interested in. □

Letters to the Editor

FOR HIS BROTHER GARY

sii

For parochialism, literaryness, insensitivity, and cultural myopia, Gary Geddes' review of *The Covenant* in your December issue deserves some kind of award.

Please, everybody, take my word for it: "A Tall Man Executes A Lip" owes no debt to A.M. Klein and certainly not to Wallace Stevens, a poet for whom I've never had much affection. Nor is the poem a warning to mankind to stop polluting the earth but written in praise of the poetic imagination. When composing "The Arcade" I wasn't "deliberately" trying to parody Yeats; I wasn't even aware of his existence. Since I never read Graves' "In Broken Images," I can't see how my poem "Dialogue" can derive from it. Though expressed with the usual academic pomposity, these statements are false, misleading and without any basis in reality. They are backed by nothing but the reviewer's asseveration.

It's an old trick to heat a post over his head with his own earlier work while pretending to weep over the pow chap's declining powers. But I wish Mr. Geddes would stop his sighings just long enough to reflect 0" my often repeated observation that there's an eternal opposition between culture and creativity. Having arrived at an appreciation of such obvious masterpieces as "Keine Lazarovitch 1870-1959," "The Day Aviva Came To Paris," "Cain," and "The Bull Calf," he's distressed I've been running on ahead of him and am no longer composing poems that give him the quiet meditative pleasures he touchingly believes poets are born to provide him with. He'll forgive me if I remind him that once upon a time it was my erotic poems that called down on my head abuse and ridicule. In 1977, so what else is new, it's poems that attack the Christianized culture of this country that are meeting a similar kind of resistance and opposition. Nor does it surprise me in the least that the tone in which they are being rejected, lofty and selfrighteous and sad, has not altered by so much as a quaver, as Mr. Geddes can swiftly ascertain by reading the reviews of my earlier books.

Mr. Geddes' reputation allowed me to expect more from him, at least an intelligent reading of the book so that he could inform his readers what its contents are about. *The Covenant* is not about the Holocaust, the slaughter of six million Jews. It's about the Jewish experience, its significance and meaning for the world, as the first poem, "The Circumcision," makes quite plain: and what strikes a mild Prairie Canuck as bombast and posturing is for the iconoclastic, rebellious, and persecuted Jew painful history. I once told him I was a five-thousand-years-old Canadian but I guess he wasn't listening. Mr. Geddes evidently prefers Klein's whimperings to my hard-fisted lines; that's of course his privilege. But he should be told that, since the establishment of the State of Israel and Entebbe, no Jewish poet is ever going to compose another "In Re Solomon Washawer." Poor Gary, I sympathize with him. His good intentions, his civilized liberalism let others question, not I. Why should I or anybody else expect him, stuffed with grants and academic turkey, to make

anything out of poems that are as stark and bitter as the Jew's sojourn on this planet has been? And, moreover, that challenging complacencies and inherited cultural reflexes derive from a searing experience with human villainy most simple-minded Canadians choose either to ignore or deride? Relax, Gary, an American or Italian is sure to come along soon and make clear for you what the poems in *The Covenant* and *For My Brother Jesus* are all about.

But I've no wish to mock Mr. Geddes. He's got a good heart even if his headpiece needs some oiling. His devotion to literature is perfect, his distress at the appearance of work that strikes him as shoddy and inferior is without doubt genuine. Because I bow how my latest book has blighted his days and nights I've made a list of poems in *The Covenant* I consider anthology pieces and will include in any future "selected poems." I've carefully considered his strictures and taken to heart his high-minded sermonizing on the paramount need for fusing thought and feeling, form and content. To console him and dry his tears here then are the poems, not including those he has already red-starred: "The Circumcision," "Sicilian Vespers," "Xianity," "The Glass Dancer," "Sylvia," "Smoke," "Hidden Worlds," "Snowdrift," "The Tamed Puma," "Night Thoughts," "Aetna," "The Sinner," "The Galilean," "El Diablo," "The Sabbath," "A Walk to Nowhere," "Magdalena," "The Luminous Bagel," "Thoughts on Tiding my Next Book 'Bravo. Layton,'" "The Fire-Gutted Church on Avenue Road," "Magdalena," "The Quill," "Come Closer, Brother."

There are several points to be made here. First, these poems are no more about the Holocaust than "Catacombe dei Cappucini" or "The Aracade," both of which, though for his own private reasons, so impressed Mr. Geddes. The second thing one might note is that they exhibit an amazingly wide range of tone and subject matter. Almost any one of them would have handed Mr. Geddes his passport to immortality. I, astonished me that a distinguished anthologist, a fairly intelligent reviewer, as well as someone who has tried his hand at writing poetry with passable success would review *The Covenant* and not single out for special commendation "The Sinner" or "The Galilean" or "El Diablo." Or say nothing about the diabolical wit in such poems as "The Sabbath," "Idiots," or "The Luminous Bagel." The last one already well on its way to beaming a minor classic. Or remain wordless before the passion and anguish of "Disguises," "The Crucifixion," "The Phylactery Box," "On Seeing An Old Man Praying In The Duomo"?

Finally: "cool off" is a colloquialism that won't permit the "off" to be split off; my poem "Aviva" is not a love poem but a stylized lyric in the manner of the Latin poets I name in it, and quite deliberately modelled on Mr. Geddes' parochialism or ignorance prevented him from seeing that and led him into asinities an acquaintance with Ovid and Tibullus might have saved him from. And for one last twist of the knife: "In Rc Solomon Warshawer" is not in the *The Hitleriad* but in A. M. Klein's much earlier book *Poems*.

Irving Layton
Toronto

IVON THE TERRIBLE

Sir:
I.M. Own writes, in your November issue, that simple-minded spy stories "assume a view of international affairs that few readers can

accept for a moment: a view in which the government of the Soviet Union devotes all its energies to the achievement of instant world conquest. . . ." Why can't readers accept that view? True, "all its energies" would be an exaggeration — the Soviets are, after all, fitfully engaged in feeding their people, providing shoes for them, building power dams, etc. — but all the evidence suggests that for a very long time the government in Moscow has been wholeheartedly devoted to world conquest, instant if possible. They say they are, certainly, and they act as if they are. What makes Owen and his fellow readers think they aren't? My guess is that the authors of those simple-minded spy stories Owen scorns may have a better grasp of geopolitics than Owen has.

Robert Fulford
Editor
Saturday Night
Toronto

Ivan Owen replies: I share Fulford's loathing for all tyrannies, and honour him for his consistent and passionate expression of it. But sometime his generous enthusiasm carries him headlong into a logical morass. His syllogism here seems to be: tyrants are evil; the intention to conquer the world is evil; therefore tyrants intend to conquer the world.

My reading of the evidence is that the rulers of the U.S.S.R., like their imperial predecessors, have always been as isolationist as the midwest of mid-Americans — more so, in fact, for they have never committed Mops in a distant theatre of war. I'd like to know where they have ever said they are "wholeheartedly devoted to world conquest, instant if possible." Perhaps Fulford has read their statements as carefully as he read my review. Nowhere in it, — no, even in the one paragraph he read — did I speak of "simple-minded spy stories" or express scorn of them. On the contrary, I declared my pleasure in them; and, far from thinking them simple-minded, I find some of the most enjoyable of them so subtle that half the time I don't know what's going on. *Vide* Deighton, *passim*.

SWEENEY PRODDED

Sir:
I have always admired the press in Canada for upholding that excellent principle, that both sides of an argument should be given a fair chance of being heard, so I trust you will allow me a little of your valuable space for a brief riposte to Alastair Sweeney's mixed metaphorical review of my book in your October, 1977, issue.

First of all I have this comment on my book, conveyed to me recently by Ian A. Gordon, professor emeritus of English and formerly head of the English Department at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand: also author of that first-rate literary work, *John Galt: The Life of a Writer*:

I write . . . to congratulate you on a very well-written and interesting book. You have filled the gap beautifully — the "other Galt," not the literary man and novelist but the man of affairs . . . you have made an excellent job of it. Your publisher has done you proud too and, altogether, you have every right to be really pleased with the result of all your work.

Then from a Canadian author, editor, professor of Canadian history, and former president of one of our universities I not long ago received the following appraisal:

This is no doubt the definitive work on John Galt. An excellent, well-written, thoroughly researched study which reveals a deep understanding of Galt's Scottish background as it reveals the problems of his Canadian venture.

The writing is first-rate — never dull, never flamboyant. A most readable work.

I leave your readers to judge between these carefully weighed assessments by reviewers who know their business, and the rambling, bombastic jargon that makes up the greater part of Sweeney's rather ridiculous effort. Why should the commonplace chore of reviewing a book cause a man to be so vicious? Sweeney evidently considers himself the principal authority on the Galts; and, since he appears to have assumed responsibility for putting all and sundry, including the publishers, to rights, he can hardly do less than offer himself as director of salvage operations, general adviser on correct use of the Queen's English, and chief consultant for volume two.

Hamilton B. Timothy
Professor of Humanities
University of Regina

LEAVE IT TO BEAVER

Sir,

I am writing in response to John Oughton's brief remarks on my book entitled *Contact and Conflict* in your August-September issue. When nominating Rev. Herbert Beaver as a "new Comedian martyr," your reviewer missed the point that Beaver was doubly qualified for the role since he came from Britain and his entire North American experience was confined to an area that later became a part of the United Sows.

Robin Fisher
Simon Fraser University

THE JOCK'S ON SMITH

Sir:

In your June-July issue, someone called Michael Smith, who claims to be "based" in St. Marys, Ont., wrote an article purporting to reveal major errors perpetrated by many of Canada's leading novelists. Michael Smith alleges that in my novel, *The Bulls of Ronda*, I wrongly used the verb "unbared" when I meant "bared." Not so. If Smith had any sense of responsibility to the material he is using or if he had a good dictionary he would find that there is a verb "to unbare." I was using language exactly and with precision. If I run across Smith in the next few months I shall kick him on his unbared *cojones* — and I do mean unbared.

Eugene Benson
Guelph, Ont.

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RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 27

ANTHROPEAN REMOIRS that the University of West Tasmania is contemplating a credit course on *Books in Canada* prompted us to ask readers to supply possible examination questions for such a course. Nelson C. Smith of Victoria, B.C., wins \$25 for these acute questions:

A. *Books in Canada* is available free or can be obtained by subscription for \$9.95 a year (\$15 overseas). Discuss this fact in regard to (a) the Canadian economy, (b) Canadian culture, and/or (c) Canadian readers.

B. How would *Be & in Canada* be different if edited by (a) Stephen Leacock, (b) Sarah Binks, (c) Louis Riel?

Honourable mentions:

"*Books in Canada* represents a feeble attempt by the last of the post-Gutenbergians to foist literacy on an unsuspecting viewing audience." Discuss with references to the magazine's free distribution practices.

—Gerry Flahive, Toronto

Using an *absolute* minimum of words, explicate the *essential* mythos of *Books in Canada* so as to illustrate the theories of Levi-Strauss and/or Northrop Frye.

—R.F. Glazin, Stouffville, Ont.

A. Critics are, for the most part, a heartless bunch of cut-throats. Support this statement with detailed reference to at least four of the regular reviewers in *Books in Canada*.

B. It has been suggested that a critic is a critic because he can't write anything else. Show the insecurity of all Canadian literary critics by making special reference to all *Books in Canada* reviewers.

—Michael O. Nowlan, Oromocto, N.B.

A. It has been suggested that *Books in Canada* is the work of a small clique of parochial Toronto writers. Discuss from the point of view of a penguin trying to break into Canadian book reviewing from Argentina.

B. How much wit can a CanWit can — if a CanWit can can wit? Answer in one word.

C. One sees ISBN all over the place in *Books in Canada*. Does ISBN mean: (a) Intense Snow Breeds Novelists; (b) I Shoulda Been a Newspaperman; (c) Illiterates Seldom Buy Novels; (d) Intellectuals Sometimes Believe Nonsense; (e) all of the above?

—Bruce Bailey, Montreal

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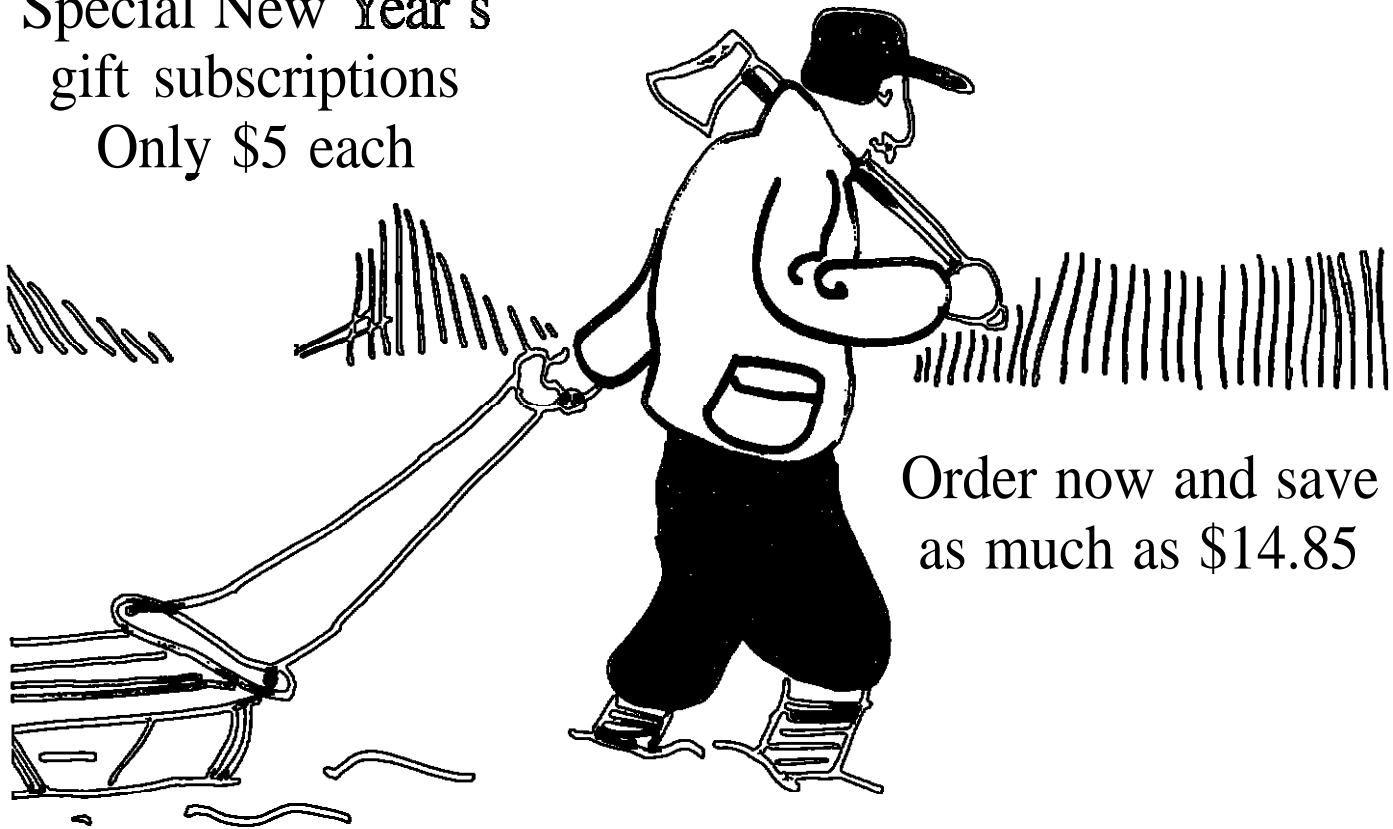
THE FOLLOWING Canadian books have been received by *Books in Canada* in recent weeks. Inclusion in this list does not preclude a review or notice in a future issue:

McClure: The Cl... Years of Dr. Bob McClure, by Murdoch Scott, Canada Publishing.
Screens, by Eugene McNamara, Coach House.
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