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When the Montreal Press Club decided women were beyond its pale, Mavis Gallant took off for Paris, independence, and eventual recognition as a brilliant story-teller. Yet most Canadian critics have always snubbed her. Why? Perhaps it's because

MAVIS TRIES HARDER

by Geoff Hancock

MAVIS GALLANT'S fiction is among the finest ever written by a Canadian. But like buried treasure, both the author and her fiction are hard to discover. Her publisher is American; her early works are out of print; her recent stories are uncollected in book issues of *The New Yorker*. She does not like to give interviews; she is taciturn about her private life: and she has no theories about fiction. She also keeps her distance. For nearly 30 years she has lived in Paris. Finally, she has a reputation for fierceness that is rumoured to squash scholars and terrify reporters. John Metcalf warned: "If she doesn't like you, she'll tear you to ribbons."

But first impressions of persons, as of countries, can be misleading. Certainly Gallant has a Presbyterian Scot toughness that makes one hesitate to blunder into areas that are out of bounds. Certainly she won't tolerate fools, gossip-mongers, or interviewers who haven't done their homework. Interviews have been chopped short because the questions became too intimate. "I like to be anonymous," she says. "I want to be known only for my work."

But toughness aside, Mavis Gallant at 57 is a winy, sophisticated, utterly charming, and independent woman. Her hazel eyes sparkle constantly and her smile radiates warmth across the room. She speaks rapidly, whether using English or her fluent French, and her conversation is laced with anecdotes. Even serious discussions on such topics as the German cinema, Marcel Proust (her favourite author), art galleries, and international politics are punctuated with infectious laughter and a cutting wit.

She has a talent for invective so precise that I dare not mention names. A leading Canadian poet "was dressed in a raincoat as though he was looking for a pornographic film." The wife of one of Canada's major architects "looked like a scone that had been sitting around so long the flour had turned all funny." A prominent Canadian critic and novelist "has the eyes of a shark swimming towards a fixed destination."

Clearly: Gallant has an eye for appearance and a concern for detail. Like most Parisian women, she herself is impeccably groomed. Not quite live-foot three (although her passport says five-foot four), her well-tailored appearance matches her prose. She is barely tolerant of visiting Canadian writers "who look as though they have just come off the ice rinks after clubbing baby seals."

For critics concerned that Gallant isn't Canadian enough after 28 years in Europe, rest easy. Gallant has never had problems with her nationality. She is still a Canadian citizen and in very certain and explosive terms: "Good God! Why would I be anything else? I would be a Canadian even if Canada ceased to exist, because it is part of being myself." Indeed, more aggressive than most Canadians on national issues, she recently complained to our embassy in Paris that the Canadian flag had not flown from the chestnut trees on the Champs Elysées during one of Prime Minister Trudeau's visits. The embassy tartly informed her that the Govern-

nor General, not Trudeau, is the head of state for whom such honours are due. She dislikes "that sinister little fascist, René Lévesque" and thinks Margaret Trudeau has proven without a doubt that Canada is 80 years behind the times — "around the era of Ibsen and *The Doll's House*." Passionately political, she frequently goes to the nearby Cultural Centre Canadien to teed the Canadian papers: "The French press gets everything wrong, and I've never met an American who could write intelligently about Canada."

Why does she live in Paris then? "I needed a place where I could live on my own terms. Paris was the most open, the most malleable." Most of her friends are French-speaking and have not heard of *The New Yorker*, which has no Paris equivalent, a situation that has given her "the most marvellous peace and quiet, as a titer."

Neither Montreal nor Toronto could offer Gallant the independent style of life she was seeking back in 1950. In Paris she found it. She knows the city well and uses it as an extension of her own high-energy personality and wide range of interests: a new German film yesterday, a gallery opening on the Ile St. Lads today, a porcelain exhibit at the Grand Palais tomorrow. And in the summer, taking time out from her writing and the 10 newspapers she



Mavis Gallant

reads a day (German, Italian, French, American, and Canadian editions). she goes to the horseraces.

One does not, however, inquire too closely into her private life. She will say her parents died when she was a child and she has been on her own ever since. As Mavis Young (her father was a Scot), she was educated in public, convent, and boarding schools — 17 in all — in Canada and the United States. She has no brothers or sisters and considers herself one of the few people with no family ties. "My one desire as a child was to grow up and become independent," she says. After high-school graduation, she worked for a short time in the cutting room of the National Film Board in Montreal. In 1944 she got a job as a feature reporter on the old *Montreal Standard*, a weekly newspaper that evolved into *Weekend* magazine. She remained there six years and "adored it." During this time she married, and quickly divorced, a musician, John Gallant. But she "saw how it was in Canada" when she learned that a male colleague on the newspaper earned

"Good God! Why would I be anything else? I would be a Canadian even if Canada ceased to exist, because it is a part of me."

\$18 a week more than she did. More insulting, the newly formed Montreal Press Club made a decision to exclude women from membership. As Gallant told Karen Lawrence, an editor of Edmonton's *Branching Out* magazine, in 1975: "It had an enormous effect on me."

At this time she had been writing fiction, but never showing it to anyone. Taunted by a male reporter that she called herself a writer but had never published anything, she sent a story to *The New Yorker*, "the best magazine in the world at that time." It was returned because it was "too specifically Canadian." A second story, set in Connecticut, was accepted. With few exceptions, such as *Esquire*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, she has published with *The New Yorker* ever since.

But she had been thinking of going to Europe for a long time. In the spring of 1949 she gave her notice to the *Standard*. In the autumn of 1950, at age 28, she left Canada for Europe. The 16-hour flight was a gift from the PR man at Trans-Canada Airlines. Her existence since then has certainly been nomadic, with extensive travels (as far as Bangkok), and long stays in Spain, Sicily, and southern France, as well as Paris.

Her work as a writer outside Canada has attracted international respect for nearly three decades. Edmund Wilson (who at first thought she was an Irish writer) said: "She gets away from the Canadian bleakness and her work displays a colour and wit rare among native writers." Brendan Gill, theatre critic for *The New Yorker*, said of her 1973 collection of German stories, *The Pegnitz Junction* (Random House): "Mavis Gallant writes as the Dutch used to paint, filling each of her canvases out to the edge with closely observed figures, bathed in the light of an incandescent mind."

Many Canadian writers know and admire her work. Long-time friend Mordecai Richler says Gallant is "our most compelling writer of short stories since Morley Callaghan." Margaret Atwood notes of her 1964 collection, *My Heart Is Broken*: "Her insights into her characters are achieved with breathtaking economy and rightness of detail. She is a terrifyingly good writer." Robert Weaver, who edited her 1971 collection, *The End of the World*, said: "She is simply too fine a writer for us to ignore." And Robertson Davies says of her long fiction, *Green Water*, *Green Sky* (1959) and *A Fairly Good Time* (1970): "Not often can one say that a writer's work enlarges and cleanses one's understanding of life, but one may honestly say so of the art of Mavis Gallant."

But being the only English Canadian writer currently living in Paris means she is inevitably overlooked whenever Canadian letters are discussed. Gallant, who is acknowledged as one of the best story writers of the English-speaking world, whose friends include critic Roland Barthes, Simone de Beauvoir, and two Nobel prize

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winners (Jean-Paul Sartre and Samuel Beckett), has been ignored in Canada by the curious inward-turning force of hothouse nationalism. "Luckily my life and work did not depend on Canadian reaction," Gallant says. "I have more often than not been treated with discourtesy."

She has been accused of "selling out" to a glossy American publication and of "writing stories to order." Naturally, Gallant is defensive: "As for The *New Yorker* publishing writers who sound alike, I'm surprised the idea still has currency. Take any four issues and try to find the link. These things are said by people who have never read it, or whose Christmas gift subscription ran out in 1964."

She might also have pointed out that it has always been next to impossible to make a living as a writer of short stories in Canada. In the 1950s, as today, success lies in the international marketplace. As a tiny recognition of her talent, only seven of her stories have been reprinted in Canadian anthologies published since 1960 (among them "The Accident," "Bernadette," and "The Legacy"). With the exception of a recent special issue of *Canadian Fiction Magazine* — with George Woodcock, Robertson Davies, Peter Stevens, and Ronald Hatch commenting on her work — her public and critical profile has been a story of local neglect.

Gallant doesn't know why. She noted, even while being praised in the *New York Times*, that Canadian reviews of her books "were for a long time merely spiteful. If I weren't Canadian I wouldn't read them. But then if I weren't Canadian they wouldn't be so small-minded either." She said she felt Canadian writers were on trial and what they had written was being used as part of the evidence against them.

I suggested also that, unlike expatriate writers such as Margaret Laurence and Mordecai Richler who returned home after many years abroad, she is intent on remaining in Europe. She does not, however, consider herself an expatriate writer. Rather, she sees herself as a writer in the English language who happens to be Canadian: "Expatriate refers to people who can't go home, such as political refugees." Three recent trips to Canada (Edmonton in 1975, and Montreal in 1976 and 1977) gave her no reason to hurry back. "Montreal is ruined now. It was the most beautiful city imaginable. People didn't know what they had."

Gallant is happy to stay in Paris. The extent of her involvement in (and detachment from) French society and political affairs is documented in two superb book-length essays: "Things Overlooked Before" tells how the French government and the country's social mores hounded a young school teacher. Gabrielle Russier, into committing suicide for having an affair with a 16-year-old student. "The Events in May: A Paris Notebook" is an evocative diary account of the student riots of 1968, which erupted in her quarter.

The brilliant painterly surface of her writing doesn't come eerily. She works seven days a week, writing in a fine italic long-hand on a long, narrow, and highly polished farmtable. She refers frequently to notebooks. Then she types her manuscripts on a small portable typewriter. Some of her stories are nearly novel length before she cuts them down to size, using scissors in places, and rearranging and shaping sections. Her constant cutting, polishing, and reshaping mean a story is sometimes several years in the creation. An "obsessive" perfectionist, each page is typed perfectly before she goes on to the next. "Cutting out the rubbish and making the meaning clear" is the closest Gallant comes to a theory of fiction. Asked about themes, plots, tone of voice, characterizations, she will simply say, "I don't know." She only insists that her work be interesting.

With just a touch of complaint in her voice, she says she can't sit long at a desk as she used to because of a bone graft in her back, the result of a childhood fall from a horse. She admits, as well, that she gave up financial security to become a writer, and that she hasn't had a vacation in three years.

Gallant's hard work has paid off in a corpus of nearly 100 stories, six novellas, and two novels unique to Canadian fiction (She makes no distinction between novella, novel, or story, so the numbers can be switched around.) A typical Gallant story, at least in the work most frequently associated with her, takes the image of

a romantic life abroad and breaks it down into Rat reality. The glamour spots of continental Europe suddenly become far from elegant. Museums are closed, restaurant food is dull, people are pushy on the Métro, the Mediterranean is uninteresting because it has no tides. Many of Gallant's characters are tourists, or Canadians living abroad. Rootless and uncommitted, they find weakness, folly, and financial crisis in Paris or on the Riviera. Nearly always unhappy, with small desires, little thoughts, and lives miserable with vaguely unfulfilled romantic notions, they try to

"Luckily my life and work did not depend on Canadian reaction. I have more often than not been treated with discourtesy."

comprehend their present with a misunderstood or forgotten knowledge of their past.

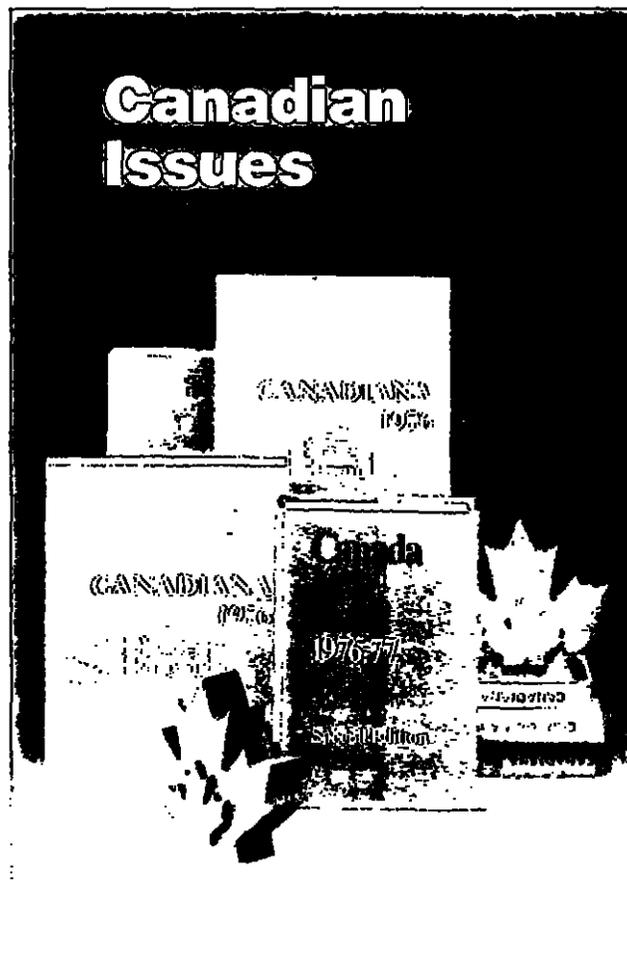
The characters in her 1970 novel, *A Fairly Good Time*, are sad, comic disasters recognizable to anyone who has spent a three-week holiday in Europe. "It began with a girl on the Métro. I saw her going home one morning, having been out all night. She was wearing a dreadful locking raincoat and had her hair cut in some funny way and she was reading a letter from Canada." The girl, Shirley Perrigny, who was born Shirley Higgins in Montreal, became stranded in Europe after the strange and accidental death of her Calgary-born husband. He rides a stolen bicycle into a car door and kills himself on their honeymoon. (This incident is the core of Gallant's much anthologized "The Accident.") In a novel crammed with the vanities of the French middle-class — obnoxious children, overbearing fathers, bad-tempered mothers — Shirley looks for some facsimile of love. When Shirley's second husband, an ambitious French journalist, leaves her stranded yet again, she tries to reconstruct the events in her life. Some critics place Shirley, as exile, squarely in the literary tradition of Laurence's Hagar Shipley, Ross' Mrs. Philip Bentley, and Susanna Moodie. The novel's complex structure see-saws between past and present, through letters, long lists of events, and equally disorganized friends and neighbours, until Shirley finally comes to terms with herself.

But Gallant's strength is in her short fiction. The stories, however, are not easily categorized. They tend to move in a spiral or wavy motion, often flashing between past and present or leaping between points of view. Some readers have complained about a puzzle-like quality to her work. Says Gallant: "Why that should be I can't tell you. That's what occurs to me. The situation has a beginning and as much ending as any situation has in life. The story builds around its centre, rather like a snail."

Gallant considers her fiction devoid of patterns, but her stories tend to fall into three distinct stages. Her early stories — most easily found in *My Heart is Broken* (PaperJacks) and *The End of the World* (New Canadian Library) — show the themes most important to her work — exile and expatriation. Sometimes the person in exile is "Bernadette," an unhappy French Canadian girl working as a servant in a wealthy English Canadian home. More often her characters are English-speaking foreigners living and travelling in Europe, finding French or Italian styles of life too difficult to accept. Europe has never seemed so tacky and decaying, or its inhabitants more vulnerable and discontent, with only a pinch of human kindness, as in the European stories of Mavis Gallant.

The war years were important ones for Gallant and post-war refugees from Germany and Eastern Europe found their way into some of her best fiction. Most of these stories are about survivors. Because their past is so distorted by concentration camps, or the Hitler Youth, or constant uprooting, they try to live in a world without memory. "Try to put yourself in the place of an adolescent who had sworn allegiance to Hitler. The German drama, the drama of that generation, was of inner displacement. You can't tear up your personality and begin again, any more than you can tear up the history of your country."

Gallant now is in the third stage of her short fiction with a series of uncollected stories featuring a young girl, Linnet Muir, who



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8 Books in Canada, June-July, 1978

wants to be a writer in Montreal during the years 1920-1945. For the first time Gallant draws clearly upon personal history. The five interlocking stories so far published "are really the reconstruction of a city which no longer exists. The girl is obviously close to me. She isn't myself, but a kind of summary of some of the things I once was."

Gallant's best work though, and her personal favourite, is the 88-page novella, "The Pegnitz Junction." This story, a daring

"I insisted on inquiring why the barriers of culture and religion had not held in such a civilized country as Germany. Needless to say the article, which I kept for 20 years, was not published."

experiment for Gallant, begins simply enough. Two uncommunicative lovers, Christine and Herbert, and a spoiled child, Little Bert, are forced to endure a 12-hour train trip to Germany during a French airline strike in the late 1960s. But the trip takes on strange proportions. The train is rerouted, seemingly all over a war-blasted Europe, full of barbed wire and ruins. From the minds of fellow passengers, Christine bears monologues. She catches the memories of people waiting at level crossings and win stations. Herbert and Christine exchange inner thoughts about their relationship and Little Bert develops precocious fantasies of spying on the two lovers. Gallant says: "There's a German expression I've always liked. 'I can hear him thinking.' That's what I did in this story." Though the young couple remain in the train looking out at a strange landscape, imaginatively they reconstruct a summary of pre-war German consciousness and the origins of Nazi Germany.

Gallant thought about that story for 30 years. It began in Montreal when she was 23. "You cannot imagine the impact the first pictures of concentration camp and slave labour had on me." She was asked to write a lead article for a special issue of the *Montreal Standard*. "I insisted on inquiring why the barriers of culture and religion had not held in such a civilized country as Germany. Needless to say the article, which I kept for 20 years, was not published." But Gallant was not satisfied with the explanations of the origins of fascism, the German drama, how individuals faced the responsibilities of their past. "The survivors could tell us what had happened to them, but not why." When she finally brought herself to go to Germany — in 1962 — Gallant was able to answer her own questions. "The Pegnitz Junction" is not a book about fascism, but a book about its small possibilities in people. That's why it's the best thing I've ever done."

For the future? Gallant is finishing up the Linnet Muir stories and working on two non-fiction books and two novels. She is also completing a massive five-year study of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish French army captain who was wrongly accused of selling military secrets to Germany in 1894. Gallant has discovered many new facts about the case — not because she is a trained historian with the necessary skills for sorting through the 60,000 documents connected with the trials — but because she simply talked to people who had never been approached: "It's unbelievable. With all the books written on the Dreyfus case, so many no one person could read them all, no one had ever talked to Dreyfus's daughter."

Mavis Gallant is now a long way from the strict Jansenist convent schools in Montreal with the straight-backed chairs in the parlour. She lives alone in her elegant third-floor apartment in the expensive Faubourg St. Germain district of the Left Bank. A Bach chorale is on the turntable, and on the walls, favourite paintings and etchings, including a Picasso etching of Stravinsky, and a rare *L'Aurore* newspaper with Emile Zola's famous "J'Accuse" headline, a gift from the Dreyfus family.

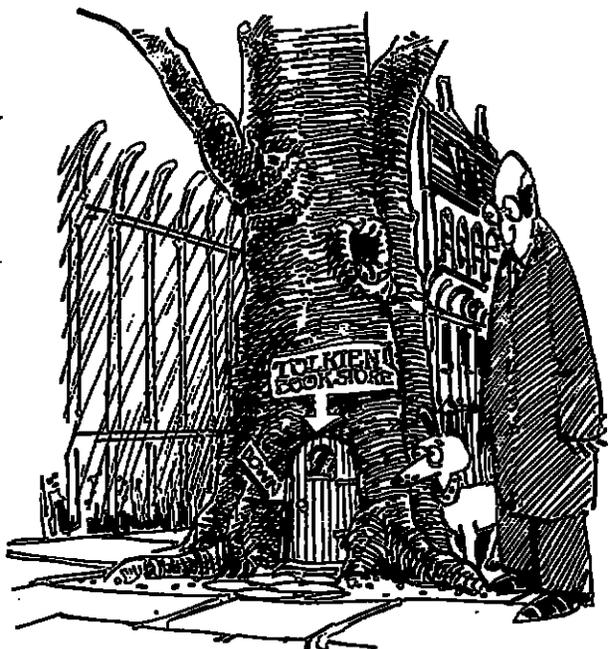
Is Gallant happy? Has she satisfied her ambitions? "My ambition was purely a way of life," she says. "Amazingly enough, I achieved it reasonably early. I wanted to write and be absolutely free and independent. I was drawn to Europe. I work long hours, but the hours are mine." □

BOOK STORES THAT NEVER WERE

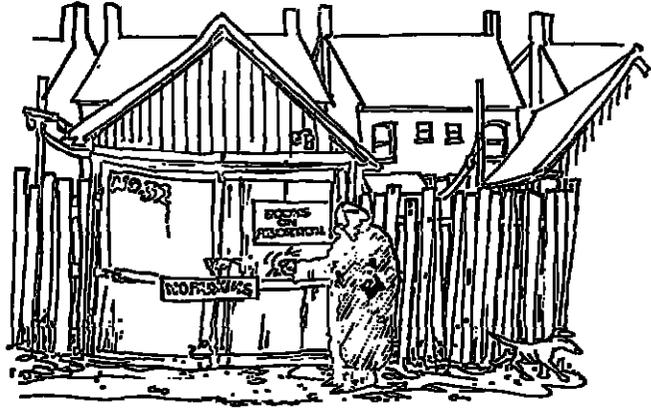
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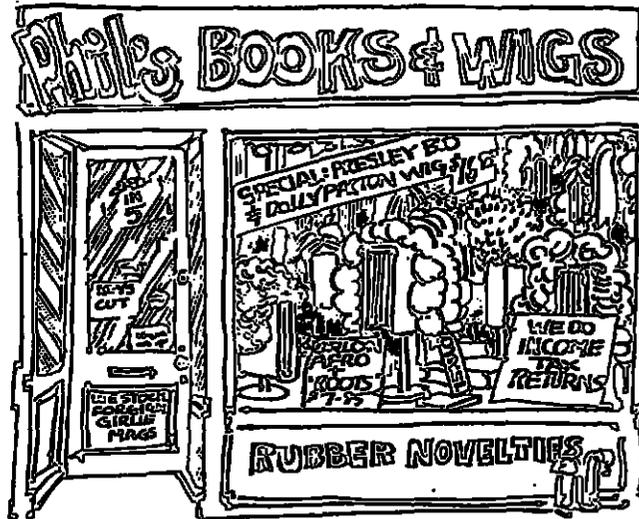
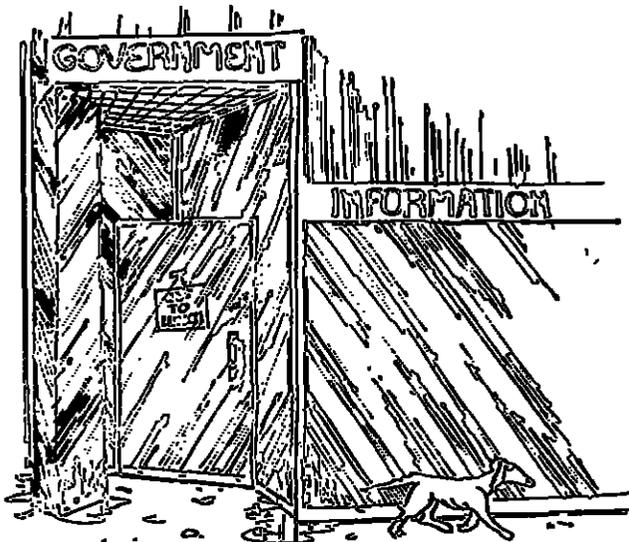
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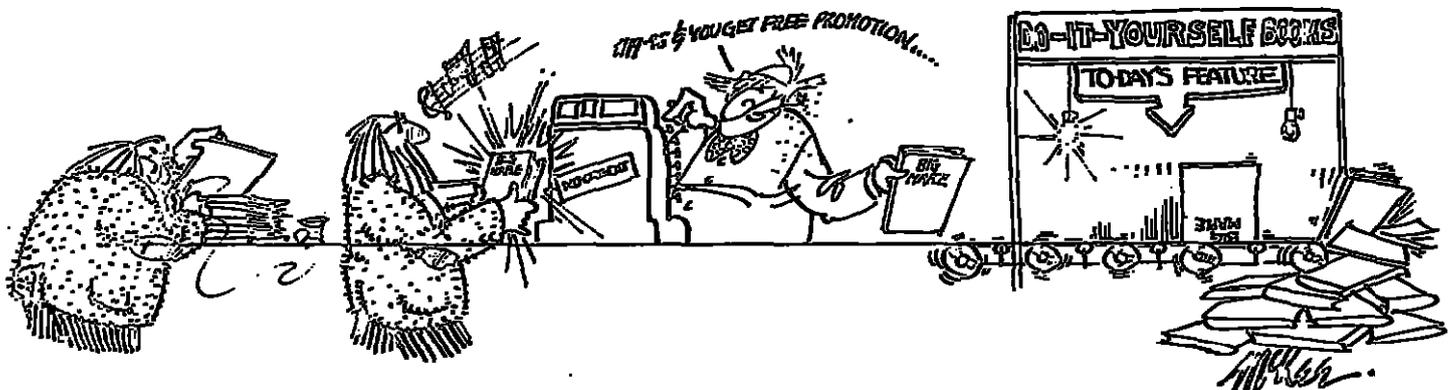
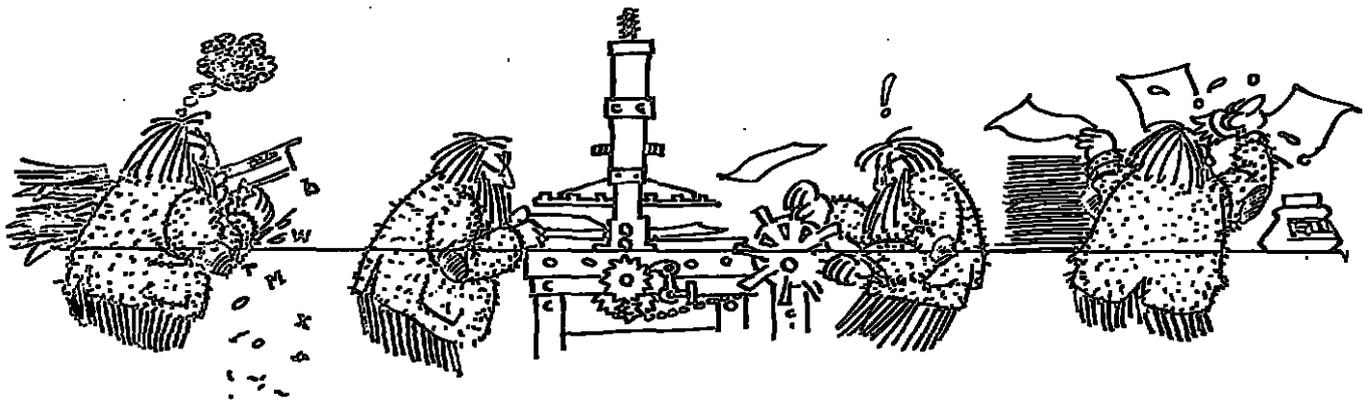
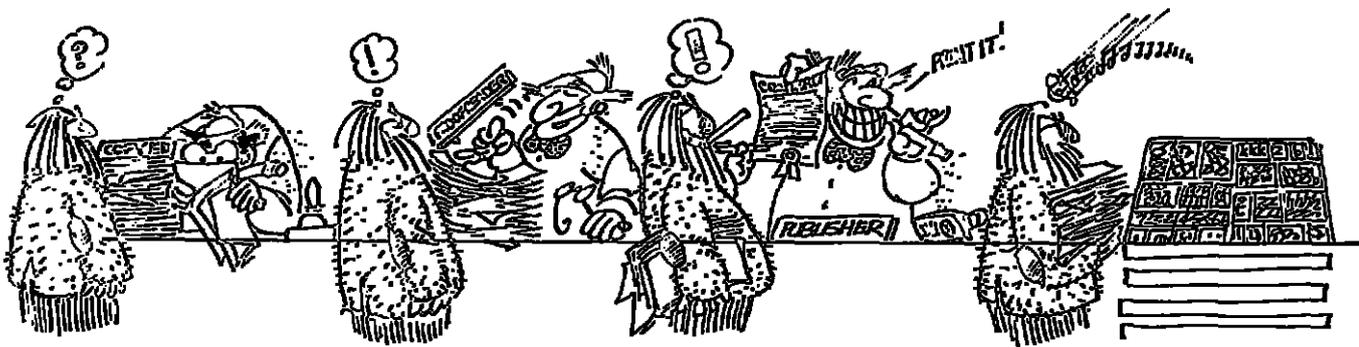
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THE POLITICIAN'S BOOKSTORE



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Childe Frank's pilgrimage

Frank Pickersgill was an intellectual knight in the fight against fascism. He found his grave in Euchenwald, unknell'd, uncoffin'd, but not unknown

by Chris Scott

The Making of a Secret Agent: The Pickersgill Letters, 1934-1943, edited by George H. Ford, McClelland & Stewart, illustrated, 279 pages, 57.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 7005 5).

FRANK H. D. PICKERSGILL was born on May 28, 1915, in Winnipeg, and was raised on a farm near Ashern, Man. An undergraduate at the University of Manitoba from 1931-36, Pickersgill spent the summer of 1934 cycling in Europe, where he was favourably impressed by Hitler's Germany. In 1938, after graduating with an M.A. in classics from the University of Toronto, Pickersgill continued his studies under the liberal Catholic apologist, Jacques Maritain, at the Sorbonne, and in the autumn of that year revisited Germany, a country that this time struck him as "possessed by the devil." In the following year Pickersgill, who was now trying to earn a living as a journalist, travelled to Italy, Poland (just before the German invasion), and Romania, flitting around Europe like a character from one of Olivia Manning's novels. He spent the Phoney War in Paris, was interned by the Germans at St. Denis from 1940-42, escaped, reached London via Unoccupied France and Portugal, and joined the Special Operations Executive. On the night of June 15-16, 1943, Frank Pickersgill was dropped into the ill-fated "Prosper" network in Occupied France. He was arrested by the Gestapo the next day, and after a spell in the Gestapo prison at Fresnes was sent first of all to Rawicz concentration camp in Poland, and then to Buchenwald, where he was executed on the morning of Sept. 11, 1944.

As a record of intellectual life in the 1930s, Pickersgill's letters make fascinating reading. There is the usual hodge-podge of Christian socialism, CCF meetings, "MacSpaunday" poetry, and Morley Callaghan and the fight against fascism. In a letter of March 3, 1937 (to Kay Sinclair), Pickersgill looked to Scandinavia as a model for the future mixed-economy society. (Rates of suicide and income tax

evidently played no part in his calculations.) As for Germany and the Soviet Union: "They both deny the rights of the individual personality; the Nazis expressly, the Communists by denying the existence of personality."

This is pretty standard fare, but a week later Pickersgill is subjecting the same correspondent to an aetiological essay on the roots of "two sets of heresies (a) Idealism, represented by Platonism, Manicheism, Hegelianism, and (b) Materialism, represented by Epicurianism, Montanism (Tertullian's heresy), and Marxism." Christianity, spirit made matter, offers a compromise — but Pickersgill is unsure about the sort of Christianity he wants. He sings the praises of the boozey



Frank Pickersgill in 1939.

Anglican Bishop Gore, fawns over Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism (it will "save" Christendom — this four years after Hitler's accession to power), and generally contrives to sound like John Henry Newman reincarnated:

I am reading Maritain and Gilson, and that, with an ever-growing consciousness of the shambles which is being made of Anglicanism by heretics of every sort, and the fact that I read colossal quantities on that

debased secularisation of the Church which is known as the Henrician "Reformation", all this is involving me in serious "Romish Tendencies."

(Shades of the Oxford Movement — surprising, perhaps, so late in the day. What, then are we to make of G.H. Ford, Pickersgill's friend and editor, who is reminded of Arthur Hallam and Tennyson — and Ford is writing in 1977 from Rochester?)

As well as this tractarian baggage, the Toronto letters are marked by a didacticism of which Pickersgill himself was well aware. "Please forgive," he begged Kay Sinclair. "it seems to be in my nature." Nature or nurture, common sense finally prevailed in Pickersgill's battle with Doubt. The doctrine of Papal Infallibility proved "too high a hurdle." Frank also played a fair amount of poker, which might have helped too. For there is much shrewdness in these letters. "The popularity of the *Star* is clear proof that a million people can be wrong." If Toronto is the intellectual centre of Canada, God help us. "Skin-swing is an all too prevalent ideal in all political parties down here." Marx is not the prophet of our time; it is Dostoevski. "Oh say," Pickersgill counsels his would-be Tennyson, "if you have any spare time this winter, take Julien Benda's *Trahison des Clercs* from the library; it is . . . the most interesting diagnosis of the trouble with modern intellectuals that I've ever seen," and in the next sentence he is drubbing MacNeice for his "god-awful" translation of *Agamemnon*. (These days nearly all treasonable clerks are in the pay of the state. Where would Pickersgill have worked had he lived? For the Canada Council? For External Affairs?) Maybe it's an accident, but the hectoring tone of these letters ends the moment Pickersgill abandoned his Ph.D. thesis on Augustine, and the Saint, as all the world was once told but has now forgotten, never got over the apples he stole as a child.

Pickersgill read widely, but there are gaps (at least in the published record).

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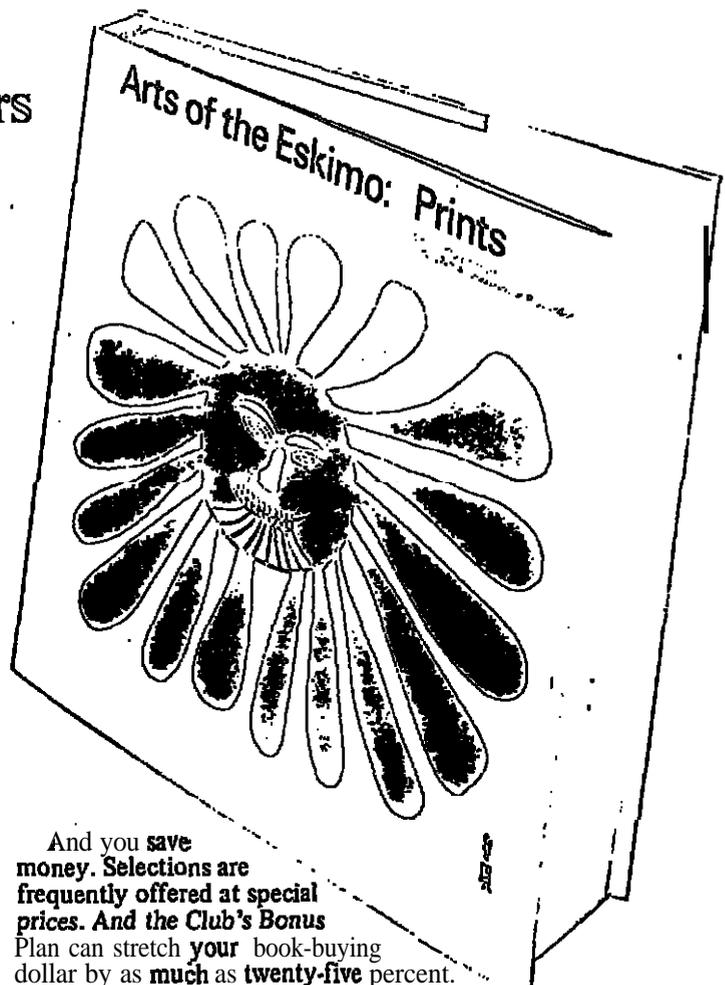
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Curiously for one steeped in Patristic lore, there is no mention of contemporary soul doctors — Jung, in Pickersgill's intellectual shadow boxing, might have gone a round or two out of the Idealist corner. Were such men as Havelock Ellis and Freud assumed to be knaves from the start, or was their brand of knowledge taboo? The most probable explanation is that Pickersgill simply did not have the time to get around to them.

What he did have time for is astonishing. In 1940, with no preparation, he was placed in the top three in the External Affairs exam; he was reading Kierkegaard (in German) and translating Sartre's *La Nausée* as well as writing a book of his own. A French friend of this period praised his capacity for "marvellous assimilation." In 1942, on the run from the internment camp at St. Denis, he found time to see Gertrude Stein at her villa in Belley, near Lyons, and Alice B. Toklas, who complained that she was sent into the garden to hoe potatoes, whenever visitors came, so that Miss Stein could monopolize the conversation. And everyone found Pickersgill a magnificent conversa-

tionalist. Indeed, he is more engaging in these letters written more than 35 years ago than many intellectuals alive to day — whatever their "modalities" of discourse.

This collection was first published in 1948. Since then, however, new material has been found concerning Pickersgill's last days in various camps and prisons, and this, together with the public's revived interest in the secret history of the Second World War, justifies a new book. In the nature of things, Pickersgill's letters end with his return to France, and his last "letter" is an inscription on the wall of his cell at Fresnes:

Pickersgill Canadian army officer	26.6.43
trial and condemnation not	7.7.43
yet and see	8.7.43

It is now known that after Fresnes Pickersgill was sent to Rawicz in Poland, and returned unexpectedly to Paris early in March, 1944. There, at 3 bis Place des États-Unis, the Gestapo offered him unlimited privileges if he would take part in a *Funkspiel* (literally, "radio game") against the British. Pickersgill's reply was to kill

one of his guards with a wine bottle, and, knocking another unconscious, go on a rampage that almost succeeded in liberating most of the prisoners. In the ensuing gun fight, Pickersgill was wounded four times and suffered a broken arm. The Gestapo, still hoping they might be able to "turn" Pickersgill (or perhaps they regarded him as a challenge), hospitalized him and nursed him back to a kind of health. But D-Day ended the *Funkspiel* and Pickersgill was sent to Buchenwald on Aug. 8, 1944, 12 days before the liberation of Paris.

Malraux, writing of death in *L'Espoir*, said that it transforms life into destiny — the romantic view of a poseur. Before his execution Pickersgill (with 1.5 of his comrades) underwent 30 hours of torture. The method of execution was strangulation by piano wire strung over a butcher's meat hook, one end of which was embedded in the cell wall. The Nazis, boasting a sense of history, had built Buchenwald around Goethe's favourite oak tree. This is a timely book. □

Epistle-packing Stella

John Mills conducts a novel by correspondence, invoking a rogue and his unusually dutiful daughter

by Susan Leslie

Skevington's Daughter, by John Mills. Oberon Press, \$15 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 253 9) and 56.95 papa (ISBN 0 88750 254 7).

DEAR FRANCIS SKEVINGTON:

I have long pondered the wisdom of disturbing you with this sort of letter. You have languished in (perhaps undeserved) obscurity this past century and I hesitate to penetrate your gloomy repose with my small questions. And, indeed, given your history of sodomy, fraud, sadism, and incest, I'm sure that there is much else in purgatory to occupy you.

Nevertheless, at the risk of interrupting your delicious sufferings, I felt I must address to you certain enquiries regarding a novel entitled *Skevington's Daughter*. Since the Skevington of the title is you, and the daughter your own beloved Stella, I deemed it essential that you peruse and comment on this new work of Canadian fiction.

You appear in this novel as a 19th-century travel writer and, according to the author, you carried on with your daughter Stella (and numerous other persons) during a trip to Mexico in 1840. The action of *Skevington's Daughter*, such as it is, revolves around a 20th-century academic dispute over the possession of some letters allegedly written by Stella during that trip. I'm afraid that Stella spared no details in describing what transpired between you.

The author of *Skevington's Daughter*, by the way, is a professor of English at a small university on the West Coast of Canada, a Mr. John Mills. How he came into possession of Stella's letters (if indeed he ever did) remains quite mysterious. In fact, it remains quite mysterious as to whether you, Stella, and the letters ever existed at all. Mr. Mills introduces you in the same breath as such genuine writers as "Scrambles" Whympere, and I confess he had me guessing for a while. And in the final pages of the book, he leaves us with what is so "ambiguous" a

statement (as you, Francis, might say) that I can only repeat it to you in the hope that you will accept this ambiguous condition between invention and history:

To the accusation that I have invented (the Skevingtons), I would riposte with a sneer that if they never existed then they ought to have done and that in any case they do exist now. In this sense life always is created by art. But in plenty of other sense, of course, life is created by nothing of the kind.

So there you have it.

In any case, Mr. Skevington, I was wondering if you could illuminate a few puzzling aspects of this book. You have shown a keen appreciation of literature in the past; your letters to Mr. Wordsworth show a fine literary sensibility at work. Could you, then, explain to me why this book is all letters?

Further, do you think you could explain why Mr. Mills found it necessary himself to write a letter at the end of the book? You see, the final entry in this collection of

non-narrative narrative devices is a letter from John Mills to his publisher (a London name and address that may well have been his laundry's, or his lover's back in England). This concluding letter discusses the point of all the previous letters on sex, evil, failure, and the rack of middle-aged lust. And the letter (and the book) end with a quotation from s. Kierkegaard (a near contemporary of yours and a self-confessed seducer too):

A man wishes to write a novel in which one of his characters goes mad; while working on it he himself goes mad by degrees, and finishes kin the first person.

Mills qualifies this quote by expressing the hope that "Kierkegaard proves as wrong about this as he proves tight about so much else."

Well, Mr. Skevington, I am enclosing a copy of the book so that you can make your own judgements about the state of Mr. Mills' mind. Frankly, I think he still has all his marbles. He is splenetic, bad-tempered, lickerish (and quite possibly libellous when it comes to the caricatured academics who are the second-rank performers in this scenario). But mad... I think not: Mr. Mills seems entirely in control of his characters and their epistolary tendencies.

He does, however, have his irrational or excessive moments. For example, Mr. Mills' affection for heartless young women is remarkably enduring. Linda, the modem doppelganger for your Stella, is every bit as deliberate, cold, and naive as the young Ms. Skevington. Such women bring out the most vicious aspects of Mr. Mills' satirical bent. Yet paradoxically, he reserves for Stella and Linda his most approving adjectives. Everyone else — policemen, professors, children, young me, and older women — suffers greatly at his hands. Mr. Mills is very funny, and funny, I suppose, is rarely forgiving.

In sum, Mr. Skevington, I would appreciate your comments on the text. I would, of course, like to know whether Stella's account of your incestuous involvement is accurate. I would also like to know, in passing, just how the trip from Veracruz to Jalapa was; such a famous journey deserves to be chronicled by you. Besides, Mr. Mills says that Skevington's Daughter is just an introductory offer, as it were, to a more extensive biographical work on the Skevingtons père et fille, and I would like to know whether you consider Mr. Mills capable of a complete treatment of your experiences.

But most important of all, I would like to know whether you, like Mr. Mills, believe that evil is something more definite than simple carelessness and whether, indeed, it is the ingenious young who do the devil's work on this earth. Does the "core of our human nature lie in our wilder and more violent impulses"?

Perhaps 400 words by April 15th?

I remain, sir,
Your most obedient and humble servant,
s. Leslie. □

The ramifications of UDI and other devices

Chain Reaction, by Gordon Pape and Tony Aspler, Penguin, 265 pages. \$9.95 cloth (ISBN 0 14 21102).

By ANDREW ALLENTUCK

NOVELS OF POLITICAL intrigue succeed to the degree that they make plausible the improbable. By that standard Chain Reaction, a speculative essay on the possible future causes and results of a unilateral declaration of independence by Quebec, is a substantial success indeed. Authors Pape and Aspler have produced a provocative, suspenseful, and believable thriller. Imaginative and well-written, it should be a best seller in Canada and the United States.

Set a few years in the future, perhaps 1980, Chain Reaction depicts the Parti Québécois still vacillating about the means by which it will act on its successful independence referendum and carry out the mandate to separate. The federal government has been unable to placate the party and has lost control of the province. A misguided English Canadian, Kevin Reilly, assassinated the Premier of Quebec. Reilly's family, Catholics from Northern Ireland, had come 'to Canada to escape persecution. Now, as an anglophone in a hostile land, he sees the linguistic nationalism issue almost in sectarian terms and his bullets threaten to make Quebec Canada's Ulster.

The leadership of the Parti Québécois will fall to one of two contenders in the provincial cabinet: Jean-Claude Belmont, a gradualist and moderate; or Guy Lacroix, a radical demagogue impatient to get on with separation. Aware that an independent Quebec would weaken its northern frontier and could even become a dependency of foreign powers, the U.S. begins to develop contingency plans to force Ottawa to stop Lacroix and, if all else fails, to permit an American invasion to eliminate the separatist government.

Pape and Aspler ask important questions and use representative situations and proxy interests to answer them. If separatism does not serve the financial interest of the people of Quebec, then whose economic interests does it serve? In Chain Reaction the prime mover is the government of France, acting covertly to secure Quebec's uranium for its own nuclear projects. Unable to buy sufficient supplies on the world market and reluctant to depend on the willingness of the Canadian government to supply uranium, France seeks to make Quebec an independent client state. Lacroix, the impatient separatist, is their man. Backed by a British



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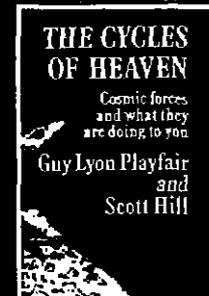
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multinational company equally eager to mine and sell Quebec's uranium, Lacroix fears neither Ottawa nor Washington, for he believes that he can ultimately either buy Washington's friendship with resources or obtain the aid of France and the Soviet Union as guarantors of his province's independence.

As the political developments unfold, Montreal *Chronicle* reporter Taylor Redfern seeks the story behind the assassination. Interviewing Reilly's family, he discovers the trail of a *femme fatale* who, as the daughter of the French agent orchestrating the moves toward independence, has also become a saboteur within the camp of the gradualist. Belmont. Redfern is the functional protagonist of the novel, and the critical link among the disparate subplots.

Whether Canada EM control her own destiny is perhaps the most important issue *Chain Reaction* raises. Rpe and Aspler apparently think not. Unable to bribe or pressure the PQ leadership into remaining in confederation. Ottawa cannot rely on military power to maintain Canadian sovereignty over the province. Heavily staffed with Quebecers, the Canadian Armed Forces' loyalties are badly divided. The U.S., previously acquiescent in Canadian moves toward economic self-determination, will not tolerate any Canadian solution detrimental to its vital interests. The President fears an independent Quebec would be another Cuba, only larger, closer, and more deadly.

Thus the prognosis: Quebec separation will never be a reality. for the U.S. will, if necessary, stop it by force of arms. Were separation to occur as Pape and Aspler describe it, they are probably tight. But if it happened in a gradual fashion, they might be wrong. The Russians could, after all, have considerable freedom of movement in a province fully responsible for its own security forces yet nominally within confederation. Quebec could become much more closely allied to France even within confederation, though such an alliance might be distasteful to the pious Québécois who remember that France abandoned their pays for two centuries after Montcalm's defeat.

Chain Reaction is a novel of plot. Like Frederick Forsyth's *Day of the Jackal*, it focuses vest political processes in the action of a few men. People are sketched briskly and efficiently. If *Chain Reaction* lacks the depth of character analysis one finds in John Le Carré's work, it is, by way of compensation, easier to get into and swifter to read.

Pape and Aspler have used prose that is admirably functional and occasionally powerful. They wrote to the requirements of their myriad plots and subplots. We never linger in a scene after the essential events have occurred. The reader perceives through intellect, insights building as fast as one scene cuts to the next. The technique is successful and, with only minor adjustments, the novel could become a motion-picture thriller. As a book, *Chain Reaction* is compelling reading. □

Tattered totem, torn metaphor

Dark Must Yield, by Dave Godfrey, Press Porcépic, 190 pages, \$12 cloth (ISBN 0 88878 100 8) and 56.95 paper (ISBN 0 88878 1016).

Hanging Threads, by W. Gunther Plaut, Lester & Orpen, 157 pages, \$8.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919630 99 5).

By WAYNE GRADY

DAVE GODFREY's book will please those who liked what he was saying 17 years ago and believe it still needs to be said today. Nine of the 15 stories have been published before, some as many as five times and as long ago as 1961, when Godfrey was one of what Frank Davey still calls "the new wave of literary and economic nationalists."

Godfrey's best-known story, "The Hard-Headed Collector," appeared in *Tamarack* in 1966. was the last story in *Death Goes Better With Coca Cola* (1967) and is the first story in *Dark Must Yield*. Despite the sense it gives of walking into the middle of a novel, it is the focal story of both collections. A group of mytbii artisans set out from the Queen Charlotte Islands (British Columbia's enchanted isles, separated from the mainland by Hecate Strait and home of the Haida Indians, Susan Musgrave, et al.) and travel east to the Maritimes to collect something called Eggsdrull, presumably a totem. Along the way they encounter resistance, temptation, and rebellion and the leader, Piet Catogas, arrives sans companions, castrated, and years late. He cannot perform the seven magic feats ("Shape the axe, sing its points, engrave its shaft," and so forth), is given a job in the lumberyard instead, and dies a week later. The main narrative is interspersed with an italicized substory about an American, Hirschorn, who became "attracted to the possibilities of Canada," made a fortune in Ontario uranium and Alberta gas speculations, and is donating a valuable art collection to the National Gallery in Washington. The Lord giveth and the Canadians giveth away.

"The Women Whose Child Fell From the Tower" is the last story in the book and, since it also is about our neglecting what we ought to hold most dear, makes a fitting bookend. A Toronto *ingénue*, daughter of the city's ruling class, marries an ambitious Italo-Canadian bricklayer who makes a fortune in Cabbagetown speculations but loses his soul. She leaves him, starts a little flowershop — her version of the Eggsdrull legend — and casually lies to her lover that her husband is trying to get custody of their daughter. The lover sets legal wheels in motion that may eventually send the daugh-

ter back to the Italians, but we aren't told if that happens, and aren't made particularly anxious to find out.

Neither character can engage our sympathies for 11 years, in the case of Piet Catogas, nor even for 23 pages, as with the *ingénué*. Godfrey seems to have run out of steam, to be listlessly flogging the half-dead horse of anti-Americanism. But he can write well — "Gossip: The Birds That Flew, the Bids That Fell" (1964) is much more praiseworthy than "The Hard-Headed Collector" — and no doubt our national wounds still need the salt.

W. Gunther Plaut is a German-born Jewish lawyer who went to the U.S. to become a rabbi in 1935, and since 1961 has been Senior Rabbi of Toronto's Holy Blossom Temple. He is a past-president of World Federalists of Canada and the Canadian Jewish Congress, and is an Ontario Human Rights Commissioner. He has written 10 books (*Genesis, A Commentary; The Rise of Reform Judaism*), contributes a regular column to the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, and is at work on a comprehensive commentary on the Torah.

It is difficult to understand what prompted Rabbi Plaut to fiction. Perhaps hard at work on a commentary on ancient history, the exegetic urge spilled over to a commentary on modern history. But his plotting of the shock waves of the Holocaust amounts to neither historical nor literary insight: there are too many characters in his stories with the same upper-case background who don't know and never learn who they are. The title, taken from the last mixed metaphor in the book ("Human experience is not a mathematical equation. More often than not there will be hanging threads"), is too literally true of Plaut's prose. He ought to have gathered up a few of those threads and woven them into some kind of fictive fabric. Instead the stories lack direction, style, cohesion, and interest.

'There are no memorable characters, no memorable ideas — only yet another re-verboration from one memorable historical event. □

Joualling with Joyce

Don Quixote In Nighttown, by Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, translated hum the French by Sheila Fischman, Press Porcépic, 192 pages. \$10 cloth (ISBN 0 88878 080 x).

By JOAN HIND-SMITH

BEFORE NOW, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu has demonstrated his intense interest in other writers. *Jack Kerouac: A Chicken Essay* is an examination of the beat author who, Beaulieu argues, was more French Canadian than American and who was filled with the black despair that is a characteristic result of the Quebec culture. Beaulieu is looking not only for writers to emulate but also for brothers under the skin. His study of Kerouac is a search for a pattern that will illuminate his own dilemma.

The newly translated *Don Quixote in Nighttown*, winner of the Governor General's Award in 1975, draws on a myriad of masters and let us be clear that Beaulieu chooses only the best. He invokes in varying degrees Cervantes, Lowry, Joyce, Shakespeare, and the authors of "Genesis." It is Cervantes whose hem appears in the title and it is Don Quixote who gallops in near the end of the book carrying a woman about to give birth. The

child she bears is the new Quebec and it is stillborn.

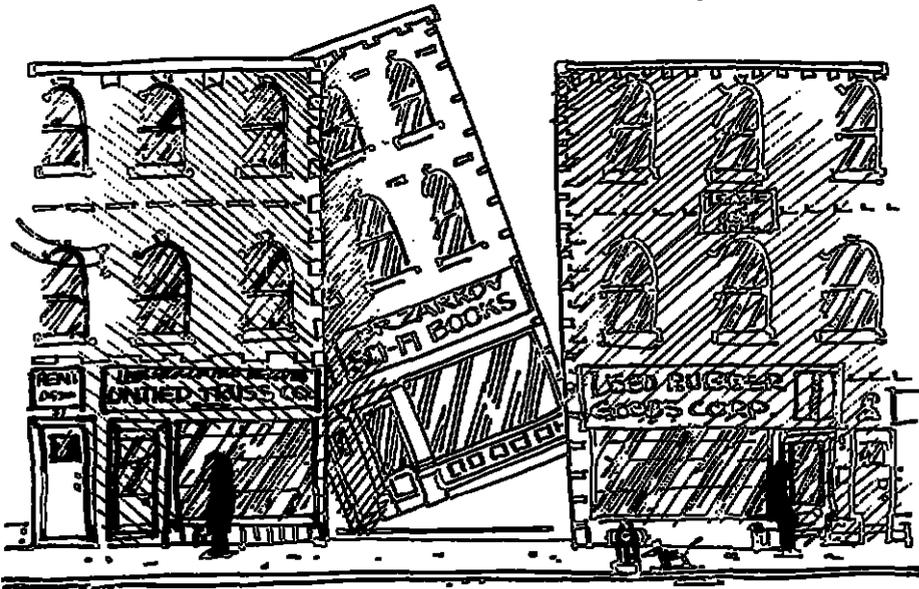
Even so, it is Joyce who dominates this novel. Beaulieu has given us a Quebec *Ulysses*. He has used Joyce's mode—the interior monologue and dream utilizing associations of language and associations of symbols, the 24-hour structure, the puns and jokes. Incidentally, the puns must have provided a formidable challenge to translator Sheila Fischman, even though Beaulieu uses *joual* with its English corruptions. She has done an expert job; idiom, which also poses translation difficulties, is handled so smoothly that the book reads as though it had originally been written in English.

However, it is not only for his technique that Beaulieu has chosen Joyce's model; he also equates Ireland with Quebec. And like Stephen Dedalus, it seems that Beaulieu's purpose is "to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race." *Don Quixote in Nighttown* expands to incorporate other peoples in search of themselves. Both the Spaniards of Cervantes's times and the Israelites under Jacob are identified with the Québécois.

What, then, does Beaulieu, using Joyce's form, have to say about Quebec? Nothing optimistic, in spite of the endearingly clownish ham. Abel Beauchemin. Signs of putrefaction proliferate in the early part of the novel. The death wish is strong in the hem who is rushed off to hospital, sure that he is dying and hoping that he is. No such luck, however, and the hospital staff, after a brusque and amused examination, sends him home. By extension, this is the wish for the death of old Quebec with its rotting traditions. Quebec will not die, however, and symbols of life like white butterflies batter Abel's eyes, terrifying him more than death. If Quebec will not die, what is to become of it with its decaying past? Abel's beloved and beautiful wife, Judith, who seems to be Quebec, apparently runs off to Florida — and it is the American culture that is perceived as corruptor and robber. Abel, the writer who cannot complete his novel, is told by the phantom Don Quixote: "Your present silence is a false one; it's not the work of one who has created a void within himself but of someone in whom the void has been created."

The way ahead and the words to create the conscience of the race remain uncertain. There is only a vast agony. A parade of Canadian writers — Ferron, Miron, Ducharme, Archibald Scott (is he a combination of Archibald Lampman and Duncan Campbell Scott?) pass unrecognized in the air above Rue Sainte-Catherine, and Don Quixote says: "We speak of green Ireland, of the Ireland in each of us that bleeds in our hearts like Anna Pluvia Plurabelle."

The triumph of the novel is that although Beaulieu works beautifully with symbol and archetype, he has been able to create a fully developed character in Abel Beauchemin. Abel is not as many-faceted as Leopold Bloom—this is a smaller book—but Abel lives. □



Plaster toads in the bush garden

Northrop Frye on Culture and Literature: A Collection of Review Essays, by Northrop Frye. edited by Robert D. Denham, University of Chicago Press, 264 pages, \$13 cloth (ISBN 0 226 26647 8).

By TOM ADAMOWSKI

MARIANNE MOORE once wrote that Poems were "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." Northrop Frye will not make even this concession to the "real." For his "archetypal critic," a poem is "not an imitation of nature" but "an imitation of other poems." Imaginary gardens with plaster-cast toads. What makes this collection of 21 review essays (from 1946 to 1960) so appealing is that it allows one to see Frye turn history, anthropology, and psychology into imaginary gardens.

In his review of Allen Tate's *The Forlorn Demon*, Frye, anticipating in 1953 the position of *Anatomy of Criticism*, warns that principles of criticism are not to be found in religion, metaphysics, psychology, or "social studies." In his introductory essay, the editor struggles manfully to defend Frye against the recurrent charge that his is a position that would seal criticism off from the world outside of literary studies; and Denham defends Frye quite well against the cruder varieties of this charge. But one is struck again and again by Frye's tactic of literary imperialism. Even as he seems to bow respectfully in the direction of anthropology (Frazier), history (Spengler and Toynbee), and psychology (Jung), Frye is actually just genuflecting low enough to pull the rug from under the feet of these representatives from other domains of knowledge whose work he has set out to review.

Not for Frye such a sweaty question as: "Do there historians, psychologists, and anthropologists tell us the truth about the West, history, the psyche, and myths?" Instead, he disarms the reader by asserting that he knows little about. For example, anthropology — and in that avowal of his "innocence," Frye finds all the moot he needs for his witty notion that Frazier is really doing "literary criticism." Nor does it "matter two pins" whether the ritual of which Frazier writes "ever had any historical existence or not." Toynbee, on the other hand, "does not really 'prove' anything." He offers "vision" and "imaginative total apprehension which can skip over the logical and sometimes even the Factual stage." As for Jung, his work, even if it may be "largely meaningless to most therapeutic psychologists," is "squarely within the orbit of literary criticism." One recalls that

to be within such an "orbit" is to circle round a "body" that does not rely on psychology for its principles.

One seems to see Frye holding the business end of a great vacuum cleaner, one that sucks into its canister of the Imagination (Frye's talismanic word) all the messy remnants of the work of Frazier, Toynbee, and Jung. Their work is to provide a "kind of grammar of the human imagination" when "it tries to express itself about the greatest mysteries ... of life and death and afterlife." Mystery indeed! Especially when those who provide the grammar are somehow absolved of the requirement that their hypotheses be adequate to the brute Facts of the Real.

There are also essays on strictly literary matters, on Beckett, Pound, Hemingway, Cervantes, Valéry, Graves, and others. The judgments made in these essays are always instructive, but the stakes are not as high as they are in the reviews of the various "grammarians." Exceptions might be made for the review of Valéry's *An of Poetry*, where Frye finds another critic for whom the Imaginary and the Real make an unhappy couple, and the review of Kenner's *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*. In the latter, Frye takes issue with Kenner's jibes at the Romantic movement and reminds one of how important to his work that period has always been. It is also amusing to read him on Robert Graves. Rival mythologists confront one another here: the Reviewer against the poet of the White Goddess; the Critic Who Sings of Many Myths against the Poet Who Sings Only of One.

Although the editor dilly-dally with Harry Levin's remark that Frye's *Anatomy* is his own *Golden Bough*, it is charming to see a circle being closed and to see Frye's own work absolved from the criterion that it correspond to the reality of literature. Spengler, Toynbee, and Frazier would have been amused. □

On top of our forms

Another Time, by Eli Mandel, Press Porcépic, 160 pages, \$15.00 cloth (ISBN 0 88878 076 1) and \$4.95 paper (ISBN 0 88878 077).

By ROSEMARY SULLIVAN

IN THE PREFACE to his new collection of critical essays *Another Time*, Eli Mandel writes about the way in which modern criticism in Canada has become a social and political instrument, assuming a "central role in the development of national consciousness" and "aspiring to the attainment of cultural coherence." He affirms these aspirations and yet he is uneasy because he sees that this approach

often involves a simplification. It confuses reality and fiction.

For Mandel, literature is mythology: literary forms are forms of fantasy, and literary landscapes are landscapes of the mind. Literature does not offer, nor should it seek to offer, objective or "realistic" records of place; such a theory leads to the "imitation of clichés and stereotypes about landscape and environment." Mandel gives sober advice to the Canadian critic. It is a mistake to claim historical and social validity for the worlds of fiction, and the writer's task is "not to write up the experience of the country but to articulate the forms of its fiction." He rejects the notion that there is a kind of "metaphysical or ontological force that enables a writer to identify a people;" and he is amused by the way in which a casual use of the definite article — the Canadian imagination — can "elevate Canadian writers to the position of Canada's unacknowledged constitutional historians." For Mandel the phenomenon of cultural identity is infinitely more subtle. Historical and social events are not the writer's primary concern; symbol is more important than circumstance, myth than fact; and the private psychic complex is more central than any collective identity, or physical frontier. In sum, cultural identity is not something mysteriously absorbed by the writer and then recorded. Indeed, it may be that identity is fictional, created by the literature. Mandel quotes Robert Kroetsch with approval: "We have no identity until someone tells our story; ... fiction makes us real."

It's a fascinating theory. It allows Mandel to examine Canadian literature within the context of the whole of modern literature, and to bring the theories of George Steiner, Susan Sontag, Borges, and others to bear on the discussion. It also carries a prescription: the writer's proper business is with the problems of language and Form.

It is important that Mandel's cautioning voice be heard in this period of literary nationalism; when the writer's quest for Canadian themes has become self-conscious. And he is right to point out that a Canadian writer inherits the whole of mythology, not just its Canadian variant. Margaret Laurence's use of biblical archetypes to shape her fiction is as convincing as any communion with Catharine Parr Trail. But in the end, as Mandel knows, it is not a question of either/or. As Atwood once put it, a writer writes from two directions: that of form, and that of mythology. Mandel himself speaks of a distinction between the nature of forms and their source or location. Look to the nature of forms and you enter the world of Fantasy and the ideal. But "even the most rigorously formal argument most finally admit the extent to which writing is local, particular, regional, and therefore, ... native in its content and interest." The important reflection is that the local or particular may not always be a geographic place but can equally be a psychic landscape and involve a disposition towards a world where psychic and physical

boundaries do not coincide. A writer may move from the direction of locus (Jack Hodgins for example) or from the direction of form (P. K. Page) but they meet in that free place where literature transforms the real.

If a writer can engage in a dialogue with his culture, so much the better for the quality of his own energy and commitment. Some of the confusion that attaches to this issue may come from the word "mythology." There are writers who seem to think of myths as tidy archetypal formulae, a mutative shorthand (i.e. flights into the wilderness, rebirth etc.) that can be given Canadian definition. But surely playing with myths as structural principles becomes a reductive game. To paraphrase Ortega y Gasset, mythology involves the thorough transformation of reality through a habit of metaphorical projection where the richness is to be found in language.

This is something Mandel knows well. In his criticism he demands and provides a model for a creative and energetic criticism that looks to the forms of language as the critic's proper concern. All of the essays in *Another Time* are interesting. The best are possibly "Ethnic Voice in Canadian Writing" which explores the dilemma of the writer who finds himself on the interface of two cultures; "Modern Canadian Poetry" which sees the poet as engaged in a dialectic between an aesthetics of time and an aesthetics of space; and "Writing West:

On the Road to Wood Mountain": in which Mandel uses his own experience to understand the state of mind that defines the Western writer living in a tension between place and culture and trying to write himself into existence. The last work is particularly rewarding because in it we see Mandel as poet and critic and we discover that the enterprises are necessarily interdependent. □

Urbanity and mean streets

The Blue Sky, by David Donnell, Black Moss Press, 76 pages, \$3.95 paper (ISBN 0 88753 031 1).

Ragged Horizons, by Peter Trower, McClelland & Stewart, 95 pages, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 8592 3).

Anima, or Swann Grown Old, by George Woodcock, Black Moss Press, 32 pages, \$2.00 paper (ISBN 0 88753 037 0).

By LEN GASPARINI

PROLIFICNESS is a foreign word to David Donnell. To the fiercely competitive book-spar poets (and there are quite a

slew of them) he must seem like an anachronism or an anomaly. There is a gap of 17 years between his first book of poems and *The Blue Sky*, his latest collection. But in spite of that, and judging from the forceful quality of these new poems, the inspiration has certainly not been held in abeyance; in fact, the poems more than compensate for the overly long delay.

The style of David Donnell's poetry is urbane, witty, and singularly objective. He knows how to evoke a mood with an image that lingers, as in "Stepfathers": "In the back of your mind, he is always lying/on top of your mother." Sometimes he lets the metaphysical intrude on the reel, and when this happens, a simple truth becomes subtle and filtered with new meaning. "The Other Singing" is an excellent example:

To be joyful in time,
conscious of it,
that is not easy;
our bodies hurt
at the thought
of it passing

Donnell also exhibits an exciting intellectualism in his work that is neither dry nor pedantic. He can dwell on "nothingness and being" with the same emotional intensity as he can on a lady friend, "running into the white breakers, your body already darker/than the sand" in the south of Sicily. He moves easily between these two disparate elements, combining them with



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well-oiled imagery and a rhythmic syntax. Even his social stance is powerfully ironic, as in "The Tenants," "Queenstreet Animal," and several others.

The Blue Sky is a splendid book. I hope that we don't have to wait another 17 years for the next one.

Peter Trower's *Ragged Horizons* is (to quote three words from Sandburg's *Chicago*) a "stormy, husky, brawling" book. Peter Trower is (to quote Al Purdy in his Introduction) "a poet of mean streets, logging camps, pubs, and the immense blue and green sprawl of British Columbia." In other words, he is a regular Paul Bunyan. Hyperbole aside, Trower's book does exert a tremendous vitality, and his poems, though muscle-bound, make for some mighty healthy reading. And I'm not being facetious either.

Trower writes about life, people, trees and mountains in a style reminiscent of Sandburg's. There are no aesthetic hang-ups or brooding decadence in his poetry. He looks you straight in the eye, and speaks frankly.

Be still love, the ghost moves in me again—
the whatever—
the itch without a name.
It has woken like a fox
in the dumb passages
to make me make music in the ashen time.

Yes, the voice is strong, but the poetic diction is often inundated with clichés, pathetic fallacies, and spasmodic word-jams that resemble Kerouac on benzedrine. "Wet Testament" is an unintended parody of itself, and so is "Appointed Rounds." A bit of careful revision would help immensely. It needs more forethought and less play.

All in all, Trower has produced a fairly good book. It has its flaws, but so do great trees.

There is one thing that George Woodcock is not — and that is a poet. As an editor, historian, and anthologist, I hold him in high esteem, but when it comes to poetry, well, I have to look the other way. This latest pamphlet from his prolific pen is utter gibberish, and what relevance it has to the soul. "Swann grown old," or Marcel Proust, is beyond me. I think Black Moss Press shouldn't kowtow to a name. □

The hack who kept his métier running

Taxi: True Stories from Behind the Wheel, by John Johnson, Macmillan. 176 pages, \$9.95 doth (ISBN 0 7705 1654 8).

By PHIL SURGUY

THIS IS THE second book we've had in recent years about taxi-driving in a major Canadian city. The first was Helen Potrebenko's 1975 novel *Taxi!*, the story of a female driver in Vancouver; and the present volume is a non-fiction account of some of the things John Johnson saw, heard, and had happen to him during the time he spent driving cab in Toronto.

Taxi! starts out by promising some superb fiction, an ironic study of a miserable, masochistic woman who has lucked into a job that perpetually confirms her belief that all women are victims and all men vicious swine. But it's soon apparent that it is largely Ms. Potrebenko — not her main character, Shannon — who is speaking to us, and that the stew of Marxist and feminist "analysis" that muddies the book is (rather than being a device in the service of the author's fiction or the product of any real thought) simply a handy rationalization for what one strongly suspects is the author's own, as well as Shannon's, self-perpetuating misery.

The people who use Shannon's cab are all ciphers condemned to wait, stifled in Potrebenko's pigeonholes, until some mythical revolution comes along to make them (or more likely their grandchildren) worthy of her attention. Johnson, on the other hand, knows his passengers are already as human as they are ever going to get in this lifetime, and for the most part he sees them all compassionately — except the drunks; in fact both driven report that ferrying drunks is the worst part of the job,

and friendly drunks are as smelly and tiresome as the mean ones.

To be sure, probably not one of Johnson's passengers ever automatically assumed he was a whore: and, as opposed to the one in two Shannon has to endure, probably not one in 100 felt it necessary to ask if he was married. But Johnson went everywhere else Shannon goes: he too carried more than his share of the disgusting, tragic, wretched, and evil side of humanity: he too was insulted and degraded, made to feel like nothing by vulgar, imperious customers. And yet, in spite of all that, he was still always open to the funny, poignant and crazily heroic aspects of life that he encountered on his job.

His fellow drivers, men and women, are also portrayed as distinct individuals (Shannon ignores the women and, where the men are concerned, sees only pigs). Some of Johnson's driven are refugees from other walks of life, others are only moonlighters. Quite a few just fell into the job and were trapped long before they realized what was happening to them. And many are ordinary working stiff who, rather than the tyranny of a lime dock, prefer what they see as the freedom driving cab gives them, though most have to work 70-odd hours a week to make a decent living.

However, though he is much kinder to the human race, Johnson's book is still not satisfying. On the surface there is nothing glaringly wrong with *Taxi*. The author is obviously a decent, intelligent man, but we learn little more than that about him. He has placed himself too far away from his material. We don't really know what it means to him; and, in the end, all we have is a string of short newspaper features. Certainly all of them are interesting, but we are left without the complete experience one expects from a book, a sense of the material's importance.

So, for all its faults and inadequacies, and no matter how much one may long to boot Shannon/Potrebekko's ass or buy her a lifetime membership at Arthur Murray's, *Taxi!* is always a more interesting book than *Taxi*. *Taxi!* is a presentation of one person's universe; the events are happening to someone. *Taxi*, however, is about no one special. As a result, the final stay, a description of the robbery and subsequent hospitalization that convinced Johnson he'd be better off doing something else, has no more and no less impact than the succession of anecdotes that came before it.

Clues to how a story like Johnson's might be presented with maximum impact can be found in a very successful book that appeared a few years ago: *Report from Engine Co. 82*, a non-fiction account of the whole life of Dennis Smith, a fireman in New York City. It is whole lot, regardless of what one may think of them, that are the essential foundations of all fiction and any non-fiction that hopes to be anything more than a superficial report on the way people live. □

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A fistful of dolours

Dancers at Night, by David Adams Richards. Oberon Press, 149 pages, \$15 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 262 8) and \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 263 6).

By GERALD LAMPERT

WHO KNOWS? Maybe within the next few years we'll have an academic meeting in Kapuskasing to choose the 100 most-important Canadian short stories written in the last couple of decades. Certainly there are a growing number of short-fiction writers v/h/o deserve more attention (and more readers) than they've had. Some authors come to mind quickly — Laurence, Engel, Gallant, Munroe, now Jack Hodgins, to name a few almost at random. John Metcalfe. Jay Teitel, why aren't you

GERALD LAMPERT

THE SAD NEWS of Gerald Lampert's sudden death from a heart attack at the age of 54 reached us a week or so after he submitted this review. The Canadian literary community, particularly those in it who are or were neophyte writers, has cause to mourn. Gerry Lampert helped to found the League of Canadian Poets and, through organized reading tours, ensured that the poets' voices were heard across the land. He was the director of the much-needed Summer Writers' Workshop held each August at the U of T. And last winter he organized a highly successful two-week retreat for creative writers at a Northern Ontario lodge. He will be remembered with warmth and gratitude.

publishing more? Others under-rated are George McWhirter, Andreas Schroeder, Elizabeth Brewster. And now there's a new writer to watch: David Adams Richards.

I say "to watch" because while I admire and enjoy his engrossing style; his range of characters and story lines are narrow. My guess is that his points of view will expand.

Each story is a gem. The language is clean, rhythmic, pure. His narrative moves. He creates the reality of the Atlantic-province landscape as Hemingway created the North Michigan woods. He defines his people sharply with a few lines of gut dialogue. Their fates are inevitable.

My reservations? Inevitable also means predictable. If you read the five stories without a time gap between them, you'll notice he uses only one mould, one vision in all five. In each story. I feel the brutality, the poverty, economic and cultural, of the isolation in small towns and small farms, that results in inbreeding of a narrow range of acceptable, blended-in personalities.

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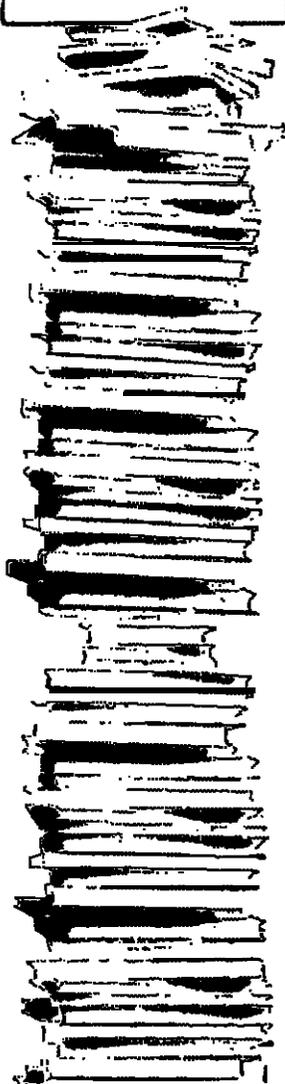
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Richards projects universal suffering but he has invented men and women who all brood and act the same way. Unless he juggles his own philosophies, he'll end up repeating clichés he himself has coined.

The characters sing snatches of Irish folk songs. They're morosely boisterous, prone to drinking and violence as the only solution to their frustrations. Sex is an act without emotion. They delight in vicious gossip. They taunt disadvantaged underdogs. A priest whose parishioners are polite to him because of what he's supposed to represent turns to drink and succumbs to his obsession with sex. Not love; sex. A hulk of a man is fired because he's a dangerous brute. He rushes off to batter a man he has never met because it's rumoured that the man may be a worthy opponent. And so on. No generosity, no love, no lightness.

Richards' characters are inarticulate, almost as if they were afraid to think. Guilt-ridden sinners with sin as the only entertainment. Almost slow-witted in their inflexibility. He's such a good writer that everything rings true. But it's a narrow truth. The publisher's biography of Richards says he has travelled to Europe and Canada's West. If this is his experience of New Brunswick, I wonder why he returned. And if this is his experience wherever he travelled, it's too scary for me. In a single story, it's dynamite. Five dirges in a row is too much. The echoes weaken with each bounce. □

IN BRIEF

GIVEN THE Philby case and the disclosures of the CIA's "destabilization" program in Chile, it is difficult to call any tale of international intrigue improbable. In the Cold War, we have learned, anything is possible. Nonetheless, John Ballem's latest novel, *The Moon Pool* (M & S, 236 pages, \$12.95) is a thriller more dubious than it is thrilling.

Operating out of Cuba, the "Export the Revolution Department" of the Russian intelligence network plans to hijack the Canadian oil drillship *Polar Probe*. The operative, a "mole" the Russians have been keeping on tap for years, is Hugh Farren, successful Vancouver lawyer. Farren convinces the president of the United Native Brotherhood that the freedom of his people can be won by seizing the drillship and blackmailing the Canadian government with the threat of a massive oil spill. Farren, of course, has not told the entire truth. But neither have the Russians told Farren every thing. As the plot unwinds, the insidious intentions of the "Export the Revolution Department" become clear. The book ends with a frantic shoot-out during which the Arctic hangs in the balance.

Marred by stilted dialogue, *The Moon Pool* is populated with walking stereotypes. The women are beautiful. The lawyer is handsome. There is even a Russian named Vronsky who says such things as: "Are you telling me the black one is dead? And that he

did not complete his mission?" Unbelievable characters will undermine any plot. By the time a maid in an Inuvik hotel turns out to be a Russian agent, it is apparent that this plot needs all the support it can get. It is unfortunate that Ballem, a man who understands and cares about the Arctic, should cloud his observations with his shortcomings as a novelist. □

— DAVID MACFARLANE

The case of the second-class corpse

The Life and Death of Anna Mae Aquash, by Johanna Brand, James Lorimer & Co., illustrated, 192 pages. \$12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88862 152 3) and \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88862 153 1).

By NEVILLE THOMPSON

ON A MILD DAY in February, 1976, a rancher building a fence on the Pine Ridge Indian Reserve in South Dakota saw a human corpse at the bottom of a steep precipice close to the highway. He telephoned the police despatcher 100 miles away and within a couple of hours about a dozen sheriffs deputies, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) police, and FBI agents had arrived to observe the body of the young Indian woman, search the area, and take photographs. Her clothes were intact and there was no obvious evidence of foul play; the bits of hair down the embankment indicated that she had gone off the cliff. There was no identification on the body.

A perfunctory autopsy the next day concluded that the woman had died of exposure and speculated that she had become drunk and fallen asleep. The only sign of physical injury was a small cut on the head. Little effort was made to identify the body but the pathologist cut off the hands at the wrists, put them in a preserving jar, and gave them to an attendant from the FBI. A week later the undertaker was ordered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to proceed with the burial, even though there was no official death certificate or burial permit. No records were kept of the burial.

A few days later news reports announced that the fingerprint analysis by the FBI in Washington had established the identity of the woman as Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, a Micmac Indian from Nova Scotia, an activist in the radical American Indian Movement, a veteran of the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973 and a fugitive from the FBI since the previous November.

The Pine Ridge Reserve, which had been in turmoil for the last three years, was swept with rumours that Anna Mae Aquash had died by violent means. One woman who would have recognized the body claimed

that she had been refused by the undertaker, who said that he was under orders to show it only to "authorized" persons. A second autopsy, initiated by the FBI, revealed that Aquash had been killed by a bullet shot close to the back of the head, perhaps after rape or an expert beating that would leave no bruises. No traces of alcohol or drugs were discovered.

The nature of the first autopsy, the mutilation of the body (the hands may have been sent to Washington by mistake), and the manner of the burial all suggest an attempt to prevent the identification of Anna Mae Aquash, who was well known on the reserve, and the investigation of her death. Not much has been done since to establish responsibility for the murder or execution. The FBI, which has given every evidence of cover-up, certainly had good reason to want the woman who had led the protests against broken treaties and other injustices out of the way. So did the goon squad of the mixed-blood Indians who controlled the reserve through a spoils system and terror. But she may have been killed by her former friends in the American Indian Movement who had come to suspect her of being an FBI agent. Until there is a real investigation and the FBI records are examined, however, there can be no certainty in the matter. Our Department of External Affairs, which should be pressing for a better exploration of the death of a Canadian citizen, has so far remained complacently satisfied with the official U.S. explanation. This may be owing in part to indifference to the fate of a poor, radical Indian who caused trouble in the U.S., but it probably owes more to an unwillingness to disturb the hand-holding relationship between Canadian and U.S. law-enforcement agencies. The news media in this country have so far not shown much interest. If this book stimulates some action in either quarter it will have achieved its principal aim.

Despite the tide, this is in no sense a biography of Anna Mae Aquash, an appealing figure whose career serves as an illustration of relations between white society and government and Indians in North America. The merest outline is given of her struggle with poverty, broken marriages, and fragmentary education, her sophisticated comprehension of Indian traditions, folk lore, and crafts and her dedication to raising the consciousness of her people. She was obviously a remarkable woman, whose brief life is worth investigating further for its own sake. But she disappears from the book for whole chapters as the author describes the activities of the FBI, the BIA, the history of Indian treaties, Wounded Knee and the concentration camp-like atmosphere of the Indian reserves. No doubt things are a bit better ordered in this country, but Anna Mae Aquash saw no national boundaries in the condition of the Indians.

A fundamental issue of this book, not treated in any depth, is the complicated question of the extraterritorial responsibility of governments for their citizens. Certainly governments should always assure that their

citizens are well treated within the laws of other countries and protest these laws when they believe them to be unjust. But these who engage in the militant politics of other countries run special and greater risks than those travelling for business or pleasure. If governments are to assume a high level of responsibility, it is not illogical for them to impose restrictions on the travel and activities of citizens abroad. None of this is to condone the Department of External Affairs' supine failure to seek a satisfactory explanation of Anna Mae Aquash's death. But if the Canadian government had requested her repatriation for her own safety, it would have been widely resented, not least by Anna Mae Aquash. Nevertheless, if she had been deported, as was threatened by the FBI, she might be alive today, though no doubt a thorn in the flesh of our own government. □

Doing the time of his life

Go Boy! Memoirs of a Life Behind Bars, by Roger Caron. McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 250 pages, \$10.95 cloth (ISBN 07 082335 1).

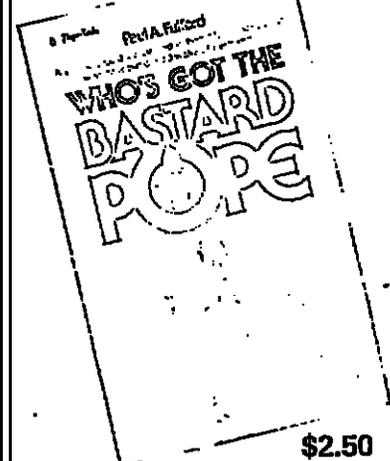
By LINDA PYKE

JOHN HERBERT. Don Bailey. Peter Madden. Andreas Schroeder. With varying degrees of success, these men have transformed the raw material of personal experience within Canada's notorious penitentiary system into the written word. Indeed, like so many Ancient Mariners driven to recount their dark histories, prisoners in tiny cells a mare *usque ad mari* are currently working on memoirs. Not to worry: it's better than bashing in the heads of fellow inmates; and for a few, it may ultimately provide them with an honest career.

Roger Caron, God know, needs an honest career. At present serving a term in Collins Bay Penitentiary, Kingston, for bank robbery, jailbreak, and parole violations, he has spent more than half a-lifetime behind bars. He has been incarcerated in some of our most brutal institutions — the old Don Jail, the Ontario Reformatory at Guelph, the Kingston Pen. Dorchester, Saint Vincent de Paul, Stony Mountain, Penetanguishene, Millhaven. He was in Kingston during the 1971 riot, and was forced to run the gauntlet, clubbed by guards, at the opening of Millhaven. Caron's memoirs are therefore interesting not only because they give us a portrait of the so-called hardened criminal but also because they illustrate our shameful treatment of prisoners from the punishing 1950s to the rehabilitative 1970s.

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On Oct. 17, 1954, Roger Caron, then a terrified 16-year-old, found himself in the Guelph Reformatory, convicted of breaking and entering. At first perceived as redeemable, he was transferred to Brampton where he almost killed a bullying inmate (to protect his friend), escaped, was caught and returned to Guelph.

Laboratory animals can easily be conditioned: they learn that certain actions result in painful stimuli, and so they learn to avoid those actions. Roger Caron, it seems, was never able to make a connection — instinctively or rationally — between behaviour and consequences. Back at Guelph he was paddled until his buttocks bled; he endured solitary with sewer rats and taunting guards as his companions. At one point, he was blackmailed into undergoing the psychiatrist's experimental "gas treatments" and almost died. In spite of this, Caron remained bad and mad, getting into fights, plotting escapes.

A "go-boy" is an escapee, and escaping was Caron's favourite sport. Whenever he managed to get away, instead of keeping a low profile, he would commit foolish crimes and be recaptured. Parole made no difference: he would seek out old prison buddies or go to a pod hall and pick out ex-cons by the tattoo on their hands. With his partners he graduated to the status of bank robber but, when he writes of his crimes, he always manages to sound more naive than hardened. At one point, although trying to go straight and living with a woman, he felt compelled to prove his manhood and provide his lady with luxuries. On his last job, he did not even have the heart to use anything more than a toy gun.

Caron claims recidivism occurs because of the need to justify all those lost and empty years. Therefore criminals keep aiming for that one big score. Caron never made it. His acts, to be blunt, were often more bumbling than grand. But when he recounts the commission of a larger crime, he does so with a certain pleasure, quoting his favourite headlines.

The prose is evocative throughout and one becomes engrossed in scenes of suspense, even though recognizing the futility of it all. What is lacking is insight; the author tends to make excuses. He says he always was a fool, and blames his Father's questionable morality for his own. It is unarguable that he had strong violent tendencies, often self-directed, the source of which remain a mystery to him. The system did nothing but shuttle him back and forth from prison to prison, administer a few shock treatments and throw him in the hole. The wonder is that, even acting as his own worst enemy, he managed to survive.

Go Boy! is in turn sensitive, superficial, exciting, violent, boring, self-indulgent, pathetic, absurd. Reading it, one feels frustration: in a world without good guys, Caron kept making the same mistakes. Soon he will be paroled again, only this time as a published author. Perhaps that will make the difference. □

A lawyer to be spared

Essays on the Constitution: Aspects of Canadian Law and Politics. by Frank R. Scott, U of T Press, 422 pages, \$25 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 2238 3) and \$7.50 paper (ISBN 0 8020 8297 0).

By DENIS SMITH

THERE CANNOT BE much doubt about the identity of the scholar who has had the greatest influence on the tone and content of reformist legislation touching upon fundamental freedoms and the general welfare in Canada since the 1930s. He is almost certainly the protean constitutional lawyer and man of letters, the former Dean of the Faculty of Law at McGill University. Frank R. Scott: a civilized man who typically asserts that his most valuable work has been his poetry. His influence on Canadian public life over 40 years, whether expressed through his scholarly papers, his teaching, the League for Social Reconstruction, topical political commentary in *The Canadian Form*, or his work as a member of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, has been immense and persistent. If it were possible to locate in English-speaking Canada the sort of humane moral and intellectual leadership offered to French-speaking Canada by André Laurendeau and Claude Ryan in the editorial pages of *Le Devoir*, Frank Scott would be our closest approximation.

To complement his monographs, poetry, and separately published papers, Frank Scott has now gathered together in *Essays on the Constitution* his leading articles written between 1928 and 1971 on constitutional law, civil liberties, and Federalism. The collection has deservedly won the Governor General's Award this year.

Scott's scholarly style is clear, unadorned, systematic, a trifle astringent. It possesses the best qualities of legal thoroughness and none of the common faults of legal obscurantism. Behind the spare language of reason lies a restrained but passionate set of moral convictions. (Both the restraint and the passion are probably as much the products of Scott's Anglican upbringing as of his legal and literary education in the English tradition.) The slightly forbidding coolness of the prose, as of the man, can be deceptive: it is a civilized style now less familiar in our public men, involving a convention of reserve that does not deny or eliminate passion but channels it into the work of reason and of art. In a less disciplined age we should attend to such a voice.

Most of Scott's concerns were prophetic, and they remain significant for Canadians in

the 1970s: the achievement of constitutional and political independence; the recognition and extension of French-language rights; the defence of unpopular minorities; the entrenchment of a constitutional bill of rights; the creation of a basic system of social security and economic welfare available to all Canadians. In his articles and addresses from 1928 on, Scott reviewed the need for reform in these fields with the greatest precision of language and informed historical scholarship. We have come a long way in that time, through the Depression, the Second World War, the postwar era of affluence and welfare, to the economic and constitutional crises of the 1970s. Scott's convictions on the place of the French language, the protection of minorities, political rights, and social security have largely been translated into legislation: his thought informed the reforming policies of the St. Laurent, Diefenbaker, Pearson, and Trudeau governments. Yet his goals of tolerance, social harmony, equity, and a measure of economic redistribution remain elusive and unachieved. By an historic paradox, the means he chose for the pursuit of those goals now seem to have become barriers to their achievement.

Scott was a constitutional lawyer for whom the law was a supple and creative instrument of change. And he was a centralist, convinced by the perversity of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, the suffering of the Depression, and the reactionary and hypocritical nationalism of the Duplessis regime, that the active initiative of the Federal government was the essential source of major reform in Canada. So it proved to be from 1945 to 1960. But Scott's legalism and centralism, sharpened over a lifetime, have been less appropriate as guides to Canadian policy in the 1960s and 1970s. For one thing, his constitutional preoccupations of the period between the wars meant that he tended to ignore the looming political and economic challenge of the United States to Canadian independence. (That challenge is not, in the narrow sense, legal or constitutional.) For another thing, neither his legalism nor his centralism can quite accommodate the new pressures of Quebec nationalism and Canadian regionalism, which take generally progressive forms and use political rather than constitutional means. By the accidents of history, Scott has thus found himself defending the use of the War Measures Act and contesting the language acts of the Bourassa and Lévesque governments — attitudes that can too easily be dismissed as reactionary by impatient civil libertarians and nationalists of a younger generation who do not trouble to analyze the sources of Scott's beliefs. That sort of easy dismissal of a progressive would be far too glib. Scott is still the civil libertarian and reformer that he was; but he lives in a world of fewer certainties and more complications. This is a fine book and the measure of a great man. □

When a saint came marching in

Shrdd: The Life and Times of Mary Shadd Cary, by Jim Bearden and Linda Jean Butler. NC Press, illustrated, 250 pages. \$13 cloth (ISBN 0 919600 73 5) and \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 919600 74 3).

By JANE W. HILL

THIS IS A biography of a woman who would be remarkable and admirable at any time and any place, but was especially so as a black woman in North America in the mid-19th century. That old-fashioned virtue, "strength of character," was hers in abundance, plus intelligence, quick wit, compassion, and diligence. Mary Shadd Cary was born in Delaware in 1823, a free black in a slave state. Her father, Abraham Shadd, was a well-known and respected abolitionist, their home a station on the Underground Railroad, the clandestine route by which Negro slaves were brought to the free North and Canada. Mary thus imbibed a political awareness and love of freedom from her childhood. She also had a fit for teaching, and while still in her teens opened a school for black children in

Wilmington. She knew the value of education, hard to come by for blacks, and her people's need for independence and self-respect, but always preferred advancement through integration rather than segregation.

The passing of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 was a watershed for the America Negro; it forced the return of fugitive slaves to their owners in the South. Even free blacks were in danger. So the exodus to Canada (British law had abolished slavery throughout the Empire in 1833) was much increased. Good farmland was available and all immigrants who were willing to work were welcomed. Thus Mary Shadd came to Windsor in 1851, at age 28.

The book tells the story of her selfless work for the Negro community, a life of teaching, writing, and public speaking, with little material reward. When she came into conflict with Henry Bibb, Negro editor of the Voice of the Fugitive but a "leader" who exploited his own people, she founded and edited a newspaper of her own, the Provincial Freeman. She eventually settled in Chatham, Ont., a prosperous farming community that in 1854 had a population of 3,500, one third of them black. But she travelled widely in Canada and the U.S., on subscription tours for her paper, attending conventions, always working for temperance and against slavery (these usually went together) — and always under the most difficult conditions, when the physical demands of travel and the moral demands of leadership were very great for a black

woman alone. Frederick Douglass, the famous Negro abolitionist writer and orator, wrote of her "unconquerable zeal and commendable ability. . . . We do not know her equal among the colored ladies of the United States."

During the Civil War Shadd recruited Negro troops in the West and brought them herself to Boston. But after Emancipation, she, along with about two thirds of the blacks who had settled in Canada West, returned to the U.S. But Mary Shadd Cary's work did not cease. In Washington, D.C., she became the first woman law student at the newly formed Howard University, while teaching school at the same time and rearing two children; at age 60 she finally stopped teaching to practise law. She became actively engaged in the woman's suffrage movement and continued speaking and writing powerfully on "race pride, Negro education in the South, and woman's tights." At last, at the age of 70, she died, fulfilling her own dictum: "It is better to wear out, than to rust out."

Jim Bearden and Linda Jean Butler have done a laudable job of research to bring us the story of Mary Shadd Cary's inspiring life. The book is not what the English call "a good read" but it is thorough and straightforward, well buttressed by footnotes, bibliography, index, and photographs. There are no imagined conversations or fictionalized versions of events; the plain recording of Shadd's words and deeds, as obtained from a great variety of

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personal end archival sources, is enough to make us realize her worth. And the background of her 15 years here reveals an interesting end little-known aspect of our history. □

Gone but repeatedly not forgotten

Vanished peoples, by Peter Such, NC Press. 94 pages. \$12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919600 84 0) end 55.95 paper (ISBN 0 919600 83 2).

By GERVAISE GALLANT

IN THE PAST 10 years there has been a spate of slender tomes published on the plight of the Beothuks and other assorted prehistorical tribes of Newfoundland. Peter Such's *Vanished Peoples* varies little from the majority of these books. He relies heavily on the one one source available — Howley's *The Beothuks or Red Indians*, which is the definitive work. This might not present a problem were it not for the fact that three books have appeared on the same subject in the last two years, saying almost exactly the same thing and with bibliographies

that might as well list just one book — Howley's.

Where Such differs from these books is in his first Chapters. There he describes the possible connection between the three main prehistorical tribes who settled in Newfoundland. The problem here is that *Vanished Peoples* borrows heavily from *Newfoundland and Labrador Prehistory* by James Tuck of Memorial University. An archaeologist, Tuck made several discoveries of ancient Indian and Eskimo sites dating back some 7,500 years. And it is from this source that Such culls his information.

The difference between Such and Tuck is that Such has a dangerous tendency to advance theories based on the slimmest of evidence. Where Tuck shies away from making connections between the Archaic Indians end the Beothuks. Such dives in head-first. Certainly some ancient Archaic Indian sites later appeared us Beothuk sites. But many white Newfoundlanders have pitched their tents at exactly the same sites, which does not prove a connection between the Archaic Indians end present-day Newfoundlanders. That both tribes used red ochre seems to prove nothing, since the Ancient Egyptians also used that clay in their burial sites. (One author tried to prove a connection between the Beothuks end the Egyptians based on this evidence!)

The problem is that Such is a novelist encroaching on the territory of the scientist. He has previously written a remarkable little novel on the last days of the Beothuks called *Riverrun*. It does far more justice to that

Indian tribe then a score of books like *Vanished Peoples*. Sometimes the perspective of the novelist does provide a valuable picture. In *Riverrun*, Such could let his imagination run wild and achieve a point of view with some validity. However, the same rules can't apply for *Vanished Peoples*. Id working from hypothesis to hypothesis, he constructs a picture that seems accurate enough. But given the climatic conditions of Newfoundland, as well as the plethora of other variables, it would seem impossible for my scientist or layman to agree with his conclusions wholeheartedly. □

A myth is as good as a style

Movies and Mythologies: Towards a National Cinema, by Peter Harcourt, CBC Publications. 171 pages, \$3.95 paper (ISBN 0 88794 080 3).

By W. II. ROCKETT

IF NOT ENGAGED in forging one themselves, Canadian writers and critics are spending a great deal of time these days hying to discover a national mythology in the work of others. Ronald Sutherland has discovered *The New Hero*, supplanting Margaret Atwood's losers and survivors — and in both French and English literatures, no less. Martin Knelman has suggested recently (in *This Is Where We Came In*) that the "decades of deprivation" in film may have finally ended; films such as *Why Shoot the Teacher*, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, and *Outrageous!* may be indications that "the dream of a movie mythology of our own has finally come to pass."

In his introduction to the 1976-77 edition of *Film Canadiana*, Sam Kula suggests "National mythologies are essential to an evolving national anxiousness as the universal mythologies that have served men and women since the dawn of time." Film both disseminates and creates such a mythology, be it in the theatres or on television screens. Canadians have for years been exposed to both American mythology and (as Pierre Berton's Hollywood's *Canada* pointed out) American-made myths about Canada. Sooner or later someone had to get round to asking how national film mythologies develop, if only to get on the right track to manufacture our own. Peter Harcourt has done so in *Movies and Mythologies* through the simple process of looking at national cinemas in terms of the cultures that produce them.

This book is a prose rendering of a radio series broadcast on *CBC Ideas* some time ago. Even the re-caps of previous programmes still stand at the beginning of some chapters (or the top of the hour), but this is

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not rally distracting. In fact, Harcourt writes well for radio, a medium that demands clarity since the audience can't replay difficult paragraphs or ideas once they've passed into the ether. Harcourt's language is direct, while the structure of the study is sound and simple rather than convoluted — Bauhaus rather than Baroque.

Harcourt warns us he is offering neither an exhaustive study of the growth of national cinemas, nor an in-depth study of the concept of mythology. Moreover, he openly states his political frame of reference:

Nationalism provides one with a space from which to speak; just as Marx's determination to relate cultural activities to the class that supports them provides us with a methodology appropriate, in my view, to the understanding of the culture of our country.

Fair enough: we are made aware of Harcourt's biases from the beginning, but he is a careful writer who does not permit them to intrude annoyingly upon his work.

Mythology is directly linked to Harcourt's nationalism and his Marxism: "When a group of people becomes aware of its own mythology, its own sense of history, its particular customs and habits of speech, it is on the way towards discovering itself as a nation and not just a colony." It is a simple matter to recognize that "group" may be a class as well as a number of people sharing the same corner of a continent, especially when Harcourt reminds us "'art' is simply the name that the cultivated middle-classes give to the way they spend their leisure."

Harcourt examines Hollywood, continental Europe, and what he calls Hollywood England. He discovers that even those nations which, stone time or another, have found a national mythology and used film to explore and elaborate it, have sometimes lost it again. Italian neo-realism petered out as Italian production became more dependent upon American backing and moved away from the social realities of Italy itself and into the age of Steve Reeves, biblical epics, and spaghetti westerns. England has lost ground because of what John Schlesinger describes as "this terrible lack of energy about everything. Everybody's been ground down into the earth with problems here." Only Hollywood, which Harcourt examines through the genres of the western, gangster film, and musical, has sustained itself. Its success is partly rooted in its ability to roll with the punches, to be as many things to as many people as possible at any given moment. Its success is also based on its ability to feed not only upon others but upon itself. As Harcourt points out,

... the Hollywood musical has been basically about itself — about the fabrication of glamour, about the transcendence of talent, about the ultimate rewards of success and love that lie in store for those of us who have the beauty, grace, and talent to dance our way beyond the money-grubbing realities of everyday life.

Hollywood, then, is a pelican, feeding its young (the backers) with the flesh of its own breast. Does that make Canada a goose, or a loon?

In any event, it is a hungry bird, hankering after this idea of a national mythology. Harcourt himself is ambivalent about the very idea of mythology: "On the one hand, mythology can be seen as a distortion of history; on the other, some form of mythology seems to be necessary to achieve the feeling of a national identity." In fact, the notion of mythology is really the 1970s incarnation of the 1960s Canadian Identity, and is as elusive now as it was then. While Harcourt's book remains entertaining because he wisely avoids belabouring the point and has a great deal of interest to say about film in general, one fears the continuing flow of books which have already begun to attack the question, a flow not likely to ebb until such time (in Ronald Sutherland's words) "when enough Canadians are satisfied that they know the truth about themselves, [and] we will at last be ready for 'the poetic grace of myth'." □

Captive's progress

A Wilderness of Days: An Artist's Experience as a Prisoner of War in Germany, by Maxwell Bates, Sono Nis Press, illustrated, 133 pages, \$9.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919462 56 1).

By DONNA DUNLOP

MAXWELL BATES is a well-known visual artist, and this personal account of his experiences as a prisoner of war in Germany from 1940-8 has a selective, visual quality. The 26 new drawings, which are placed throughout the text to correspond to it, are subtle and expressionistic. The narrative, in three parts, gives retrospective shape to the past without sentimentalizing the details of human nature and strife.

Bates' work-camp years are bracketed by two marches relating respectively to the fall of France and the fall of Germany and, more immediately for him, by captivity and the strange incongruity of sudden release: "Our guards role sway on bicycles." He presents a condensed recollection of day-to-day existence behind enemy lines. With minimal editorializing, he describes how people, driven to various extremes, fell victim to every kind of survival stratagem. The mood of telling varies of course with the situations depicted, and Bates sensitively notes distinctions between human motivations. The tone is conversational yet laconic, and the book as a whole is textured by a series of contrasts and juxtapositions that succeed in re-creating the immediacy of

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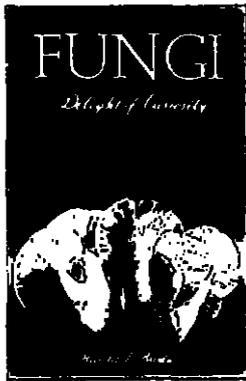
"a fascinating account of a little-known part of the war between Britain and Germany," *Toronto Star*.

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the time and place. His alternating perceptions convey what could be described as wartime binary vision.

Knowledge of who was actually happening, the significance of events, in the world *outside* was *circumstantially limited*, though rumour was rife. The great horror was perceived indirectly, though the author later witnessed the SS guards' vicious treatment of concentration-camp prisoners. Earlier he had heard what seemed to be the echo of "lost souls" through the salt-mine machinery. Yet describing a typical day he writes: "Our minds were filled with trivia." That depends on what you consider trivial, and Bates concludes:

What we had learned could not be learned in any other way. Many of us had come to despise things we had valued before, and had learned to value things we had despised or overlooked. It was up to us whether we lapsed back into the old grooves of hypocrisy, snobbishness and humbug. At least some of us had been freed.



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for us from
sea to Sphinx**

Vancouver Defended: A History of the Men and Guns of the Lower Mainland Defences, X59-1949, by Peter N. Moogk with Maj. R. V. Stevenson. Antonson Publishing, illustrated, 128 pages, \$10.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919900 26 7).

Canadians on the Nile, 1882-1898: Being the Adventures of the Voyageurs on the Khartoum Relief Expedition and Other Exploits, by Roy MacLaren, University of British Columbia Press, illustrated, 200 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7748 0094 1).

By C. D. MINNI

INI 866 George Francis Train, eccentric leader of the Fenians in San Francisco, called on his followers to conquer British Columbia. His scheme came to nothing, but the colony — alarmed by reports of the destruction the small Irish-American armies were causing in eastern British North America — decided to form its first militia to bolster the meagre British regulars. The men lacked guns, were unpaid, and had to supply their own uniforms; the commander had to pay for the ammunition himself. The militia was a typical example of the makeshift quality of British Columbia's coastal defences during the next century.

Vancouver Defended traces the history of those defences to 1949. Their object was to prevent enemy raids on the coast, the port of Vancouver in particular, at different times from Americans, Russians, Germans, and Japanese. The defences were always mini-

mal, even inadequate. During the Second World War for example, Vancouver had little protection against possible air raids. The threat of such raids, fortunately, was never serious, except for a brief time in 1914 when Count von Spee's squadron, based in Germany's Pacific possessions, roamed the ocean.

The authors write: "The psychological and strategic value of the coastal batteries can be debated, but what is beyond question are the practical services the home defences performed in training men for service overseas and in enforcing port security regulations during the Second World War." Of unforeseen value, *mu*, were the military reserves set up in the 1860s by the naval and army officers who feared Russian and American aggression; these retired later "were the basis of Greater Vancouver's extensive public parks," including Stanley Park, Jericho Beach, and the University Endowment Lands.

Vancouver Defended is an attractive volume, well-illustrated with photos, maps, and diagrams. Its co-authors make a good team. Peter Moogk is an associate professor of history at the University of British Columbia and Major R. V. Stevenson is regimental historian of the 15th Field Artillery Regiment. Their research has been meticulous and the topic, which could have been tedious, is presented in an interesting way. However, more anecdotes would have been welcome.

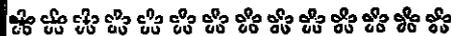
Canadians on the Nile should have a similar appeal to history and military buffs and collectors of Canadiana. The romantic Anglo-Egyptian campaigns in the Sudan during 1882-1898 still capture the imagination of writers and film-makers. It was a colourful time and a colourful place. The roles of the chief opponents — the mystic Christian soldier "Chinese" Gordon and the fanatic Moslem Mshdi — are well-known; both are storybook characters. Hardly remembered, however, is the significant role Canadians — voyageurs, soldiers, and engineers — played in the campaign.

Ckn. Garnet Wolseley, commander of the futile Nile expedition to save Gordon, had earlier commanded the Red River expedition in Canada and had been impressed with the skills of the voyageurs. He asked for a corps of them and 386 boatmen volunteered. About half were French-speaking and more than 100 were Indian or Métis. *Canadians on the Nile* tells their story and also that of Sir Percy Girouard, who built the desert railway that later enabled Kitchener to recapture Khartoum in 1898.

MacLaren holds his readers, and his subject is interesting. However, he has exaggerated the importance of what is only a footnote in Canadian history. □



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Going out on a wing and a prayer

Jet Roulette, by Fred McClement, Doubleday, illustrated, 189 pages, \$8.95 cloth (ISBN 0 385 11279 3).

Warehouses for Death: The Nursing Home Industry, by Daniel Jay Baum, Bums & MacEachern, 191 pages, \$4.95 paper (ISBN 0 88768 072 0).

Wheelchair Air Travel, by Clare Millar, Box 7, Blair, Cambridge, Ont., 128 pages, unpriced.

By SEAN VIRGO

THE WOMAN IN the next seal was placidly reading *On Death and Dying* as the L-101 I dropped towards Toronto International. The section entitled "Hope." I was clutching my array of amulets and babbling my usual infernal litany. Two hundred feet from the runway she flipped a page: section live, "Acceptance." The jumbo did a tripod tango down the tarmac, lifting a stewardess clear of her bench and spinning someone's glasses out into the aisle. My

neighbour smiled brightly, slipped the book into her purse, and began to comb her hair. Bet she'd have been less blasé if the book in her hand had been *Jet Roulette*.

It's no great feat of writing or research, but it does two things vividly. It reminds you, in case you'd pretended to forget, what a gesture of faith in man and machine you make every time you decide to save lime by flying. And it tells you what it's like when the odds win out over faith.

This is done mostly through transcripts of cockpit-to-ground communications in the last minutes before a crash or near-miss. Since McClement doesn't tell you beforehand whether a disaster is involved, it's pretty tense reading. Also, inevitably, voyeuristically intriguing. The last word of the pilot whose Turkish DC-10 dumped 347 people into the forest near Ermenonville was "Ooops."

Similarly, details of victims seen at 29,000 feet from another plane—"human, spread-eagled, and looking like birds" — stay with you. As, in another way, does the story of the little girl who survived her fall for an hour, the day two jets collided over Zagreb and it mined corpses in a Yugoslav field.

But the overt aim of the book — to crusade against human error and carelessness — is less well achieved, mostly because it doesn't lend itself to popularizing and thii is a journalistic book.

It's certainly outrageous, after surviving a

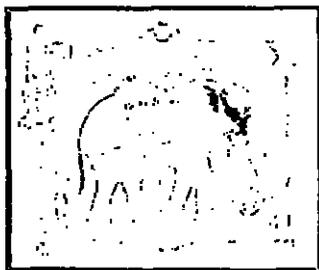
crash landing, to be incinerated because the doors won't open. Or to be pulverised by a captain who ignores his altitude meters. But proposing cures for human and mechanical errors can't really be done in layman's terms, especially when the human culprits are almost always quite dead. Still, the book might cause changes if enough people read it as more than a series of horror stories.

I'm personally just left with my old attitudes reinforced. Friends insist that statistics prove you're safer in a plane than on a sidewalk. They forget that the odds on surviving a sidewalk accident are about 100,000 to one over a plane crash. Which makes the figure of 12,700 air disaster victims in the last 10 years scary indeed. Train, anyone?

It's a typical imny that *Jet Roulette*, a slick hardback, will make a mint while the dowdy paperback, *Warehouses for Death: The Nursing Home Industry*, probably won't get much further than library orders. It should, though, h's an important book and a good one, and it throws a chilly, unsensational light on the one fate air-crash victims are spared-old age.

It does everything *Jet Roulette* fails to do. It makes individual victims come to life; it talks, effectively, as much about responsibility as about suffering; it does propose real alternatives and cures for the system; and it is so excellently researched that if you followed up the bibliography you'd find

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yourself an expert on the subject. As well as being a much saddened person.

The nursing-borne industry is not condemned as a racket, but rather as an ignorant, insensitive makeshift. Canada's record is awful. The section on unnecessary committals is heartbreaking; the dignity and tolerance of the victims is humiliating. Statistics again. just one. Guaranteed monthly incomes for the elderly: Alberta

\$285; Ontario and British Columbia 527% Saskatchewan \$260; Manitoba \$248. Nova Scotia \$100 annually. Yeah.

The first 60 pages of *Wheelchair Air Travel* (privately printed) are common-sensical and, I'm sure, useful. Thereafter it's increasingly trivial, anecdotal, and viley illustrated. Small pager, big print. Published 1973. □

of some import

Saxe and literature, science and wax, sex and penile servitude

What Is an Editor? Saxe Commins at Work, by Dorothy Commins, University of Chicago Press, 213 pages. \$12 (ISBN 01 226 11427 9). Saxe Commins. The name, memorable enough in itself, probably rings only a distant bell, echoing faintly from the footnotes of literary biographies. Yet this affectionate book by his widow reminds us that Saxe Commins was one of the greatest editors who ever lived, a man whose work has affected every reader of English.

His list of authors reads like a roll-call of excellence: Dreiser, Lewis, Auden, O'Neill, and Faulkner, to name only a few. Yet he was not exclusively a "literary" editor. He would work just as devotedly on Schulberg's *On the Waterfront*, or McKoon's *Introduction to Aristotle* — or Dr. Seuss's books for children — as he would on Auden's latest award-winning poetry collection. He would even write every word of a now-forgotten star's biography when the author of record developed a monumental writer's block; Commins's anguished journal of their "collaboration" tells of his partner's labouring for hours to produce the single sentence: "The Great War brought many changes to America."

As editor at Random House from 1933 until his death in 1958 he built up a devoted stable of authors. Not all of these relationships, however, were mutually delightful. When he cautioned John O'Hara about obscenities, O'Hara responded by firing a marble paperweight at his head. And after working with Dreiser, Commins commented wryly that "it does not follow... that a writer of great influence be a man of character or sensibility."

Saxe Commins was clearly such a man. Robinson Jeffers respected him so much that he allowed him to enclose in the book an official disavowal of Jeffers' theme, while Faulkner gave him full power of attorney as his literary executor. For Faulkner and O'Neill (a former patient back in the prosperous days when Commins was, yes, a dentist in Rochester) he would do anything, from arranging hospital accommodation to

buying a suit appropriate to a Nobel prizewinner.

The book is far from perfect. Once or twice Mrs. Commins lapses into fond domestic recollections — "Oh, those hats of his!" — that Saxe would have deleted at once. Yet — almost mysteriously — in the course of this author-by-author account of his husband's career (a treasure trove of literary anecdotes), Mrs. Commins answers the question provocatively posed by the title. Clearly an editor is someone who should try to be as perceptive, as well-read, as hard-working, and above all as decent, as Saxe Commins.

—STET

* * *

Most Secret War, by R. V. Jones, Thomas Nelson and Sons, illustrated. 556 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 241 89746 7). At least from Archimedes' day onward, science and technology have been closely associated with the state, most lamentably and most intimately during times of war. This long-standing pollution of the search for truth by the preposterous lunacy of nationalism does not seem to trouble Mr. Jones. So far as I can judge from his account of the role he played in British scientific intelligence between 1939 and 1945.

One would hardly expect Jones to notice



any possible moral objection to a link between his scientific vocation and service to the state. Artlessly he reveals himself as a true British patriot. British born, of British-born parents. "My earliest background," he tells us, "was that of the Grenadier Guards." His father was one of the "Old Contemptibles," first of the British to fight the Boche in the First World War. He depicts his mother as no less of a flag-wagger, so it is hardly surprising that despite his brilliant scientific talents, he felt no qualms at sacrificing the best years of his scientific life to government service before, during, and after the Second World War.

Fortunately, Jones is a man not lacking in humour. He relates how, during a brush with the bureaucracy of the National Physical Laboratory at Teddington, as a preliminary stage of discipline:

I was... asked to sign a certificate to the effect that I had read the Official Secrets Act (1911). I could not resist adding a postscript to my signature: "The 1920 Act is also worth reading"... and a little later a despatch rider was sent up to the Admiralty to check whether there really was an Act in 1920.

There was, of course. Not surprisingly a man who could win this sort of battle was equal to the task of keeping tabs on German radar techniques, the V-1 and V-2 weapons, atomic-bomb developments, and was also able to survive the bitter internecine warfare that raged within the wartime British civil service.

For me, by far the most valuable insight given by *The Secret War* is Jones's startling disclosure of a hitherto unpublished, presumably top-secret, logical proof that a cat has three tails. The book, which is full of such asides, shocks, and goodies, is worthwhile for that in itself. □

—RICHARD LUBBOCK

* * *

The Women's Room, by Marilyn French, Summit Books. 471 pages, \$13.75 cloth (ISBN 0-671-40010-X). E. F. Benson's comic classic from the 1920s, *Make Way For Lucia*, six related novels issued in a 913-page omnibus last August and currently being published in individual paperbacks by Popular Library, is the most delightful fiction I've discovered in the past year. Jane Bowles' *Two Serious Ladies* (1943), reissued in an expanded volume of her collected works under the title *My Sister's Hand in Mind* (Ecco Press, \$6.95) is a close second. There was one novel, however, considerably less perfect in style and form than anything Benson or Bowles would write, that had far greater emotional impact. Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* is one of the most arresting and haunting novels of the 1970s. It has also been one of the sleepers of the 1977-78 season, creeping up the New York Times best-seller list without much support or hype from the mass media.

There have been numerous other attempts in fiction to describe and define the changing roles and self-images of women in the contemporary society, but where French

surpasses other writers on the theme is in the richness and variety of her experiences and the stripped-down honesty of her authorial voice. Simone de Beauvoir once said in an interview: "I think that literature enjoys the advantage of being able to surpass all other modes of communication, allowing us to communicate in what separates us. . . . When I read a book, a book that matters to me, someone speaks to me; the author is part of his book; literature only begins at that moment, the moment when I hear a singular voice." The "voice" one hears in *The Women's Room* is one of eloquent nge. French describes the lives of a group of women over the past 20 years — their marriages, affairs, separations: their children, friendships and careers: their bouts with alcoholism, depression, and "madness." As the years pass, and the details mount, the novel becomes the feminist equivalent of a *Gulag Archipelago*, an Amazonian castigation of woman's penile servitude in patriarchal society.

The male characters are not weakly drawn, as in many novels by women, but they are generally unimpressive, limited in

their growth by the roles they feel compelled to play. Then is no substantial communication among them, and no genuine friendships. French depicts their conversations as competitive and combative, always juggling for the "last word," no matter what the subject may be; or else they have symbolic conversations - about sports, for example — in which they allow themselves an avid emotional sharing. But the content of such conversations is essentially meaningless. The males in *The Women's Room* are psychologically pathetic creatures — evasive and dishonest about their true feelings, insensitive in relationships. Several of the female characters, however, are splendidly realized, and all of them are agonizingly alive.

The exhilarating aspect of this novel is that it shows what a creative ferment there is going on right now in the lives of women. The chances of substantial social change and renewal rest more with this group than any other. No other novel has caught so much, so acutely, of the cold war currently being fought over sexual differences.

— JOHN HOFSESS

interview

by Blaine Marchand

How bookseller Bill Roberts brought CanLit to Ottawa's Confederation Square

W. H. ROBERTS, 46, known as Bill throughout the Canadian book trade, is the incoming president of the Canadian Booksellers Association. (The CBA will hold its annual convention in Quebec City June 4-6). He arrived in Canada from Britain in 1952 and joined Ottawa's Shirley Leishman Books in 1962. In 1968 he and his partner, Peggy Blackstone, took over the business from the Leishman family. Four years later they opened Books Canada on Confederation Square, a store devoted to Canadian books that has become an Ottawa landmark.



Bill Roberts

Freelancer Blaine Marchand asked Roberts about the operation:

Books in Canada: How did Books Canada Begin?

Roberts: Since its outset in 1961, Shirley Leishman Books always had a special interest in Canadian books. By 1971 we had moved to a larger store and after a year there realized that we would have to increase our stock of paperbacks and mass-market books. That would not have allowed us to do justice to our Canadian stock. One day in 1972, Peggy Blackstone and I were walking across Confederation Square and spotted an empty store. The idea struck both of us: Why not an independent store, & voted exclusively to Canadian books, less than a stone's throw from the Parliament Buildings? We immediately approached the owners of the building, the National Capital Commission, who agreed it was a good idea.

BiC: How was the store received?

Roberts: We advertised heavily before the opening. Even so, most people expressed surprise that there were so many books by Canadians. Foreign tourists, on the other hand, accepted it as a normal situation. The store's location is a big advantage. You are bound to pass it within an hour of being in the central core. Visitors, of course, are

The Women's Press

JUNE-JULY RELEASES:

*Good Day Care:
Getting It, Keeping It,
Fighting For It*
Kathleen Gallagher Ross, ed.

A practical guide to day care in Canada. *Good Day Care* outlines the social need for day care, compares the types of service presently available and discusses the ongoing struggle for more and better day care.

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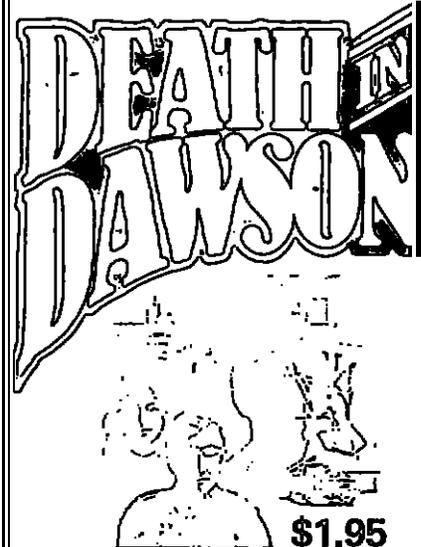
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important to the trade because they buy a lot of books on Canada, especially the large pictorial books. But there is also a strong corps of loyal buyers from the city.

The initial period of increasing response now is levelling out. It's a small store and there comes a point when you cannot expand anymore in terms of display space. The country is also in an economic down period and people are more careful with their money. You must remember that only six per cent of the population are book-buyers.

Bic: How do you go about selecting books?

Roberts: Because of the store's size, we have to keep a mixture of books. Any book store is run on individual judgement, so each store tends to take on a distinct personality. In Ottawa, books on politics, economics, and regional topics do extremely well. There are also indications of interest well in advance. For instance, if there is a book written by someone in one of the government departments, people start to phone once they've heard about the book. Retail awareness has grown considerably in the past five or six years.

On our side, one of the things we do to help create public awareness is to circulate free periodicals such as *Books in Canada* and the CBA's *Bookseller's Choice*. We subscribe to 800 copies of *Books in Canada* each issue. They always disappear within a few weeks. The feedback indicates that many people make a special trip each month to pick up a copy of the magazine and often books are sold on the basis of reviews in its pages.

Bic: How does *Books Canada* ensure that its selection is representative of all regions of Canada?

Roberts: In the past few years the Secretary of State, the Canada Council, and the publishers have ensured that there are regional catalogues available to the bookseller and to the public. *Bookseller's*

Choice has a basic stocklist of Canadian books and there are regional associations of the CBA. *Quill and Quire* is also invaluable to us. Writers now are gaining national reputations and are travelling across the country promoting their books.

Bic: Does *Books Canada* represent *French Canada* as well?

Roberts: No. It would be impossible to do even an adequate job as a bilingual book store at our present size, so then is no significant representation of francophone authors in the store. The French writing, publishing, and book system is a completely separate and insulated entity from the English one in Canada. The discount structure and the public's expectations are different as well.

Bic: What about the future? Can you see *Books Canada* expanding?

first impressions

by Sandra Martin

Reflections on that irresistible middle-age compulsion to tell tales out of school

Parade on an Empty Street, by Margaret Drury Gane, Clarke Irwin, 219 pages, \$10.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7720 1169 9).

Hold Fast, by Kevin Major, Clarke Irwin, 170 pages, \$7.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7720 1175 3).

Jim Tweed, by John Parr, Queenston House, 303 pages, \$9.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919866 12 3).

I WAS CLEANING my basement a while ago, having decided that even that onerous chore was better than hammering out an overdue assignment, when I came across an ordinary

cardboard box, the kind groceries used to be packed in. I was about to examine the contents when I was stopped by an inscription on the side. There, in a neat authoritative script I recognized as my father's, were the words: "Sandra's youth." "Is that id?" I shuddered. "One crummy box, not eve" filled to the top?" And beat a hasty retreat back to the typewriter.

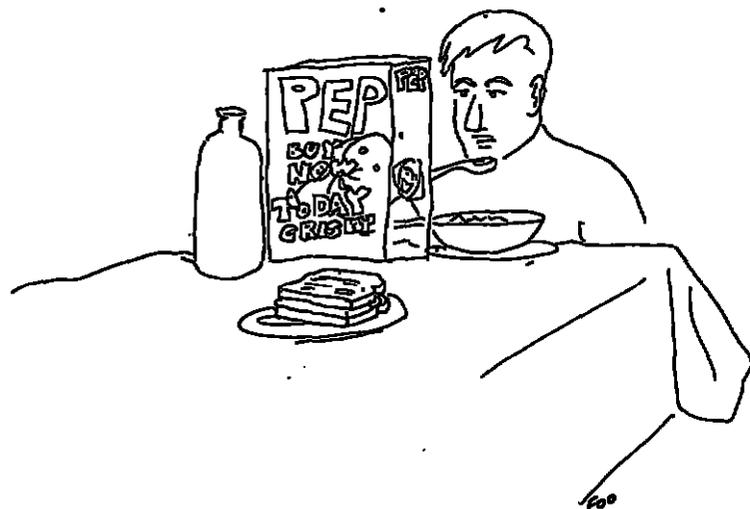
The need to sort through one's childhood is a frequent well-spring for first novels and these three books are no exception. It's as though one has to houseclean the past, discarding, that memory, preserving this one, exorcising ancient fears and traumatic incidents. But you can't parcel up the past and store it on a shelf as though life were a series of sealed compartments rather than a continuum. People, events, and memories Rash across the screen of the present and demand to be dealt with.

It's the sudden and chance confrontation between then and now that Margaret Drury Gane is ostensibly writing about in *Parade on an Empty Street*. I say ostensibly because Gane's book is really a piece of romanticized nostalgia, fixed firmly in the dull, safe, Orange Toronto of 1939, but with modern bits tacked on at the beginning and the end, makeshift flourishes that are bath contrived and obvious.

The book opens in what appears to be the present but is, in fact, the mid-1960s; that's the only way Gane can make her chronology jibe. A paunchy, balding, mid-30s dentist named Keith Gillies is sitting in his lawyer's office waiting patiently for an appointment when suddenly a door opens and Gillies glimpses Shirley Upshaw, a childhood

men and their libraries: 3

by Foo



friend he hasn't seen for 25 years. Gillies is afraid to approach her. afraid the past they shared has no commonality now, and so he ignores her and takes refuge in memories of the days when he was 11 and lived across the street from the hateful Mrs. Upshaw and her orphaned granddaughter Shirley.

Gane is good when she writes about the Toronto of her youth. She is a keen observer and has a good memory for streets and styles and neighbourhoods. Her characters are the stuff of romantic fiction but they are none the less realized for all their sentimentality. The author fails when she attempts to make more of her old-fashioned tale than it is. When Keith Gillies finally wakes from his reverie — one of the longer flashbacks in recent fiction, it occupies all but eight pages of the novel — it is Shirley Upshaw who approaches him and renews the relationship. The brave little boy who rescued Shirley from as creepy a house and as diabolical a guardian as anything Dickens created in *Great Expectations* is curiously shy and fearful when confronted by the grown-up Shirley Upshaw. We never discover what happened to break Keith's spirit, for Gane is content to let her two characters wander off to lunch in a candy-floss mist of rosy expectations.

There is nothing old-fashioned or saccharine about *Hold Fast*, Kevin Major's story about Michael, a 11-year-old boy suddenly orphaned and uprooted from his Newfoundland outport community and transplanted to a town a few hundred miles away. Nothing about his new situation pleases Michael. He particularly loathes living with his meek Aunt Ellen and his tyrannical Uncle Ted and eventually he runs away trailing his cousin Curtis behind him. The two boys hitch-hike across the province, survive alone in the woods for a few days, and finally make it back to Michael's home in Marten. That all sounds pretty familiar, but what makes *Hold Fast* different is that Michael gets away with it. He has beaten up a kid at school, been suspended, defied his uncle, run away from home, lied to adults, and even temporarily stolen a car. Nobody makes Michael apologize, or eat crow, or even go back to the hateful school in St. Albert. Instead of learning a "valuable but painful lesson about life," Michael chews out his uncle and moves back to Marten. Michael wins because he belongs in Marten and his relatives, although well-meaning, were wrong to displace him. He is like the species of local seaweed that, when threatened, grows an appendage — the "hold fast" of the title — to anchor itself to the rock.

The book works both as a juvenile story and as a testimony to the outport life in Newfoundland. The author, Kevin Major, a former teacher and the editor of *Doryloads* (an anthology of Newfoundland literature used in the local junior high schools) is dedicated to preserving the traditional Newfoundland style of life. He writes with passion and authenticity, telling the story in Michael's voice without a hint of condescension or artifice.

By comparison, *Jim Tweed* by Winnipeg author John Parr is slight, sometimes amusing, and always predictable. Jim is the teenaged only son of a rowdy, lecherous gorilla and his wife. It is the early days of the Second World War and Tweed Senior is employed as foreman of a construction camp. The family moves around the West from camp to camp with Jim the perennial new kid when school starts each September. As the book opens Jim has enrolled in grade nine at Lord Durham High School in Winnipeg.

Jim is an imitation of the anti-hero made famous by Kingsley Amis in *Lucky Jim* and other novels. He looks awful, plagued by acne, poor eyesight, and a frame that would cause even Charles Atlas to despair. He is painfully shy, congenitally clumsy, and suffers an inchoate passion for Bonih Mottram, the school tease. We follow Jim's career as a misfit and a booby as he stumbles through grade nine and then moves on to high school. Some of his scrapes are fleetingly funny, but they disappear as soon as the page is turned. Finally, with the prospect of yet another move — this time to Vancouver — Jim runs away by hopping the CNR freight as it passes through town.

He has the sort of life that people joke about at reunions before slugging down another rye and parsing on to more topical concerns. His is the picture you pause over briefly while Ricking through the high-school yearbook and then dismiss as you pack the annual and the memory back in the cardboard box. Not a memorable character, not a memorable book. □

Letters to the Editor

TIDINGS OF GREATER JOY

Sir:

Re your cover on the April issue of *Books in Canada*. I would like to comment on two things:

(a) Surely this is hilly discriminatory? Naturally, I cannot speak for Doris or Sylvia but it seems to me that if you lump us together we should have identical exposure. Why have you completely covered Doris Anderson's but half-covered Sylvia Fraser's and left mine completely uncovered? Falling back on a so-called classic example is no excuse.

(b) I must protest also against what can only be called "misrepresentation of boobs." I believe I can honestly say (and if pressed could no doubt produce affidavits from friends and enemies alike) that my bosom is more generous than that portrayed on your cover. I find myself forced to defend my front. In future, should you decide to reveal any more female novelists' breasts, may I humbly suggest that you delve more deeply into your subject?

Joy Carroll
Toronto

IWANIUK IGNORED

Sir:

I enjoyed reading the March issue, especially A. F. Moritz's spread in which eight authors of foreign background comment on multiculturalism. I talked over the piece with Waclaw Iwaniuk and was saddened to learn that although the distinguished Polish *émigré* poet follows Canadian writing closely it makes no attempt to follow him.

Iwaniuk has lived in Toronto since the 1950s and has had seven collections of Polish-language poems published in London and Fads. No Canadian newspaper or magazine has ever reviewed one of his books or commissioned one feature on the man or his work. His collections are reviewed in England and across Europe by both Polish and non-Polish publications, yet the only publication that pays him the slightest review attention is the *University of Toronto Quarterly* which does survey some foreign-language literature in its "Letters in Canada" Summer issue.

In my mind Iwaniuk's poems have something valuable to tell us about ourselves, for he quite often writes specifically about the experience of living in Canada. The Vancouver writer Jagna Boraks is translating a selection of Iwaniuk's poems for publication next year, and I have included one of her translations in *The Poets of Canada*, which Hurig will issue this September. But surely that is not enough — for Iwaniuk and others live on.

It would seem to me reasonable that a periodical such as *Books in Canada* should commission the occasional column to note the appearance of recent and topical books written in what J. Michael Yates has dubbed "the unofficial languages." It would give multiculturalism some teeth — or a tongue.

John Robert Colombo
Toronto

IWANIUK HEARD FROM

Sir:

In your March issue you missed the point [on multiculturalism]. It is my view that you should interview Canadian editors, publishers, ministers of culture, librarians, CBC producers, and others about whether Canadian literature has been enriched by their support of "ethnic" authors writing in Spanish, Hungarian, Polish, Ukrainian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and so on.

I feel there must be a large number of outstanding books written and published in Canada in the languages just mentioned.

Being a Canadian by choice, but at the same time a political *émigré* and a Polish author still writing in Polish, I have published seven books in

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CanWit No. 34

A RECENT ARTICLE by Elaine Von Brun in *Verbatim*, an entertaining American quarterly devoted to language, discusses the phenomenon of "illicit threesomes" - the coupling of a pair of unmarried words or phrases to produce illegitimate offspring. Some examples produced by *Verbatim* readers: *bird in the handshake* (an unsigned agreement); *scotch or the bedrock* (alcoholic refreshment during a marital quarrel); *bottle-necktie* (worn by St. Bernards in the Alps); *snail's pacemaker* (yet another triumph of medical science); and *five and humdrum* (uninspired music). We'll pay \$25 for the best set of original illicit threesomes, complete with definitions, we

receive by Aug. 31. Address: CanWit No. 34. *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 1N4.

RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 32

IN AN EFFORT to bring CanLit personalities closer to the common people, we asked readers to suggest nicknames. There were a number of duplications, with Pierre "Spike" Berton topping the poll. The winner is Peggy Butler of Toronto, who received \$25 for these subtle sobriquets:

- Frederick Philip "Shady" Grove
- W.O. "First Class" Mitchell
- Brian "Windy" Moore
- Richard "Rich" Rohmer
- Rick "Shaw" Sakutin
- Robert "Active" Service
- Northrop "Deep" Frye
- Al "Purdy-boy" Purdy
- Dennis "Delightful" Lee
- Eric "Plugged" Nicol

Honourable mentions:

- Michael "Raunchy" Ondaatje
 - Stephen "Tee Hee" Leacock
 - Ernest "Swash" Buckler
 - T.C. "Ticker" Haliburton
- Homer Noble and Judith Comfort,
Liverpool, N.S.

• **

- Farley "Flasher" Mowatt
 - Pierre "Boxcar" Berton
 - Richard "Needle-r" Needham
 - Gabrielle "Trumpeter" Roy
- Jay Ames, Toronto

- Ian "Snoopy" Adams
 - Doris "Chatty" Anderson
 - Barry "Tapeworm" Broadfoot
 - Robertson "Sammy" Davies
 - Sylvia "Candy" Fraser
- Mary Lile Benham, Winnipeg

• **

- Margaret "Manitoba Meg" Laurence
- Elisabeth Hulsman, Sackville, N.B.

• **

- Margaret "Square Peg" Atwood
 - Graeme "Crackers" Gibson
 - Marian "Avenging" Engel
- Marcia Rodriguez, Halifax

• **

- Marie-Claire "Clear-fire" Blais
- Laura Kropp, Ottawa

• **

- Irving "Will-of-the-Wasp" Layton
 - Malcolm "CanBrit" Lowry
 - Silver Donald Cameron, Ag.
- Doug Wading, Halifax

• **

- Morley "Sunaghan" Callaghan
 - Hugh "Gravelly" Gamer
 - Dorothy "Light 'n" Livesay
 - Roch "and Gravel" Carrier
- Renato Rizzuti, Vanier, Ont.

Books received

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

- Girl in Gingham*, by John Metcalf, Oberon Press.
- Old Wooden Buildings*, by Donovan Clemson, Hazcock House.
- The Cheese Stands Alone*, by Joyce Wells, Hancock House.
- A Snack and Dessert Cookbook for All Seasons*, by Ronald Belanger, Vantage Press.
- Quebec Independence: The Background to a National Crisis*, by Achim Krull and Murray Shukya, Clarke Irwin.
- Le Dandysme de Baulelaire à Mallarmé*, by Michel Lemaire, Les Presses de L'Université de Montréal.
- National Research in Canada: The NRC 1916-1966*, by Wilfrid Eggleston, Clarke Irwin.
- Anyone Can Make Big Money from Home*, Ronald J. Cooke Ltd.
- Toronto: 100 Years of Grandeur*, by Lucy Booth Martyn, Pagurian Press.
- Ethnic Canadians: Culture and Education*, edited by Martin L. Kovacs, Canadian Plains Research Center.
- A Whale for the Killing*, by Farley Mowat, Seal Books.
- Canamerican Union Now!*, by D.K. Donnelly, Griffin House.
- Canada Has a Future*, by Marie-Josée Drouin and B. Bruce-Briggs, M & S.
- Men For the Mountains*, by Sid Marty, M & S.
- Playbacks: Canadian Selections*, by Jack David and Michael Park, M & S.
- The Leaves of Louise*, by Matt Cohen, illustrated by Rikki, M & S.
- World Food and the Canadian "Breadbasket"*, The North-South Institute.
- Don't Fall Off the Rocking Horse*, by Lawrence Freiman, M & S.
- Minority Canadians: Ethnic Groups*, by Joseph F. Kruter and Morris Davis, Methuen.
- Nationalism and the National Question*, by Nicole Arnaud and Jacques Dufny, Black Rose Books.
- In Dark Places*, by Diane Keating, Black Moss Press.
- Re-visions*, by Marcia Resnick, Coach House.
- In Our Own Houses: Social Perspectives on Canadian Literature*, by Paul Cappon, M & S.
- On the Idea of a University*, by J.M. Cameron, U of T Press.
- Senator Hardisty's Prairie: 1840-1889*, by Dr. James G. MacGregor, Western Producer Prairie Books.
- Cruel and Unusual*, by Gérard McNeil with Sharon Vance, Deneau & Greenberg.
- Canadians on the Nile: 1882-1898*, by Roy MacLaren, UBC Press.
- Salties*, by Richard Roche and Oscar Meeme, Macmillan.
- Ontario*, by Anthony Hocking, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.
- Quebec*, by Anthony Hocking, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

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