

Earle Birney recalls
how CanLit boomed
at UBC in the 1920s

To Sir, with yuk:
a bulletin from the
Grade 4 battlefield

Why P. D. James is
the Jane Austen of
the welfare state

BOOKS IN CANADA



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craftsmanship
of
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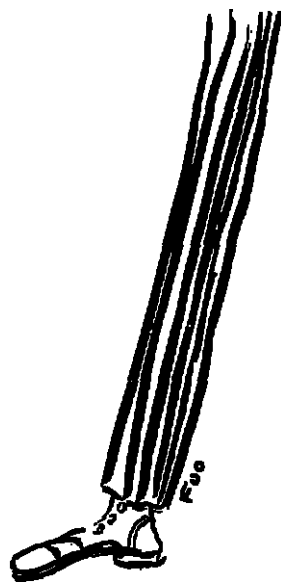
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BOOKS IN CANADA

FEATURES	
Bliss of Solitude. Earle Bimey entered UBC in 1922 planning to become an engineer. Some celebrated bad writers helped him make up his mind about literature. A memoir	3
Telling It in Garth. Robert Harlow reviews Mordecai Richler's gossipy new novel. Joshua <i>Then and Now</i>	7
<i>Take Me Home, Country</i> Rhodes. Keith Maillard's novel, <i>Alex Driving South</i> , is reviewed by Frank Davey	8
Linda Pyke, 1948-1979. An admirer remembers the poet	18
Bug Off, Mr. Chips. Lorne Hill reviews <i>Cries from the Corridor: The New Suburban Ghettos</i> , by Peter McLaren	21

REVIEWS	
Red Fox, by Gerald Seymour	9
Plains Song , by Wright Morris	9
Yellowfish , by John Keeble	10
The House on Dorchester Street , by Ronald J. Cooke	10
Woods and River Tales , by Roderick Haig-Brown, edited by Valerie Haig-Brown	12
East of Myloona , by Andrew Suknaski; Another Mouth , by George Bowering	12
Les stratégies du réel/The Story So Far 6 , edited by Nicole Brossard	15
Landmarks , by Robin Skelton	15
More Stories from Western Canada , edited by Rudy Wiebe and Aritha van Herk	16
Landscape With Rain and Gradations of Grandeur , by Ralph Gustafson	17
Innocent Blood , by P. D. James	18
Britain and European Resistance, 1940-1945: A Survey of the Special Operations Executive , with Documents, by David Stafford	20

From Hell to Breakfast , by Douglas Alcorn with Raymond Souster	22
Smoke and Mirrors: The Inside Story of Television News in Canada , by Peter Trueman	23
From Front Street to Queen's Park: The Story of Ontario's Parliament Buildings , by Eric Arthur	24



DEPARTMENTS	
On the Racks , by Paul Stuewe	25
The Browser , by Michael Smith	26
In the Beginning , by Mary Ainslie Smith	27
On/Off/Set , by Wayne Grady	28
First Impressions , by Douglas Hill	29
Interview with James Houston , by Phil Surguy	30
Letters to the Editor	32
CanWit No. 53	33
The editors recommend	34
Books received	34

ILLUSTRATIONS
Cover caricature of Mordecai Richler by Kerry Waghorn
Drawings throughout the issue by Howard Engel

CONTRIBUTORS

Alfred Earle Birney was born in Calgary, grew up in Banff, taught in universities from Utah to London, won two Governor General's Awards, and is a Canadian resource. Bob Blackburn is the former television columnist for the *Toronto Sun* and writes regularly on TV for various magazines. Dean Bonney is an Ottawa librarian. Former *Tish pat* Frank Davey teaches English at York University and is the author of *From There to Here* (Press Porcépic), a guide to English Canadian literature. Patrick Donohue is working on a book about his experiences as a letter-carrier. Gilbert Drolet teaches English at Le Collège militaire royal de St. Jean in LaSalle, Que. Howard Engel is the producer of CBC-Radio's *Anthology* program. Poet Len Gasparini teaches part time at Seneca College in Toronto. Wayne Grady is a regular contributor to these pages. Roger Hall reaches history at the University of Western Ontario. Novelist Robert Harlow teaches creative writing at the University of British Columbia. Douglas Hill teaches English at the U of T's Erindale College. Lorne R. Hill is the head of the history department in the U of T's Faculty of Education. Albert Moritz's first major collection of poetry, *The Root and the Flower*, will be published shortly by Blackfish Press. Stephen Scobie teaches English at the University of Alberta. David Sharpe is a Toronto short-story writer and poet. Mary Ainslie Smith teaches English to boat children in St. Marys, Ont. Paul Stuewe is writing an anti-*Survival* handbook on Canadian literature. Phil Surguy is an editor with *CA magazine*. Michael Thompson teaches English at Carleton University. Cartoons by West Coast artist Kerry Waghorn appear regularly in the *Vancouver Sun*. Ian Young is collaborating on a book about homosexuals in Nazi concentration camps.

EDITOR: Douglas Marshall. **ASSOCIATE EDITOR:** Michael Smith. **COPY EDITOR:** Marvin Goody. **ART DIRECTOR:** Mary Lu Toms. **GENERAL MANAGER and ADVERTISING MANAGER:** Susan Traer. **CIRCULATION MANAGER:** Susan Aihoshi. **CONSULTANTS:** Robert Farrelly and Jack Jensen.

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS: Eleanor Wachtel (West Coast); Stephen Scobie (Prairies); Wayne Grady; Douglas Hill; Christopher Hume; Sheila Fischman (Quebec); Tim Heald (Europe).

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BLISS OF SOLITUDE

How Carman wandered lonely as a clod and Sir Henry shot his jingoistic bolt when high culture came hilariously to a West Coast, cow college in the 1920s

by Earle Birney

IN THE FALL OF 1922; at the age of 18. I made it at last dawn to Vancouver out of the Rockies with enough saved from two years of day-labouring to last through a first year at the University of British Columbia. I hoped to become 'some kind of engineer — geological? chemical? Becoming a professor or a writer of CanLit were possibilities I'd never considered. However, I had to spend a year first in Arts, taking among other irrelevancies, a course in EngLit, English 100. It began with Euripides *Bacchae*, romped through Poe and George Eliot and ended with G. B. Shaw. I was surprised to find it exciting, except for the collection of verse laid on for study — *Poems of Today*. Even the title was a fraud; most of the stuff had been written 50 years ago, and all of it before I was born. Moreover the poets were all English-English (except Yeats, represented only by his early and soppy affairs with the Celtic Twilight). I had grown up memorizing Burns and Robert W. Service. The bombast of Sir Henry Newbolt and the turgidities of T. Sturge Moore left me cold.

There was in that text a particular jingle I've always, remembered because, by chance, it led to a glorious row on our campus during my first winter. This was Newbolt's "Drake's Drum," which enshrines a legend that whenever foes threaten Old England, the ghost of Sir Francis Drake begins thumping his drum at Plymouth Hoe. It happened that Sir Henry himself arrived in our midst, fresh from Australia, in the course of a "speaking tour of the Dominions" sponsored by the British Empire League back in London. Our student body was duly assembled in a converted hospital ward — one of the outpatient buildings the University rented from the General Hospital at this time. Sir Henry quickly launched into a memorized piece of patriotic oratory interwoven with quotes from his own work. The older males in the audience were veterans of the First World War, which had only recently ended, and they became restive. When he began beating out his "Drake's Drum" our old-soldier undergrads broke into rounds of booing until curbed by the chairman, our president, who had not been in a war, and, in any case, as he said later, couldn't see anything wrong with the poetry.

I can still hear Sir Henry's quavery recital:

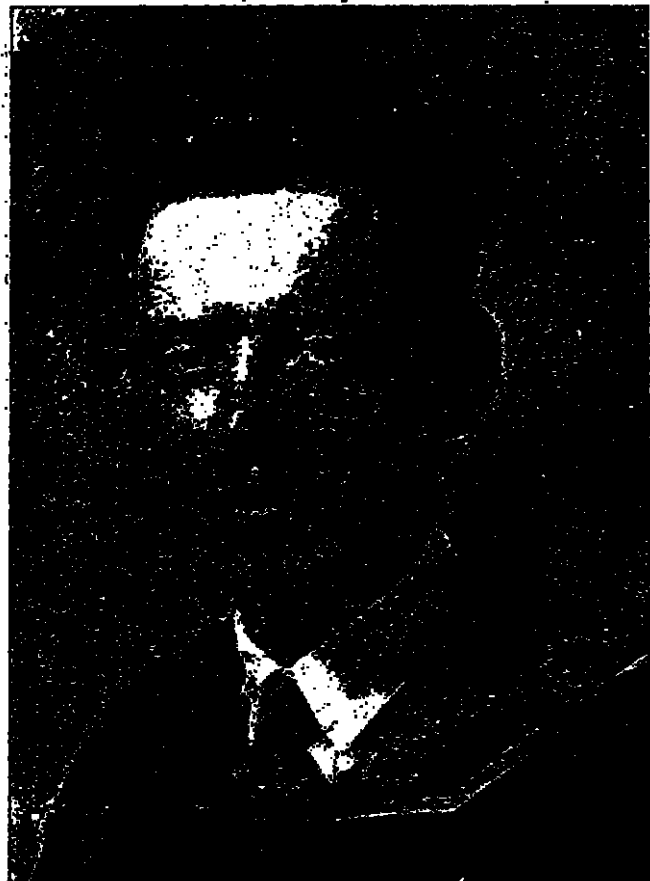
*Drake he's in his hammock an' a thousand mile away
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?)
Take my drum to England, hang et by the shore;
Strike et when your powder's runnin' low.*

But I remember even better the parody that superseded it on our rough campus that year. It had been struck off immediately by a veteran who had a friend on *The Ubyssay*, the student newspaper. A special issue was rushed out to contain it:

*England sent an orator six thousand mile away
(Far away and very far below)*

*To trumpet to the colonies at forty bob a day
(Far away and very far below)....*

The president read it and rushed off a telegram of apologies to Sir Henry, by now in Edmonton, and demanded *The Ubyssay* do the same. When they refused he dismissed Harry Cassidy, the editor, whereupon the entire staff resigned. Storms of indignation in the student council, in the faculty, in the downtown press. A marvelous uproar. Suddenly I became aware that poetry, whether good or bad, had powers, carried ideas, mused emotions in all sorts of people and could stir some of them to action. "Henry's Horn" had sounded a flourish I would never forget, an assertion of wickedness and wit in the face of dull piety, a blast for international



The graduate: Earle Birney in 1926.

peace, even, and cultural independence. It was my first experience with *Canadiana* in the making.

The Newbolt incident also awakened in me forgotten ambitions formed in Banff school-holidays when I sold *Calgary Herald* and *Eye-Openers* and longed to be a real newspaper man. A fresh *Ubyssy* staff had been appointed which was rapidly proving to be as anti-authoritarian as its predecessor. I tried out for its next-year's reporter staff and was accepted. I was still loyal; I told myself, to science. @ my lab-marks convinced me I had better

MacDonald commanded what remained of his audience to remain seated until he had walked, down to our only exit door "to greet every one" Of us. At this exit he had arranged to have a pile of his books and a money box.

stay in Arts. and train for mathematical disciplines, or maybe paleontology — or maybe I'd be a foreign correspondent.

Coming back to UBC in the fall of 1923 I was required to take the "survey course" in EngLit. This contributed nothing to my knowledge of contemporary writing, however, since it started with Chaucer and dwindled away somewhere around Byron. An extra half-year, without credit, was given by Dr. Garnett Sedgewick, the department head, which took us down to Hardy.

To sit in a Sedgewick class was to enter into a world of wit, sophistication, taste, aesthetic values, hard thinking and hard work. If I could stay in it might I become, in some far-off day, a professor of literature too? This little Nova Scotian with a Harvard Ph.D. sods world view of literature shocked parish-pumpery and intellectual laziness out of me, and replaced it with his Arnoldian love for "the best that has been thought in the world." I began quickly to reduce my judgements of earlier Canadian literature to

more realistic values and to become more alert to and evaluative of what was being written in the world about me.

What The *Ubyssy* did was to promote me, at the end of my sophomore year, to an associate editorship. This put stiffening into my shaky hope to be a professional journalist (if being a professor proved impossible). And it brought me into comradely relations with those students who were themselves attempting to mite CanLit. Reading their polished Rupert Brookian sonnets to print stirred me to renew my own teen-age attempts at versifying. The results, however, I soon scrapped, or should have. My colleagues clearly wrote real poems, or so I thought, and would be famous writers some day. None of them, in fact, published anything in the way of literature after graduation — confirming what I felt at the time to be Sedgewick's too harsh judgements of our undergraduate culture.

Sedgewick's sardonic attitude to CanLit, which I was resisting only feebly now, had been reinforced that winter when a poet who was publicly billed as one of Canada's greatest gave a noon performance in the largest of our campus shacks. Most of us had never heard of him. His name was Wilson MacDonald and he was from Ontario. The downtown papers said he was sponsored by the Canadian Authors' Association, the Native Sons of Canada, *Tk Industrial Review*, the *Vancouver Poetry Society*, the UBC Alumni's Literary Society, and the Lieutenant-Governor. He was reported to have given "scores of recitals across Canada" already and engaged to give more now throughout B.C.

MacDonald was even worse than Newbolt. Not only were his poems clumsily rhymed and bathetic to the point of childishness, he interlarded them with tedious self-praise. Even Dr. Fewster, whose own mid-Victorian effusions had raised him to the presidency of the Vancouver Poetry Society, a well-heeled gathering of West End culture-vultures, was so exasperated by MacDonald's "insistence both in public and private on the idea that his poetry cannot be equalled" that he would no longer give MacDonald house-room and made him move out to a hotel. And Fewster followed this up by writing the poet's Toronto editor, Lorne Pierce, begging him to discourage his author from giving further recitals, in British Columbia, "in view of the antagonism he has aroused in Vancouver." We UBC students knew nothing of these backstage reverberations but didn't need to hear them to make up our minds about MacDonald.

I think what annoyed me most was that, after his egotistical performance, MacDonald commanded what remained of his audience (about 30 of us) to remain seated until he had walked down to our only exit door "to greet every one" of us. At this exit he had already arranged, with the janitor's help, it seems, to have a money box and a pile of his books on a table placed to allow only one of us to escape at a time. To manage this I had to shake MacDonald's right hand while he held up in my face with his left a signed copy of his book.

In my third year at UBC I became too busy for CanLit. There was no course in it anyway, and only a rudimentary one in AmLit, not open to me, for I had now signed up for English Honours, Language and Literature. Till May, 1926, I had to devote my critical faculties and eye-energies during the academic months to Philology and to Old-Middle-Elizabethan-Restoration-Eighteenth-Century-Romantic-Victorian EngLit. Nothing after Good Queen Vic bet everything before Her. Any time over was already earmarked for *The Ubyssy*, for which I now fobbed up news, editorials and headlines, read proofs, and worked on the dummy.

Occasionally I wrote doggerel to fill corners but only once tried a "serious" poem, something begun in the head on a starry night sleeping out on Grouse Plateau and looking down on the lights of the city. I was too doubtful of it to show it in *The Ubyssy* office or even to read it to my girlfriend. I carried it around for week in an envelope addressed to the Vancouver Province, before screwing up the courage to stuff the crumpled thing in a mailbox. It came back, of course, with a stern letter from the ancient literary editor: "Since you think so little of your work that you send me this soiled, wrinkled and badly typed specimen, you will not be surprised that I think the same. . . ." I was crushed now as my poem, but too stubborn to throw it away. Fifteen years later, under



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DAW BOOKS

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wartime compulsions, I rewrote the thing. It was published in a Toronto magazine under the title "Vancouver Lights?"

My own attempts at CanLit are another story and I mention this instance only because I think it illustrates why a young would-be writer in the Canadian 1920s, especially one still loaded with the inferiority feelings of a village yokel, might be steered away by higher education from either a creative or a positive-critical approach to the literature of his own country. True, I was in a "cow college," but one that had already attracted professors of quality. Of the English department's full-time teachers, the head end two others had Harvard doctorates; another was a *Docteur ès lettres* from Brussels; one an Oxford man in sight of a Ph.D.; the other a Harvard M. A. Good scholars and dedicated teachers, their combined influence on me was enormous.

Sedgewick himself remains in my memory the most brilliant and inspiring teacher I ever encountered, and one of the finest of human beings. These men, however, had not chosen me to be a creative writer but to be in my turn an erudite interpreter of the language and literature of Great Britain. Whatever had been written by Americans, Canadians, Australians, Maltese, etc., in their sort of English was, though sometimes interesting, not The Best, not primary. It was the British Best they wanted us to carry through life, as they had, absorbing it so thoroughly that we would win scholarships to a good graduate school — we hadn't even a bed one yet at UBC — and add the higher degree that would ensure us (in those far-off pre-Depression days) a professional career even as good as theirs. (None of us, in fact, ever got to Harvard.)

Looking back now, I'm sure any of my UBC professors would have given me kindly attention if I had brought a poem of mine for private-criticism; but at the time I believed I would get only ridicule, even reprimand, for wasting energy better devoted to Chaucer - Spenser - Shakespeare - Milton - Swift - Austen - Wordsworth - Browning. My professors had created a preferential tariff in foreign literary products, and the touchstones of Matthew Arnold, which Kittredge of Harvard had passed on to them, as they to us,

were the trademarks guaranteeing the quality of these commodities. Touchstones? The few shiny pebbles I'd found so far in CanLit did not lead to nuggets. And it was plain that anyone aspiring to be one of Canada's literary alchemists would need to spend his probably short life elsewhere than in academic halls.

During my final undergrad year the world of CanLit intruded only twice into our groves of academe. Bliss Carman, billed by the

Carman acknowledged my self-introduction with a nod, and explained he wanted merely "to be set going on a good nature path, and then left alone." I tried to explain the campus was still being carved from the woods.

Canadian Authors' Association as "one of Canada's laureate poets," appeared on a balmy morning in autumn. He was on a quick tour of the West between his usual summering in the Catskills and his usual wintering in Connecticut. It appeared he hadn't visited Canada or written about it in 13 years, for reasons not given. I had already formed the opinion, from Carman's anthologized poems, that he was nobody's laureate.

Consequently I did not leap for joy when I was called into Sedgewick's office from *The Ulysses* an hour before Carman's reading was to begin, and told by the great Doc that the Poet of the Open Road wanted someone to guide him into "one of our woodland trails," fore walk before his performance. "And that s&e- &e." said Sedgewick, impaling me with ice-blue eyes, "is you, sir." I argued I had a class. "I have already excused you." I argued I had an editorial to write. He regarded me silently and raised one eyebrow. I argued that every trail into the nearby woods either doubled back or petered out into piles of bulldozed stumps. Sedgewick merely waved at the window. "Be off, Biley. Canadian minstrelsy is waiting for you." I looked out. On a weedy plot that we hoped would someday be a lawn, a tall figure stood alone. He was gazing up at our usual cloudy sky from under what looked like a crumpled stetson. He was bundled in a long overcoat and tangled in a white scarf. I had heard it was his first time in B.C., and remember wondering if he had thought we were near tundra.

Carman acknowledged my self-introduction with a nod and explained he wanted merely "to be set going on a good nature path, and then left alone." I tried to explain UBC had just moved a few months before and the campus was still being carved from the woods. There was brush piled on undergrowth. But Carman was already striding ahead toward the first visible opening in some balsam, scarf streaming like a ship's wake. When I caught up with him at the trail's opening he insisted I return, that he never lost his sense of direction, and would be back in time for his reading. I warned him there were multiple forks ahead, the trail led nowhere, and he should lay arrow-marks with sticks on the path. He gave me a glance of pity that could only have been born out of total ignorance of B.C. undergrowth and strode off.

He didn't reappear, of course, though when I found him — he'd left no trail-marks but hadn't gone far — he seemed annoyed. "I was about to return," he said, "but you are early." He was sitting on a stump where the trail branched into three thin tracks. I told him his audience had been waiting now for 15 minutes. "Perhaps your watch stopped?" "Oh, I go by the sun," he said, looking up vaguely at the still murky sky. We came back without further conversation.

I was still prepared to enjoy his reading — at least there was a good timbre to his voice but I found his accent artificial, with a New England overlay, and his platform manner pompous and condescending. I remember telling myself he was at least better than MacDonald and that I should concentrate on the poems. But even "Low Tide on Grand Pre" sounded slick and verbose, the way he read it; and "Heck and Hew" a humourless sermon. Worse. I now knew enough Victorian poetry to detect a steady, echoing of Arnold, Morris, and Tennyson in nearly all his verse. At least he didn't block the exits.



Dr. Garnett G. Sedgewick, circa 1924.

The other CanLit star flashing over our campus that autumn was Carman's cousin, the still un-knighted Charles G. D. Roberts. He too had been away from Canada for many years, had been in England when the First World War began, had enlisted in the British Army, and after the Armistice joined Carman in the United States. Roberts was also on his first reading tour of the Canadian West, and he too was rated a Canadian laureate by the CM. A Vancouver paper had recently published a photo of him outside the CPR's luxury hotel in Banff, talking with the chief of the local Stonies, Chief Walking Buffalo is on horseback; he is wearing an eagle headdress and beaded chaps. The Bard is on foot; he wears a Christie-stiff, a black eye-ribbon and a wing collar.

Since I had kept a warmer feeling about Roberts, from my schoolboy pleasure in his animal stories, I went to his reading in at least a neutral state. Among his anthology pieces I had taken a moderate liking for his "Potato Harvest." But hearing him read it now, along with many verses new to me, I decided Roberts dealt with cliché emotions and conventional thoughts. He was a good craftsman, and yet as dependent as Carman on outmoded rhythms and, even for details of Canadian nature, on 19th-century British phrasings.

Who wasthere alive and young and coming up, then? Would there ever be anyone to write the Canadian poetry that wait.4 in the air? There was that man with the plain, even comic, name of Pratt, but I'd heard nothing of him, and he wasn't a Canadian. Newfoundland was still a British Crown Colony. And I was unaware that *Witches' Brew* had just been published in London. Consequently, when I was asked to give a paper to the Letters Club an a living Canadian poet of my choice, I decided on Roberts..

The essay I came up with made no mention of the puzzlement I then felt that the English department had evidently sponsored Roberts's reading on the campus, with Sedgewick in the chair. How could my mentor and culture-hero, my own Matthew Arnold, preside over such exhibitions of second-rate verse as Roberts, Carman, and MacDonald had served up to the students? In my undergraduate naivety I later made some remark about it to Sedgewick. He rounded on me with a great show of rage, calling

me a snob and an idiot. These poets were not Shakespeares, he admitted, but they were among the best we seemed to have. They had been willing to ride the train out to this wasteland and read their best work to rascals like me without charge, though they themselves were so poor they had to reside in the United States to make a living. The least this university could do, since it paid them nothing, was to give them campus hospitality and a tolerant hearing. And if we didn't, by God, Sedgewick intoned in mock fear, there would be such storms brewing in the leacups at the University Women's Club and the local branch of the authors' association, and in all the other haunts of the patriotic *literati*, as would blow away all hope of further donations to the building fund, wipe out department grants and prizes, and generally shipwreck the whole Faculty of Arts.

The next year, when Roberts was again on the UBC campus, Sedgewick wrote me in a different mood, though to the same conclusion:

Charles G. D. Roberts lectures thrice this week on Canadian Literature & Wild Life. (The latter topic will neglect many aspects of the subject matter familiar to Roberts.) It is ungracious to say it, but I don't feel like entertaining him just now.—and damn it all, I do find his verse stiffish (most of it that is), his novels insipid, and his animal stories sentimental. But like Enobarbus, I must be your considerate stone. God must surely be very lenient with hypocrisy.

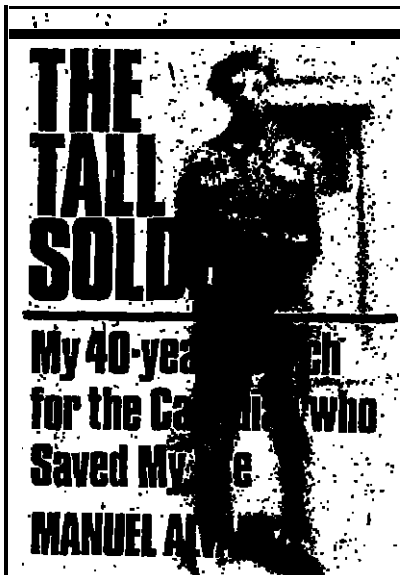
Sedgewick will not go down in any man's memory as a hypocrite. But he was a realist. He and his students must use nothing less than the touchstones of Matthew Arnold to test the great world's literature; but Sedgewick was also a Canadian committed to Canada, to what was still a small and impoverished college in a society intent on primary accumulations on the edge of nowhere. Though its literary coinage was fool's gold, he would pass it on with charming aplomb if by such gestures he could retain in his own Department of English Literature the gold standard of Harvard. □

(Adapted from *Spreading Time: Remarks on Canadian Writing and Writers*, Book I, 1904-1949, to be published by *Véhicule Press* this month.)

THE TALL SOLDIER

My 40-year Search
for the Canadian who
Saved My Life

MANUEL ALVAREZ



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"In sheer relief I let out a long sigh and then laughed. No possible doubt about it. I had found him."

:&from Chapter 19

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TELLING IT IN GARTH

Richler's important new novel runs on high-octane gossip about being a Jew among the daughters of the uncircumcised

by Robert Harlow

Joshua Then and Now, by Mordecai Richler, McClelland and Stewart (Knopf), 435 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 394 49351 6).

VIRGINIA WOOLF once suggested that the novel was an extended range of gossip. No mean social observer and tattler herself, she understood that this basic ingredient in our personal lives must necessarily be fundamental to our fictions about life in general. Gossip is always interesting, surprising, often shocking: as a spectator sport it's thrilling; when you participate it allows you to let off healing steam from your angers and knacks; of freeing up our sympathies. There but for the grace of God, etc. Consequently, Woolf's extended range is the basic mode for the best of our story-tellers. Philosophies and epiphanies are not those universal artists are said to strive for. The real cosmic concerns that connect Helen with Emma and Oedipus with Richler's Joshua are, Who's sleeping with whom? Who's ripping off what? And how well are others coping and dying? The difference between good and bad literature, then, may be judged by the level of imagination and sensibility used to chronicle those concerns.

Joshua Then and Now begins with gossip. *Time* magazine has become merely liberal and not a good teed anymore. The spectacle of Bob Hope doing a TV special in China leads quite illogically and naturally (gossip-wise) to the notion that, "Next year maybe Sonny and Cher would come us direct from Auschwitz, singing 'The Way We Were' before the open doors of a reconstructed crematorium." Thus, the tone is set. We shift to pictures of athletes on the wall above the bed of Joshua, a TV sports commentator (he is incests, chest to ankles, because of an accident), and then mow on down from his bedroom to the front porch of his wife's summer home; where we find her father (Senator Hornby) drinking Chablis with a shotgun across his knees, in the presence of Reuben Shapiro, Joshua's father (an ex-prizefighter, enforcer for a local mafioso) who is about to deal with an unwanted Montreal Gazette

reporter who has come to get the story. (the gossip) about Joshua's accident. We learn the cause of, and the reason for, the accident 400 pages later.

In another few moments we learn that the real story the reporter was after arises out of the fact that Joshua is being lauded (falsely) in the gay press for "coming out." One of the homophile magazines has interviewed Joshua's mother, Esther Shapiro, née Leventhal, but best known as Esty Blossom, who now lives in Winnipeg and runs a massage parlour called "Oral is Beautiful." It is clear after 10 pages that Richler's readers are being tested. His imagination and sensibilities are doing a schoolyard sort of thing: "You like it? I got more where that came from." Say you don't like it and you're square; say you do and you wonder if maybe you haven't quite grown up yet, either. Reserve judgement and read on.

Mother Shapiro screws an alderman from the Montreal city council; she does a striptease at Joshua's bar mitzvah before going on to play in porno flicks. Father Shapiro goes to jail regularly; is probably a bank robber and a rum runner, and we see him break the bends of a dentist who owes his boss a gambling debt. On St. Urbain Street and in the schoolyard, Joshua is taunted about these two by his peers, and now 30 years later, just before his accident,

his wife mad and in the hospital, his children in school and the book he is writing stalled, Joshua wanders Westmount amusing himself by seeking out those St. Urbain Street old boys who are now rich. Irving Pinsky, for instance. Joshua goes up to Westmount to Pinsky's place on Summit Circle:

"Joshua, what are you doing here?"

"I came up for fresh air, Irving. YOU have no idea how it stinks down below. We even have niggers on our street."

"You're supposed to say blacks now."

"How would you like to be called a kike?"

"I'm a Jew, Irving, you're a kike."

For 126 pages this is where we've been headed. It's been a trip into a labyrinth where there are an even dozen narrative lines to follow. Along the way we've listened to Richler invent what might be called Revenge Comedy, and we've struggled to get past Richler's gangrenous tongue and eye to Joshua, "a Jew, a sportswriter, a T V presence," because the real gossip whose range has been extended here is about being a Jew - about having to be a Jew. It is important to be a woman in a time of liberation, to be black in Zimbabwe in a time of revolution, to be Canadian in a time of cultural crisis. But the most important thing for the Joshuas of the world to be at any time in any place is a Jew, because Jews carry with them always the first and most basic and most debilitating (for civilization) oppression there is.

We can have our consciousnesses raised as much as we can stand about women, blacks, homophiles, Native Peoples, East Indians, West Indians, Boat People, but our prejudices and bigotry will stay safe and healthy so long as the Jew as scapegoat and hate object remains conveniently there for us to kick or burn or gas when we feel unsafe, inadequate, threatened. Or oppressed, because it is the oppressed who, sick with swelling hurt and anger and helplessness, look for someone to push even lower on the totem pole than they are. Or newly liberated, because some of those feel, insanely, that their anger, suddenly freed from a lifetime of repression, must have an object, and the Jew is the safest one there is.



Mordecai Richler

It is this terrifying triple crunch (among other things) that Joshua tries to fathom.

While Richler is on stage doing his sour vaudeville to entertain us, Joshua runs as often as he can in front of him, anxious, determined, angry, shouting: *auto da fé*, expulsion, Nazi. He is appalled by the Jews who know how he assisted their tormentors, or who have joined them — Pinsky, with his Westmount home, his velvet dinner-jacket, his wine cellar where each bottle is worth at least \$100; the meek Jews in Ibiza who lived with a wanted Nazi in their midst; the State of Israel itself which refused citizenship to a young man from Ibiza because his family has had to profess Christianity for generations for fear of their lives. This double level of sensibility and imagination (Richler's and Joshua's) is basic to the novel. It is, finally, a technique, and any technical arrangement by an author loses something for him, even as it wins something else. The best arrangements always win more than they lose.

Here, in *Joshua Then and Now*, Richler wins more than he loses. He makes author intrusion and manipulation into something like a high art, and he manages to project both his world and Joshua's into the reader's so that the novel — structurally complex and anecdotal as it is — ripples and shimmers in the mind and in the heart. Richler is more often sculptor than writer, more scenarist than novelist, but despite this, Joshua's essential pain as a Jew and his humanity as a person come through Richler's carved-out hyperbole and movie-maker's dialogue (two generations of film-goers most actually believe that is the way people speak).

The biblical Joshua breached the walls of Jericho. Richler's Joshua — rebelling against his sycophant school chums, — climbs over the wall around Westmount, marries a Liberal senator's daughter, becomes a sports writer, a book writer, a TV commentator. The bones of his biography appear no different than Pinsky's. But he refuses to bow, to suck. He never gives up his father, who taught Joshua a kind of morality out of the King James Version. He makes the Senator love him on his own terms. He goes his own way and becomes himself as a writer, a husband, father, person. He loved Pauline, is faithful to her. He loves his family... But he is surprised when he is loved back, and he doesn't feel he quite belongs.

That he is a Jew among the Westmount Philistines is never denied. He tolerates them, as they tolerate him. He can't stop being a Jew, but he would like them to stop being Westmounters. His wife's brother, Kevin, comes home. He is the essential Westmount playboy-failure, and he is the catalyst who forces Pauline to the wall, because Joshua wants her to abandon him to disgrace and jail as a stock-market crook. Pauline's crisis comes at the same time as Joshua's. He feels he must go back to Europe, to Ibiza, where 25 years before he betrayed himself — or perhaps he feels that is when he began to betray himself — by not

having confronted and defeated the wanted Nazi living openly there. While he is away chasing shadows, Pauline's mental health breaks, and she is taken to a Montreal hospital. Joshua is forced back on himself. He has to forgive as best he can, not just Kevin, but himself — which may mean Pinsky and all the others too, but that is off in the future.

To belong in the technical sense is easy: the dub elects you, accepts your presence and honours your signature. But to feel you belong is a different matter entirely. Old hurts, knee-jerk reactions, angers, fears, embarrassments have to be gotten rid of. One has to be safe enough to be able to stop being defensive and begin to trust. But the facts are there in Joshua's life: 20 centuries of exile, oppression, ghettos, pogroms, and the Holocaust on the one hand, and Irving Pinsky and his friends on the other. Richler punishes Irving, makes fun of him, steams the labels off his wine bottles and shuffles them around the cellar so that they will never again be identified.

Joshua's intention is purer and more mature, and so the stress between Richler and Joshua gives the novel a different kind of energy than we're used to. Both want to get to the same place, but they want to go powered by different fuels — Richler by rage, Joshua by the fierceness that goes with the need to love strongly. Each may be a little embarrassed by the other, but the reader need not be too concerned for either. What is heard about both makes a book the like of which may not have been seen here before. It perhaps isn't precisely what Woolf had in mind when she talked about an extended range of gossip, but she would appreciate the craft that went into its making, as well as Richler's vitriolic tongue and Joshua's possessed heart. It is a novel that is both a writer's and a reader's book, and when Richler's works are finally evaluated this one will, I think, rank equally with his best. It is certainly among the most important he has published during his first 25 years as a novelist. □

Take me home, country Rhodes

by Frank Davey

Alex Driving South, by Keith Maillard, Doubleday (Dial), 256 pages, \$11.50 cloth (ISBN 0 8037 0196 9).

EVAN CARLYLE HAS GROWN UP a pampered only child of a genteel family in a depressed West Virginia industrial town. He is unremarkable in most ways — a resistant piano and dance student, a C-plus scholar, a hanger-on in high-school athletics. His one skill has been in conniving acceptance from the hard-drinking, violent working-class youth of the town — youths whose borderline criminality he envies and would vicariously share. Evan thereby gives his life the aura of passion and violence without assuming their risks; he deliberately passes out when taken to a brothel; he flees during a gang-fight; he asks to be included in cross-country races in stolen cars only if he is confident of being refused. Eventually he deserts his pregnant girlfriend Elaine by merely not answering her letters; drifts away from a California wife who bores him; end, evades military draft by moving to Canada and becoming a successful (though Valium-addicted) CBC-Radio producer; in moving to Canada he sees himself as "looking out for number one, the same as always."

When we meet this character in *Alex Driving South*, Keith Maillard's second novel, he has returned for a Christmas visit

to his West Virginia home some 13 years after his high-school graduation and desertion of Elaine. Maillard reveals Evan's life in an engaging mixture of chapters that relate his high-school years and ones that detail his current encounter with an old friend, the title character. Alex is Evan's foil — holder of a 429.5 record for the high-school mile in West Virginia, car thief, womanizer, road racer, brawler, and latterly alcoholic husband, father, and operator of a failing gas station. Through Alex, Maillard puts forward the tethered dubious moral proposition that by testing oneself through running, racing stolen cars, whoring, drinking, or streetfighting, one can not only give one's life meaning but also remain in responsible contact with one's fellow man. High-speed road races in stolen cars, with accompanying risks to pedestrians and other drivers, become in this novel Maillard's metaphor for a life lived fully and openly. Willingness to take unnecessary life-or-death risks becomes prerequisite to the honourable acceptance of responsibility for the hazards one has created.

Measuring Even Carlyle by Alex, Maillard easily shows him to be, despite his modish clothes and career success, a spiritual drifter who has fled from all risks, all difficult moral choices, all ties and responsibilities to others. Indeed he is; but

the moral alternatives Maillard provides here — bourgeois escapism versus reckless violence, timidity versus antisocial thievery, narcissism versus gangland loyalty — are too polarized to be the basis of any meaningful general statement, as well as unnecessarily explicit for demonstrating Evan's visible shallowness.

Despite these limitations, *Alex Driving South* reads extremely well. The three principals — Evan, Alex, and Elaine — are vivid and convincing characterizations who acquire much of their vitality through dialogue. Their family relationships are impressively captured — the Oedipal conflicts between parents and children; the brooding disappointments of Alex's failing marriage. Evan's parents' helpless ignorance of their son's world, the ever-latent violence of families imprisoned by alcoholism and poverty. Maillard's switch in the last third of the book from Evan to Alex as the central point of view, character is unfortunate (it being a gimmicky statement of Evan's moral inferiority and leaving his relatively unresolved) but it does not obscure the book's strengths. These strengths — the authoritative view of the claustrophobic Appalachian town, its sensitive grasp of passionate characters beaten by life, its fast-moving narrative of brutal action and intense dialogue — make it a highly readable work of fiction, which by its narrative energy overrides its author's slight grasp of its more issues. □

IN-BRIEF

Red Fox, by Gerald Seymour, Collins, 308 pages, \$13.95 cloth (ISBN 0 00 221444 X). British TV journalist Gerald Seymour is an empirical student of urban terrorism, specializing in the psychological duel between the hooter and the hunted. He has treated the subject in three previous best sellers, the first of which was *Harry's Game* — a beautifully constructed IRA bombshell that rocked the ranks of thriller addicts with a shock of authenticity not felt since *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*. His next two books (*The Glory Boys*, *Kingfisher*) never quite captured the stark power of the first. Nor does *Red Fox*, which is set in Italy, where Seymour spent three years on assignment. The plot, suggested by the *Aldo Moro* tragedy, concerns the kidnapping of a British businessman by the Mafia. Through complicated plot mechanics, a love-crazed teenage terrorist decides to play a lone hand in the affair. The action swings between Rome and Calabria, allowing Seymour to pause briefly at Monte Cassino for some historical reflections. There's a touch too much travelogue writing to the descriptive passages; the author seems intent on proving he knows his Italy. And a good editor should have told him that two of his six main characters — a second Italian cop and a second concerned Englishman — are redundant in thriller fiction, no matter how true they may be to

such situations in real life. On the whole, however, Seymour proves he can still deliver the goods. Since his latest assignment has taken him back to Ireland, we look forward to his fifth thriller with relish.

— DOUGLAS MARSHALL

Voyage to the middle ground

Plains Song, by Wright Morris, Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 229 pages, \$12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 06 013047 4).

By DOUGLAS HILL

WRIGHT MORRIS has been recording the American Middle West in fiction, photo-text, and essay for more than 30 years, but fame and popularity have avoided him. There was a National Book Award in 1956 (for *Field of Vision*), and his accomplishments are sung by readers who know him, but his reputation seems never to have gained much authority of its own. This is his 19th novel, 29th book.

Few, including this reviewer, would dare to speak comprehensively about Morris's work. It's obvious, however, from even a tentative acquaintance, that no other fiction-writer of his generation — he's 70 — except perhaps John Cheever, has applied himself so diligently and with such varied success to the subject of human limitation, to the abrasions of necessity upon longing, decision upon dream.

Morris isn't really like anyone else, and comparisons to other regionalists aren't helpful. He appears remarkably unself-conscious, un-"artistic"; the novels breathe craftsmanship, ignore flourishes. But his straight-ahead, declarative prose, laconic and relaxed, cuts deep into meaning and possibility. And his unforced, seemingly loose and casual structure gives a firm balance to his stories of change and dissolution. He's also funny, a quality that seems to have been bred out of most writers, American or Canadian, who ponder life west of the Appalachians and east of California.

Plains Song celebrates a Nebraska family, the Atkinses, through three generations. It's music "for female voices" (and so subtitled): the Atkins women — Cora, her sister-in-law Belle, daughter Madge, niece Sharon Rose — live in the minor keys, the measures of their days unorchestrated, unmelodic, but quietly, often hauntingly rhythmical. The novel is as far from the bloated pop-saga as can be imagined, yet for all its spare precision it achieves a masterful density and cumulative power.

The characters are utterly plausible, made whole and memorable by Morris's irony. Cora comes to Nebraska, stays, dies.

The fact of her being, and her legacy, is "not her image, not her person, but the

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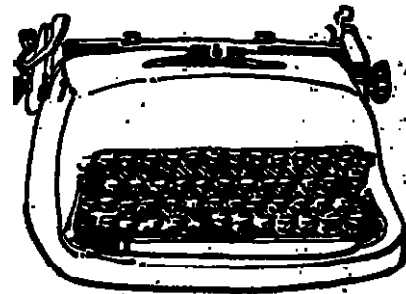
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great alarming silence of her nature, the void behind her luminous eyes." Sharon Rose leaves; goes east, returns: "whatever life held in the future for her, it would prove to reside in this rimless past, approaching and then fading like the gong of a crossing bell."

There are no fanfares in *Plains Song*, only a careful journey through some lives for their beginnings, to see what these can give, where they can lead. Work and duty are dominant themes. It's in effect a rural middle-class ethic that Morris isolates: "only work that could not be finished gave purpose to life." Though the ingredients for mere nostalgia — image, memory, emotion — are all present, the book's energies strike forward, not back. This is a contemporary novel, not a period-piece.

The steadiness of Morris's tone leads to a rich and moving climax. The symbolism of item and incident is unobtrusive; connections and parallels among the lives are understated; the intricate texture of power and love is bright. All this in an easy, colloquial, almost "country" style. *Plains Song* lingers, earthy and disquieting. □

Triad men and true

Yellowfish, by John Keeble, Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 310 pages, \$15.75 cloth (ISBN 0060122927).

B y PHIL SURGUY

YELLOWFISH ARE Chinese wetbacks. The hem of John Keeble's line novel is Wesley Erks, a 35-year-old farmer from eastern Washington State, who sometimes works as a courier for a smuggler named Lucas. Erks has always run cocaine, but on this occasion — the time is April, 1977 — he agrees to pick up four illegal Chinese immigrants in Vancouver and drive them east across southern British Columbia to Creston, then south, over the border, then down through Idaho to Reno, and finally over to San Francisco.

Erks is barely under way when he discovers that one of his passengers is dying from a knife wound. Also, another of the four is actually an American. He's the same age as Erks, and his name is Ginam Taam. Seven years earlier, the Maoist book store he ran in San Francisco's Chinatown was burned by a Mafia-like organization called the Triad. His wife died in the fire. He hunted the arsonist down, killed him, and fled to China.

The reason for the detour through Reno is that Taam's family owns a casino there, and the Triad will allow him to return to the United States (that is, they'll "forget" he killed one of their members), if they can buy it at a price well below its actual value.

Taam's safety has been guaranteed at the sale itself, but he still has to get there, and from the border onward Erks's vehicle is followed by two others, one driven by agents of a Mad fiction that wants Taam dead and the other by people who've been sent to protect him. Moreover, it is not too clear which faction Lucas favours, a question that becomes crucially important after his tough, horny wife joins Erks's party in Idaho.

Yellowfish is a good thriller. It is also a very ambitious novel. Erks has a passionate, almost mystic interest in the natural, physical, and human history of the north-west part of this continent — not only the actual history, but also the myths, dreams, and unconscious drives that have always brought new people into the area. In Vancouver, on the old CN pier at the top of the ramp at the north end of Main Street, he communes with the memory of the navigators who once sought the Northwest Passage, among them both the strait-laced Cook, whose ships were first thought by the Indians at Nootka Sound to be islands magically risen from the sea, and the extravagant Juan de Fuca, who claimed he had sailed inland and found an Eldorado in what would now be Saskatchewan. Later, on the final dash to San Francisco, Erks's mind is as much with the tragic Donner Party as it is on the adventure at hand. And, as he and his passengers leave Vancouver behind and the highway is enclosed by the lower end of the Fraser Canyon, we learn:

Erks had a special attachment for Fraser's journals, which were filled with the violence of dream, of visions exceeding his ideas. His language was excessive, his nouns sheer and his verbs aggressive, Brontëesque, his words on the verge of unintelligibility and yet exact in their evocation of the massive, rebellious land. Fraser, himself Scotch, his grandparents immigrants to New York, then to Vermont, Jacobite in their sympathies, fled to Quebec; or his mother did. His father died in prison, and Simon Fraser, exploring the West, took on the language of the West; and in so doing seemed akin to the excessive, often brutal, and yet exact language of other Westerners to come: Joaquin Miller, Norris, London, Jeffers, Ginsberg, Kerouac, Spicer and Bukowski.

Erks is an odd hem. He is as self-reliant, competent, and metaphysically hefty as a herd should be; but all he is capable of influencing are momentary events. When it comes to affecting the larger drama, he is just the driver, all but powerless. In Reno, a Triad man, a guard outside the door to the room where the casino sale is being negotiated, tells him, "Look, nobody's really interested in you. If I was you, I'd just get those two to San Francisco and go on home."

The point, I think, is that Erks does indeed have a home, also an excellent wife and a son. His parents were the immigrants, the travellers. He has arrived. The geography, history, and mythology of the Northwest may be as important to him as his blood, but it is the travellers, the newcom-

ers, who are the heroes, the ones who create the history and legends of the area. Taam is more in Simon Fraser's tradition than Erks is. Perhaps Erks has other duties. At the end of the novel there is a suggestion that he will see that Taam's story is told to the world. Which isn't to say that this is all that *Yellowfish* is about. There is lots more here, and Keeble may not have intended to make these points specifically, or even at all. There are simply a few possibilities, one facet of the universe of hard facts and extraordinary visions to be found in this rich, imaginative book. □

Rooms with a view

The House on Dorchester Street, by Ronald J. Cooke, Vesta, 122 pages, \$4.95 paper (ISBN 0 919806 414).

By LEN GASPARINI

THIS SHORT NOVEL takes place in Montreal during the Depression. Although the plot is somewhat skimpy and contrived — like a Grade B movie — it has enough bite to make an impression on the reader for a few hours. The scene is Mrs. Emma Wilder's all-girl rooming house on Dorchester Street, a pruriently obvious setup that Cooke understates by having Mrs. Wilder say, "My place is respectable!" And it is to a certain extent. The only raunchy element is her unemployed 15-year-old son Louis, and his street-wise friend Sam. They both spend most of their time masturbating and peeping at the girls in the washroom, through a nail hole in the wall of Louis's room. This obsessive voyeurism is such a focal point of the novel that one gets the suspicion the author is enjoying it me.

Cooke's narrative style suffers from cliché and a lot of unconvincing, inane dialogue. Consequently, the characters seem wooden, and a odds with their own motives. The Depression is only hinted at, and its looming spectre is never felt strongly enough to alter the characters' lives. This is the novel's biggest flaw. Aside from that, it has all the rapid ingredients of a mediocre whodunit. There is a jewel cache; a half-hearted kidnapping; and a seduction scene that doesn't quite fill a page. Perhaps the novel should have been beefed up with more episodes and Depression-era realism.

The House on Dorchester Street gets by partly on its spasmodic efforts at suspense. Because the chapters are so short, an aura of anxious uncertainty is achieved by a series of minor climaxes that thicken the plot. In this respect, Cooke is like a traffic cop. All in all, his novel is fast-paced and interesting. It bears watching TV, and also tells us that rooming houses haven't changed much in the past 50 years. □

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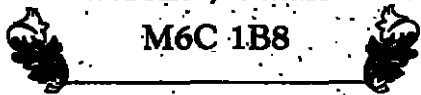
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Field and stream of consciousness

Woods end River Tales, by Roderick Haig-Brown, edited by Valerie Haig-Brown, McClelland & Stewart, 192 pages, \$13.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 3768 6).

By DEAN BONNEY

THIS IS A collection of 19 stories, 16 of them unpublished when Haig-Brown died in 1976. They all came out of his experience as a logger, prospector, trapper, surveyor, hunter, and sport fisherman. "Stories" is as good a word as any, although the camouflage gets progressively thinner and the lest handfull, the best by far, are autobiographical sketches. He dropped the pretense of "making up" stories, many of them having an O. Henry kick at the end, and wrote straightforwardly as the Campbell River author-magistrate who, *relished* fishing above almost anything else. The editor is his eldest daughter.

Haig-Brown wrote the first eight stories in London shortly before he moved back to British Columbia for good. He was in his early 20s. They proclaim themselves as apprentice work. Like all writers he was trying to learn his craft at the expense of the public (and failing; none of the eight is listed as having been previously published). They are too carefully aimed at British magazines of the time that would take stories with some colonial colour — *Blackwood's* perhaps, or *Cornhill*. Tough West Coast loggers say "See here" and "He'll be along directly." Men who desert their wives are "dirty skunks," cowards are "yellow," and adulterers are "rotten swine." Characters who can't speak the King's English have to get by on ethnic or yokel talk with plenty of "der"s mid "hev"s and "dat"s and "ting"s. His daughter says in a note she believes they are all true stories. Maybe, but in these early ones his memories seem too often tailored to fit the preconceptions of a certain kind of British reader in 1930. Even so, indications of the lean style to come are here, as are the keenly appreciative eye, ear, and nose for his chosen part of the country.

Half the others were written in the late '30s. By then Haig-Brown had settled on the east coast of Vancouver Island. He had also settled in @ developing a cooler way of looking at things and a sparer way of writing, lie was involved enough to know intimately what he was writing about, but detached enough to be able to describe it with telling accuracy. There are fewer adjectives and adverbs, and he was no longer trying so hard for effect, or no longer seeming to, which is the same kg.

Some of them are character sketches. In

two of these the characters — the protagonists in fact — are a barnyard rooster and a Labrador retriever. You wait for the first bit of humanizing, a little stream of consciousness, say, from the cock or the dog. But no. The animals are credible, even winning, because they're always perceived by the human being who is telling us about them.

The other stories date from "emend 1950" according to the editor. Most of them are character sketches too. In all of them Haig-Brown appears unselfconsciously as a writer who is also a small-town judge and a knowing and caring fisherman. When he takes you fishing with him he imparts his expertise so deftly that even the layman can follow him: "I was . . . fishing a wet fly downstream on a long-line and trying to swing it across a few inches above where the fish were lying so that no shadow of gut would touch them."

The prize of the book is the seven-page piece called "The Wharf." In it he recounts a minor tragedy. There is no exaggeration, yet the event is given a convincing dimension. *AU* Haig-Brown's virtues came together in this story: a matchless knowledge of fishing and fishermen; an unruffled compassion (no doubt refined, if not acquired, in court); a feel for his part of the coast; and a pellucid style. *The New Yorker* bought it. No wonder. Cl

The ears have it.

East of Myloona, by Andrew Suknaski, Thistledown Press, 68 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920066 22 4) and \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 920066 21 6).

Another Mouth, by George Bowering, McClelland & Stewart, 96 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 1590 9).

By STEPHEN SCOBIE

ANDY SUKNASKI writes the words of the poet listening. Reading his work you always have the impression of him sitting in some small-town café or hotel bar, hunched forward, smoking his pipe, his eyes in the shadow of his peaked cap (white polar bear on blue, the Northwest Territories) intense, intelligent listening.

His books contain the poems of all the voices he hears: in *East of Myloona*, the voices of the North. The poems come from a tip he took in the summer of 1977, to the country 'the Inuit hunter Ishmael Alunik named for him as "Myloona": "where I hunted." Here are the voices of the old Dutch immigrant Tjar Doornbos, "the King of the Ravens"; of the trapper Oliver Powder ("ain't nobody's gonna survey/ across my traplines . . . caus i got guns/ boy!"); of Alex Tawye remembering his

grandfather who worked a whole summer for Hudson's Bay and got a gun, a "muzzahlohdda," as his total wages; of Henry Rivett, "strumming blue moon of kentucky/ while the MACKENZIE flows on"; of "Harry Debastien: in the Mackenzie Hotel Pub";
 hey... you know?
 sometimes I go huntin moose?

come home with
 nothin?
 throw handful ah snow in
 pot?
 with tin tomato?
 got moose track soup!

This is the kind of writing with which Suknaski has established his posit@ as one of Western Canada's leading poets: a poetry of precise observation and impersonality; a poetry of the people and their history, their rootedness in time and place; a poetry of anecdote and reminiscence, of tall tale and legend; above all a poetry voice, of colloquial speech, of bar-mom conversation, heretorecord function re-present, to listen, and later to speak, telling the stories and catching the inflections (the question marks at the end of each Harry Debastien's statements annotating the upturn in the voice), getting the voice down on paper. It 's a craft that Suknaski has perfected, and in *East of Myloona* he applies it, as skillfully to the northern land in which he is only a summer visitor as he has done in the past to the familiar home-ground of Wood

Mountain. One would hate to see him abandon this role as the chronicler of a vast oral history, yet one would also hate to see him trapped in it. His potential range is even wider, and there is surely room for more of Suknaski himself in these poems, more of his quirky, esoteric intelligence, more than merely the observer, the interpreter. As an &id reader of Jorge Luis Borges, he must himself know that he is not simply recording his world, but also creating it, dreaming it. Some day he should step mom firmly into his dreams.

East of Myloona does feature one other aspect of Suknaski; namely his talents as an artist. The book is illustrated with six of his own drawings, meticulous pencil sketches of overlaid images — faces, animals, masks — which stand in grave and eloquent counterpoint to the poems. (And congratulations to Thistle-down Press for the quality, of the reproductions.) *East of Myloona* is certainly a book worth having.

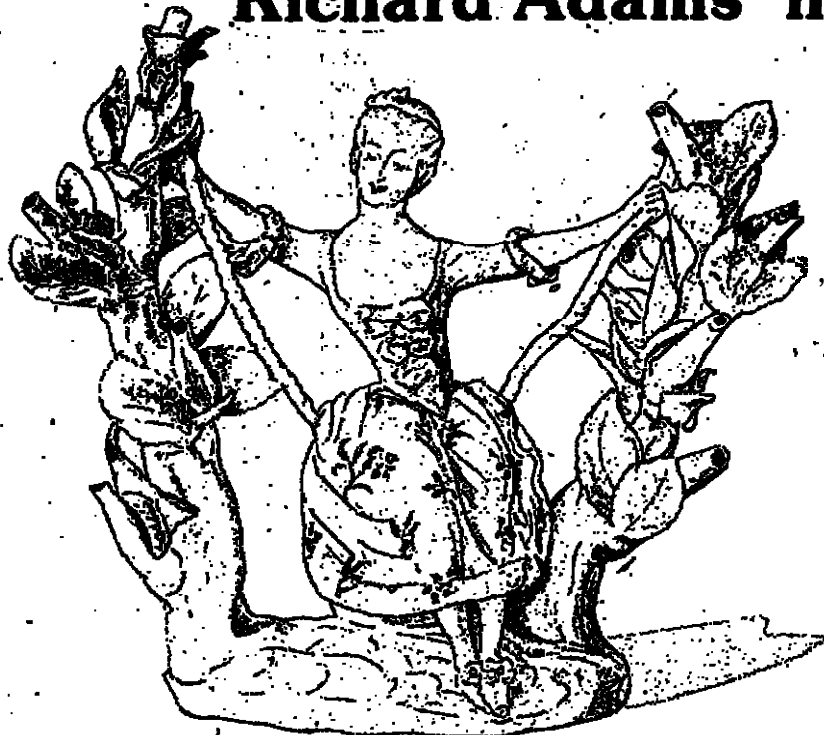
George Bowering writes the words the poet listening to a poetry of voice. Bowering hears that are not those in northern pubs: rather, the voice that he hears and follow,, tracing its movements with no less dexterity than does Suknaski, is his own voice, or more profoundly, the voice of the language moving within him. It is by turns witty, sardonic, passionate, compassionate; it can speak with a striking simplicity and directness, or it can twist and turn like a thread in a labyrinth. But it is in the end his own,

performing the function that Bowering alludes to in an early quote from Wittgenstein: "One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over & over again, & one is merely tracing round the frame thru which we look at it." The poetry traces the voice, and the voice is the frame: in Bowering's work, what we observe is the process of perception as it takes place, moment by moment, in the language.

Another Mouth is not one of Bowering's major book-length works. Like the delightful *A Short Sad Book* or the elusive *Allophanes*; rather, it is a loose and casual collection of short poems, the only extended sequence being "Old Standards." The book is none the worse for this: my occasional dissatisfaction with Bowering usually derives from a feeling that the concepts behind his books are sometimes more interesting than the books themselves. These small, fleeting moments of wit and perception are among the best of Bowering.

Some of the poems are little more than jokes, but they're good jokes: "A Poem for High School Anthologies" would serve splendidly the purpose its title suggests. There are poems of small, precise observation; poems for his daughter and poems of re-finding his own past; surprisingly little about baseball. There are poems of loneliness and poems of travel; poems of personal and of national history. Poundmaker is evoked with dignity, John Newlove with affection. The series "Old Standards" reviews long past relationships in poems

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that take off from the first lines of old pop songs: the whole sequence is outstanding, but the second poem — "Moonlight becomes you" — is just superb, as good a poem as Bowering, or for that matter any of his contemporaries; has ever written.

What holds this scattered collection together is only the voice, "the frame through which we look at it." It's a voice as authentic as any Suknaski has heard; though they speak of different worlds, though they dream different creations, they are linked in their fidelity to the movements of language through which they sense — everything. They write the words of the poet, listening. □

Cerebral seismographs

Les stratégies du réel/ The Story So Far 6, edited by Nicole Brossard, Coach House Press, 344 pages, \$7.50 paper (ISBN 0 88910 168 X).

By WAYNE GRADY

THIS SIXTH ANNUAL issue of Coach House's *The Story So Far* anthology has been given over entirely to the young québécois writers associated with the Montréal quarterly *La Barre du Jour* (rechristened in 1977 *La Nouvelle Barre du Jour*). Coach House's guest editor, Nicole Brossard, is also the editor of *La Nouvelle Barre du Jour*. At 37 she is one of the oldest writers in the group; and one of the few who have previously appeared in English. In 1976 Coach House published two of her novels, a book and *Turn of a Pang*, both of which were published in French in the early 1970s. She is also the author of *Mécanique jongleuse*, which won the Governor General's Award in 1975.

Brossard has been with *La Barre du Jour* since its inception in 1965, and so it is not surprising that all the writers represented here seem cast in her mould, all tinkering more or less proficiently with the themes and images found in Brossard's own work (again not surprisingly, these are the same themes and images found in most Coach House authors as well); Brossard's poetry is often oppressively cerebral:

Unknown to emotion the scene unfolds filled with seduction filled with reserve for the stakes could be bruises of black or of words.

But cerebral all in a rush, stridently subjectified, as though the words spew from the brain's pan unhindered by thought or custom. Pure words; in fact, painted with a large brush. Almost all of Brossard's poems are about words — not words as means of communication, but words as physical objects to be experienced:

Indelible always perceptible in my muscles, to the touch, this scene of a hair so surprising the act of intertwining suddenly turning into a structure of sound.

The image lends itself easily to the idea of the word made flesh: especially for women poets (Brossard is co-founder of the feminist collective that publishes *Les Têtes de pioche*, which translates as "Pickaxe"), the poem replaces the foetus as something to be laboured over and delivered. Thus we find in the excellent piece by Genviève Amyot, "These Too Are Real Birds," an intense verbal account — no, not so much an account as a *simulation* — of a birth. We don't find out what was actually born (a bird? the /connections with French and Russian symbolism have always been very strong in Quebec); but the experience is followed by this:

When in fact I have gone over all the sessions again, pre-natal, natal and the succeeding ones, each and every one, written, spoken, from a distance or actual presence, achieved or stored away, when I have made as many appeals as necessary for trust to be indefectible, then have fabricated the missing parts so as to reinforce the foundations sufficiently, guaranteed for life, in the greatest tranquility, then I will undertake the job of working out the final objective: the systematic invention of our trivial daily life.

For France Théoret, the struggle is against language: "There's no possible mode of language for a seismograph trained on lips turning blue." Words are, in a sharp rebuttal to Genviève Amyot, the "hollow echo of a mother dead from having given birth." Théoret rails against "acts that don't lead to action," for, as she says, "behind the Maginot line words are unheard."

But all revolutions begin with the disintegration and reconstruction of language, with "giving new names to the stars" in F.R. Scott's phrase (Jean-Paul Sartre's autobiography is called *The Words*). Perhaps the clearest statement of the violent, revolutionary use of language in this volume is found in Michel Gay, who co-founded *La Nouvelle Barre du Jour* with Brossard in 1977. Gay's bombardment, "Bluff Edge of Suresurge," bounces from prose to poetry, but is internally consistent in its message:

Words on a page's the way, if we want to, we'll get in the mêlée, the ricochet of the letters, ABC's. A new circulation, (at least) an absolute necessity. Some new meaning (any). Reaching the indifferent transparency of what filters through the keen-edged tissue of the words.

The problem, for these descendants of an older generation's *parti pris*, is to turn a language of subjugation and colonialism into a vocabulary of anger. Once that is accomplished, there will be no more talk of a "quiet" revolution. □



Pebble pusher

Landmarks, by Robin Skelton, Sono Nis Press, 91 pages, 85.95 paper (ISBN 0 919462 88 X).

By MICHAEL THOMPSON

ROBIN SKELTON, now in his mid-50s, came to Canada 17 years ago with the beginnings of a British literary reputation. He had done some academic work — selections, editions, articles, translations — and other bits and pieces including various volumes, pamphlets, and broadsides of poetry, or stuff somewhat like it. He kept this up prolifically in British Columbia and crafted and grafted his way on to the approved CanLit roster by an aggressive ubiquity in all the right genres, journals, and media:

Skelton is at his best as a translator — of, for instance, the lucid morsels of the *Greek Anthology* — and as a provocative commentator on the craft of poetry — *The Practice of Poetry* (1971) and *Poetic Truth* (1978) being among his excellent output. But woe, woe, multiple woe. In many another sleek and high-trotting academic, Skelton is light years from being a poet himself. His latest slim volume, the unmemorably titled *Landmarks*, is drab evidence of the gap between theory and practice.

For Skelton, Vancouver Island is a place to which he "came home" from wuthering Yorkshire, and whose past and presences he has slowly been coming to know over the intervening years. *Landmarks* is an attempt to relate his "own present self to the haunting past and the presences of this place, which is, for me, the centre of the natural and spiritual world I inhabit and which inhabits me." It isn't easy to glean from its contents what force this relation has. This is not to impugn the validity for Skelton of his engagement with the terrain and its past. It's just that he doesn't have the poetry to tell us about it. Faceless stuff like this doesn't do it: "I picked a pebble from the beach; the pebble/ first is miracle/ and then is stone." And when Skelton tries to be gnomic it's even worse. Here is "Pebble" complete: "It would be hard to take/ this pebble home/ unless we knew the way/ to take the sea."

In some ways *Landmarks* is a parody of what can be thought of as West Coast or more nearly Vancouver Island poetry. Lots of rain and mist, lots of stone, pebbles, sea water, sea birds, shells, whales, wolves, Indians and discoveries, woods and woods, forest and forests: the ingredients are ready to mix. "It is a day of rain;/ the rain sweeps down,/ each leaf, each needle,/ gathering, filling, loosing/ threads of rain until the/ threads of rain/ have woven curtains" is one

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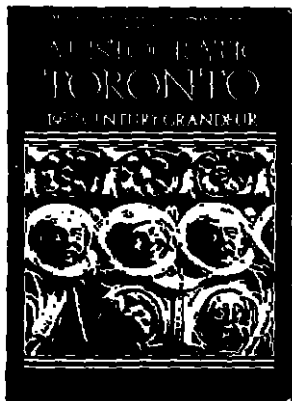
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rainy piece. Another starts: "A mist of rain/ upon the shore/ of the empty island/ and in the sand,/ half buried, ribbed/ as an ebbing wave..." Then there are the fish eagles, "great wings silhouetted/ on the sky,/ swaying upon the wind,/ and sliding, gliding", or "Nootka" where "Over the west/ coast the birds/ hover and scream, the big breakers/ hurling them high," etc. "Nootka" even throw People of the Deer into the bargain.

Once in a while there is the flicker of an attempt at busy, hard-working language: "Fanged ship-splitter/ women of rains," which, however, quickly tapers off into the regulation Landmarks banality. Landmarks is full of pieces that are rather sketches for poems than poems in themselves, and simply do not resonate in the reader's mind. nerves, guts, or bloodstream. As Skelton's dedicatory item: "Makar" (in pretty ink), accurately note*: "With less to say/ than rain on stone/ ... than beast or bird/ I put this word/ upon this word/ upon this word..." □

Sparrows and whooping cranes

More Stories from Western Canada,
edited by Rudy Wiebe and Aritha van Herk,
Macmillan. 296 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN
0 no5 1794 3).

By DAVID SHARPE

THE TITLE, I fear, does this collection a disservice. These 22 works are not simply "more stories" III K-Tel's "more greatest hits"; there is a fine, informing intelligence behind their selection, an editorial presence between the lines, and "more" is scarcely the word for that. Nor, to its credit, is the collection notably "Western." Indictments against failures of vision, and the ills that result when a society fumbles the transfer of vision needed for community — those are problems that are universal, or at least (on our bed days) Canadian.

Wiebe, in his introduction, prepares us for themes of language and naming, and the first two of four sections deliver-k promised. Then the third section veers sharply into a theme of independence versus dependence featuring exclusively female pro-



tagonists, and I said, "Whoa! Is thiii the other editor?" A bit of warning would have been nice. And a bit of linking — even though, by the end of the final section, the apparent break is healed.

In the first story, an English gentleman saves his respect, his silk handkerchief, and his hot tub from the crudities of the bush, and admiration of him by a local trapper passes that dandy's name into the landscape. We're watching a colonial mentality, a fascination with imported models, that appears as well in the biblical and Olympian giants who replace the mere players of a Winnipeg high-school football game in "The Immortals" by Ed Kleiman. Fortunately for our identity, other stories raise the possibility of home-grown models: the myths of the Amerindian in Mel Dagg's "Sunday Evening on Axe Plate"; the somewhat summary rejection of an American husband in W.D. Valgardson's "Skald" for the sake of a local, rustic contact with the land; and even a remarkable use of nature-close-at-hand in the metaphor of "Gall" by Brenda Riches.

Many of the imported visions fail; as Kleiman says in "The Immortals": "It was right. I suppose, that we should have lost. Anything else would have been a tic." And so we find Sante Claus viciously defrocked in "You Better Not Pout" by Ken Mitchell and the bliss of Bryan Moon's "The Student Prince" blasted apart by a proposition that is decidedly not romantic, nor operatic. So many models have died in the Canadian wilderness that we have earned a candor and humility shocking to a foreigner. In Wiebe's "Games for Queen Victoria," a British officer is aghast at Riel's lack of vision: "He had no emperor's eye to achieve an indescribably glorious prize."

Stories of breakdown are as common as suburbs. This collection builds another subdivision of disaster with such pieces as the well-crafted murder, "The Flowers That Killed Him," by Sinclair Ross. But the endangered species, the whooping cranes of our literature, are here too. Those are the stories of success, of vision et work with love — and those create the models we need. Instead of tie immobility of "The Dancer" (by Katherine Govier), in exile from her culture to the point of becoming a reptile, we have Big Joe saved by his land with its buried cache of grain in R. Ross Annett's "It's Gone Rain Sometime." W. P. Kinsella takes a first step beyond our often-destructive candor in "The Kid in the Stove" when Silas Ermineskin agrees to lie; as Silas says, "The reasons you don't shoot songbirds is that they don't do nobody no harm."

And if, when I'm 90 and in a nursing home, I have no other model than the Mennonite hem of "A Sunny Day in Canada" by David Waltner-Toews, I'll be satisfied. Even when he hears of his wife's death, that man hangs on to his vision: "I must concentrate. Dear God help me. I must see everything, feel, hear, sense everything. Totally. My life depends on it." □

Modest angels in worn jeans

Landscape With Rain, by Ralph Gustafson, McClelland & Stewart, 109 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 77103710 4).

Gradations of Grandeur, by Ralph Gustafson, Sono Nis Press, 74 pages, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 919462 82 0).

By ALBERT MORITZ

RALPH GUSTAFSON'S poetry has always been energetic, intelligent, wittily crafted. In the last decade, poems have flowed freely from this writer who during the first 35 years of his career (1935-1970) produced six books at long intervals. Not only has Gustafson grown more prolific, he has also moved toward larger forms. Since 1978, three of his four poetry books (*Soviet Poems, Sequences, Gradations of Grandeur*) have involved long lyric sequences, the last being a single book-length poem. The remaining back from this period, *Landscape With Rain*, is Gustafson's first collection of short poems since *Corners in the Glass* (1977).

Gustafson has also moved toward an emphasis on the social aspects and implications of his beliefs — and indeed, of the whole domain of ideas, traditions, symbols, and values, which has been his chief concern from the beginning. For Gustafson this does not mean becoming a "political" poet, but shifting from the expression of values toward the examination of their function in the concrete present.

Taken together, *Gradations of Grandeur* and *Landscape With Rain* give a good Gustafson cross-section. As a book of personal lyrics, *Landscape* remains close to the earlier Gustafson. Man's confusions and delusions are glanced at obliquely by an individual celebrating love, light, nature, the play of mind and emotion, the insights and harmonies of civilization.

Gradations of Grandeur is more impersonal, philosophical, and sustained. Not that Gustafson's personality is absent from it. But more fundamentally, it is a coherent attempt to assert "grandeur" (the poet's term for human aspiration toward peace, freedom, and an active spirit) in the face of dullness, atrocity, and prejudice.

The best of both books is in their theme, their thought, and the attractive persona that lies behind them. This writing is devoted to reason, its virtue and powers; yet it remains aware, critical, honest. Poetry springs from Gustafson's unegotistical passion for his issues. He praises the "normal," the balanced person in a relatively stable society, capable of pursuits beyond survival or the iteration of dull pain. Without blinking misery and evil, he maintains the possibility, and even "the superior reality, of order and good.

Mixed with these themes is that of sensuous delight in life and all its details. Together, passionate reasonableness and love of the things of earth form Gustafson's version of a 20th-century secular humanism.

Gustafson's poetry, especially in *Gradations*, has a seriousness that asks for attention in the cultural debates of our day. It is interesting to read *Gradations* with George Grant's *English Speaking Justice: Gustafson* championing the heroic secularism of the last two centuries, and rating "supernatural" Christianity as a mythic, superseded phase; Grant proving that free institutions and freedom of thought cannot exist long apart from acceptance of supernatural reality per Judaism and Christianity, which gave them birth.

The poetry does, however, have faults of style and tone that lessen its impact. As a late modernist, Gustafson practises the collage and disjunction common to this "school." His style resembles certain features of Pound, Zukofsky, and Williams. In a choppy, short-phrased fashion, he assembles allusions to culture and history, time-sounding lyrical word-smithery, prosaic statement, and colloquialism of all sorts, from banal to colourful to vulgar:

*The universe out to get us Jesus!
What other premise but a logic
Of stars, Palomar and praise?*

These qualities of style are neutral in themselves, but Gustafson has trouble con-

trolling them. There are frequent misfortunes of tone, as in this passage, too typical:

*What man makes of it often
Is death, more often than
We care to present without throwing up.
Auschwitz's smell. The bulldozer brought
up,
The dad too much for carting;
Anyway, the stink too much.*

This childish brutality trivialized rather than dramatizes. Also, we notice the sketchiness of the language: "more often than we care to present" is officialese, pedantry.

In general, Gustafson's collaged surfaces draw a wide range of materials into his work, but often work against the underlying intention. Most of his poems are, at bottom, orderly lyric meditations. One has the feeling of piecing together a puzzle that turns out to have a simple picture on it.

At its best, his technique reflects the variety, confusion, and trouble of life. Sometimes the complex style co-ordinates all its parts and becomes very effective. His own fine words apply to his poetry:

*A man of jowls suddenly gets up
And stretches: Jeremiah stretches.
In the wood sun comes while hoods*

*Blink and owls defile sarcophagi.
Men work misliking stars.
Metaphors become beet crops.*

*Angels come dorm and get into it,
Our of modesty in worn jeans.
That is to say, it sometimes works.*



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It's a wise child . . .

Innocent Blood, by P. D. James, Oxford University Press (Faber & Faber), 276 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 57111566 7).

By DOUGLAS MARSHALL

THE LEGISLATORS who framed Britain's Children Act 1975 were well aware that they were playing with social dynamite. Under the Act, which a growing lobby would like to see duplicated in Canada, adopted children who have reached the age of 18 can apply *unilaterally* to the Registrar General for the confidential linking information that will lead them to their natural parents. Moreover, Britain made the legislation retrospective to include children adopted before the Act was passed. Since an implied covenant of permanent secrecy surrounded most pre-1975 adoptions, Parliament was properly concerned about the effects on natural parents and others of breaking that covenant. How many marriages would survive the sudden appearance of a strange 15-year-old on the doorstep eager to hug his or her mother or father? The legislators concluded such repercussions could not be avoided but as a partial safeguard ordered that children adopted before 1975 must attend an interview with a counsellor before they can be given the information.

This is the stuff great stories are made of. Like 3 prim Puritan forced to cope with the raiments of a Medici pope, the stiff legal language of the 1975 Act touches on one of childhood's oldest and most richly embroidered myths — the notion that we may not be who we seem, that we may be changelings who had another begetting and cometh from afar.

R's neither surprising nor unfitting that P.D. James should be the first writer to discover and exploit this new literary lode. In seven previous and much-admired crime novels, she has more than once pulled hot-blooded plats out of the cold-hearted filing cabinets of institutional bureaucracy. That James is this generation's Dorothy Sayers is a kuth almost universally acknowledged by fans of the classic British mystery story. *Innocent Blood* suggests that she may also be the Jane Austen of the welfare state, working out modern novels of manners on the small pieces of laminated plastic that g- our socially insured lives.

Our Emma in this ease is the lovely Phillipa Palfrey, a sophisticated 18-year-old with a scholarship to Cambridge to go with the Henry Walton oil painting in her all-too-perfect bedroom. She owes her education and fine taste to Maurice, the trendy intellectual who adopted her at the age of 18 Books in Canada, May, 1980

eight. Beyond a hazy intimation that she is the illegitimate daughter of an earl, the first eight years of her life are a blank. Determined to find out who she really is, Phillipa exercises her right under the 1975 Act.

In due course the filing cabinets yield up the chilling truth: her natural father was a seedy clerk who raped a 12-year-old girl and died in prison; her natural mother, the clerk's wife, has served 10 years for murdering the raped child and is about to be released on parole. After she recovers from the shock, Phillipa perceives that circumstances and self-respect dictate an inevitable course of action for the two-month interval before she goes up to Cambridge: she must rent a small flat and invite her mother to stay with her. Little does she know that the father of the murdered child is stalking her mother. With a butcher's knife honed by 10 years of grief.

This is the first James novel in which her poet-detective, Commander Adam Dal-

liesh of Scotland Yard, does not appear. Generally speaking, it is a bad sign when writers in this genre abandon their protagonists. One remembers with a shudder John le Carré's excursion into romance with *The Naive and Sentimental Lover*. And Nicolas Freeling has never quite recovered his form since he killed off Van der Valk. *Innocent Blood*, however, doesn't need Dalgliesh. We feel he is probably striding around the streets of London James invokes so vividly (mainly Pimlico and Marylebone) and half expect to run across him sooner or later. But in the end the mystery unravels itself in so satisfying -and unpredictable — a manner that there is no point in calling him in.

Finally *Innocent Blood*, like its seven predecessors, exhibits from first line to last an elementary virtue so rarely found in popular fiction these days that fastidious readers will be moved to tears of gratitude. James herself makes allusion to this virtue

Linda Pyke, 1948-1979

IT WAS A gruesome news item, the kind I usually skip over. A disabled woman, age 31, had fallen out of her wheelchair while getting into a van at York University. She died in hospital as a result of head injuries. But the woman's name and address caught my eye: Linda Anne Pyke, of Alexander Street. That address, as well as the name, were very familiar to me. For several years Linda had been one of my favourite customers on my mail route in the heart of Toronto near Maple Leaf Gardens.

Linda was the only recognized poet on my postal walk. We often used to commiserate about the ups and downs of the literary life. It was a standing joke between us that I took a great interest in ha mall. I would skim the pages of magazines, including this one, to find her contribution before delivering them to her. Once when she asked if there was any interesting mail for ha, I blurted out, "Yes — a cheque for \$50." She laughed as I mumbled some explanation about the thinness of the envelope. On days when rejections came through the mail slot in her door and plopped on the floor of her apartment I would wait in the hall to hear the rip of the envelope and then Linda's "Shit!" or "That pisses me off!"

It was a happy day when Linda called out the bit news, "Hey, did I tell you I found a publisher for my book?" *Prisoner* (Macmillan, 1978) is Linda's account of a love affair with a man in Kingston Penitentiary for murder. I had brought her his missives in the form of weird poems on postcards. Sometimes Linda and I had chatted in the lobby of her apartment building while she was waiting for the van to take her for her weekly visit to Kingston. The book created no great splash, although some reviewers gave it small, favourable notice.

When the expected media coverage did not materialize, I conceived the idea of writing about Linda and her work. In the classic position of the go-between, I would be the one to explain the fascinating circumstances of the creation of her poetry. I would bring Linda the public attention she deserved. We were sitting in her apartment while she signed

my copy of the book. Somewhat hesitantly, I broached the subject of my writing about her and her work. She exploded in amazement and indignation.

That was my first indication of Linda's tremendous sensitivity to public exposure. While she strenuously refused to let ha handicap interfere with her private life, she recoiled from the morbid curiosity, as she saw it, of the public. She desperately feared personal revelations would prevent a true appreciation of her work for its own sake. She seemed to feel that the tar known about her condition the better. Without extra publicity, Linda's book suffered the sad fate of most books of poetry by unknowns. But she kept writing. According to the directives of her will, after her death her papers were delivered to Doug Gibson, her editor at Macmillan.

Still wanting to write about Linda, I visited Macmillan and found her life's work stacked in a neat pile on a desk in a private office. There was something eerily evocative of Linda in that tidy bundle. Many of the surface aspects of ha life, such as her meticulously tidy apartment, had been quite orderly. But what a tumult of emotion and experience the bundle of papers contained. Reading the new poems, I realized how little I had really known Linda. In spite of *Prisoner*, I had p&ted in thinking of her as the delicate poetess. I had refused to see the whole woman raging in the poems. They began to read like a violent protest against my thinking of her as a cripple.

In "Wedding Night" Linda speaks of Elizabeth Barrett's escape from her family who thought their sacrifice had bound her to them forever. That poem reads as a particular rebuke to me. It is as though I had been trying to lay special claim to Linda by my attentiveness. How horrible it must have seemed to her that she was prey even to her mailman. This, then, is a belated admission of a failure to understand, despite my desire to be a true friend. My appreciation of a unique person has been enlarged. That, I think, is a success that Linda would have welcomed for her poetry.

—PATRICK DONOHUE

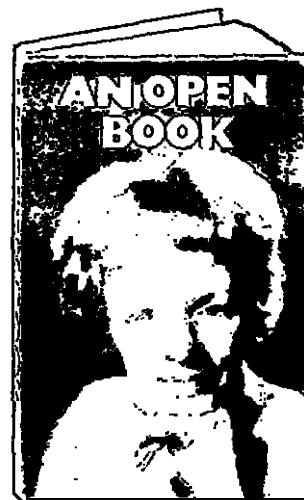
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when she has Maurice muse about his sociology students:

He told himself that they were no different
very intelligent. uneducated if education
implied the ability to write their own
language with elegance and precision. . .

Suffice it to say that Mrs. James is a highly
educated person. □

Notes from the underground

Britain and European Resistance, 1940-1945: A Survey of the Special Operations Executive, with Documents. by David Stafford, University of Toronto Press. 295 pages, \$25.00 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 2361 4).

By IAN YOUNG

CANADIAN TELEVISION of *The Secret Army*, the exciting and intelligent British serial on the Belgian Resistance, may have stimulated some interest in the Second World War European Underground. *Britain and European Resistance* by David Stafford, an associate professor of history at the University of Victoria, outlines the British Special

Operations Executive's involvement with — and partial control over — the various European Resistance organizations, and

War in the ideological and political struggles within these groups.

After the capitulation of France and before the entrance into the war of Russia and the United States, Britain, virtually alone against a German-dominated Europe, fearing invasion and fifth-column activity, suspected that a military defeat of Germany

mobilize European Resistance movements in order to bring about a general uprising. Thus "it was Churchill, not Stalin, who first called Europe to be set ablaze with the flames of revolt."

In the early years of the war, Germany's grip on Europe was underestimated, and as Lord Selborne put it, "Underground warfare was an unknown art in England, there were no manuals for newcomers, no old hands to initiate them into the experiences of the last war . . . lessons had to be learned in the hard school of practice." As the war progressed, Britain's aim changed from encouraging national uprisings to attempting to limit activity in specific acts of sabotage and intelligence-gathering, and readying to assist a future Allied invasion.

Even these moderated insurrectionist policies created some nervousness: what would the post-war result be? Basil Liddell Hart was typical of many when in 1950 he condemned Britain's support for armed

resistance in Europe not only for its relative ineffectiveness but for its "wider moral effect on the younger generation as a whole . . . for teaching them to obey authority and break the rules of civic morality." (Never mind that the "civic morality" was a Hitlerian nightmare!)

Stafford demonstrates that in fact SOE operations tended to be carried out with an eye to the political complexion of post-war Europe, and did reflect "the broader wartime process by which British interests . . .

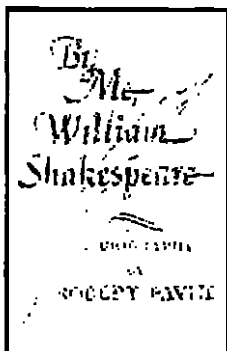
then threatened by, the Soviet Union and European communism."

As well as delineating the problems posed by ideological questions, Stafford reveals the limited effectiveness of Resistance movements. Partly the result of "carelessness within the SOE," Britain supplied and dropped agents in its organization in Holland for 18 months before realizing that it had been penetrated by and was under the control of the enemy. In 1945, a *Conseil National de la Résistance*, formed "after months of patient effort," was almost immediately broken up by the Germans. (German penetration of the Underground was extensive; often false agents were parachuted in to flush out and capture Resistance fighters — a tactic that too often worked well.) The Greek and Yugoslav guerrillas were engaging in civil wars between their pro- and anti-communist factions. And at one point, the names of 200 French Resistance fighters fell into the hands of the Abwehr when a courier fell asleep on a train and a German agent walked away with his briefcase.

Stafford concentrates on the activities of the SOE, and thus must omit a great deal of pertinent material. He writes that "contributions of Polish and Czech intelligence services to the Allied cause were immense." Yet he says little about these contributions, perhaps the most important of which was the Polish smuggling to Britain of "Enigma," the German cipher decoding device — an immeasurable aid to the Allied war effort. Stafford is also hindered by having to work without access to official SOE records, which remain secret. It seems a pity, too, that he has chosen to focus almost exclusively on theoretical and policy questions, with the result that he succeeds in what one would have thought impossible — making the anti-Nazi Resistance seem dull.

While his book will be of some value to historians (in spite of the limitations placed on his research) it unfortunately holds little interest for the general reader. □

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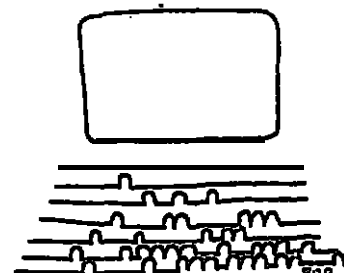
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Bug off, Mr. Chips

by Lorne R. Hill

Cries from the Corridor: The 'New Suburban Ghettos, by Peter McLaren, Methuen, 208 pages, \$17.50 cloth (ISBN 0 458 944 50 5) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 458 943 40 1).

Monday, December 5:

Mr. McLaren! T. J. punched me in the face!

Fuck off, Flip-Lip! Quit lyin!

Look at my nose, sir!

Did you hit her, T. J.?

She punched her own face — I didn't do nothin! She's tryin to get me!

Come and see my picture on the blackboard, sir!

Did you use paint on the blackboard?

It's okay. It washes off.

Sir, are you comin up to see my picture?

T. J. just stole my comic books from my desk!

You said you'd help me with my printin, sir.

Just a minute.

I didn't take nothin from Frankie's desk.

I hate printin! Can I just draw instead?

Tell Sal to watch his fuckin welfare face.

I'll punch it in for him!

You're welfare!

Your mom's a nigger!

Okay, outside boys! We're going to have a little talk!

When are you going to tell T. J. to gimme back my comic books!

Who cut the cheese and didn't put out no crackers?

Sal did! I heard him!

It's Betsy!

Come on kids, let's drop the fart questions, okay?

You stink, Flip-Lip!

Fuck you!

Who said it was me that cut the cheese? Was it you T. J.? If it was, I'll bash put fuckin head in!

Garth's got a *Playboy* in his desk and he's feeling up the pictures inside his desk!

What?

Ya, he pm his finger up the ass of one of the naked pictures. There was this picture of a woman bending over touching her toes.

Garth, can I see you a moment?

Oh, oh.

Sucker!

I got my comic books back, sir. they were in T. J.'s desk, just like I said.

They're mix?! I brought them from home! Honest. My brother give them to me yesterday!

You asshole! You just wait until I get you outside!

Shut up welfare!

Okay class. Line up for recess!

THESE ARE GRADE four kids in the Jane Jungle, the Jane-Finch Corridor, a suburban ghetto in North York just outside Toronto, a six-square-block area of government-subsidized high rises and townhouses containing recent immigrants, single-parent families, juvenile delinquents, and one of the highest suicide rates in Metropolitan Toronto. What is it like to be one of these abandoned and abused children? What's it like to teach them?

So you're on drugs, T. J. You swear, beat up your buddies, destroy school property, and drive teachers from the classroom. You hate the police, the social worker, and anyone in authority. So what? Your own parents are on drugs. They beat up each other and burn you with their cigarette butts. They're pimps, prostitutes, and drunks. They can't manage their own lives. Get away from them. It's your only hope. Parents pass on to their kids pass on to their kids pass on to their . . . Leave them. Start again. The sad story, T. J., is that your parents are failures. They're losers. It's the luck of the draw, and you lost. Tough.

But you see, T. I. no one wants N take the responsibility for you. You're a drain on



the resources of this society. A liability. You cost money. You are a problem. What do we do with you? You bug people. You hang around plazas and parking lots with a radio blasting, and people call you a hoodlum. You go to the roller palace, and the cops throw you out for smoking up. You go to N school, but the dope at the front of the mom is talking about some weird Roman faggot named Caesar. Like, who cares? Society has even invented a new entertainment for you at lunch hour and after school. It's called shoplifting. You get some of your mom's welfare money, and after you've spent it, you steal. It's easy. And you know whose fault it is? It's those commies in the government. It's the racist cops. It's those rich bitches having their hair done over there in the mall. Or their boyfriends in those silver Continentals. Christ! If you only had a Trans-Am!

Hey! T. I. I'll tell you something. You'll never know what it's like to have a home (a house even), a Sunday dinner in a dining room, a fireplace, Mozart playing in the background, and A. Y. Jackson watching over the library in the den. You'll never spend Sundays visiting art galleries, museums, and out-of-the-way comfortable country inns. You will never be invited to drop into the club after work for a cocktail or two before going to the theatre and then to that cute little place where the maitre d' lisses a little in his polished foreign accent. No, none of this is yours. Your parents decided that. You will never know what it's like not to be afraid, not to be hooked on booze, broads, and tobacco, not to be on welfare. You're trapped. Your teacher, McLaren, could get out and did, but then he chose to go into the Corridor; you didn't. And you can't make it out on your own.

You are a major social problem, T. J. In you are summed up the many failings of our society: the breakdown of the family, the immaturity of modern parents, the inadequacy of social services, the powerlessness of the poor, the stagnant economy with its high prices, the gap between the cultures of the old and new immigrants, the unreasonable educational expectations, and the old con game of something for nothing. So what do we do? Do we continue to expect every student in every school to measure up to Eton or Harrow, to Upper Canada College, or the University of Toronto Schools as if they were all being prepared for the British Imperial civil service? On parent's night should limousines draw up to the door and mink coats sweep gracefully into school? Or should we establish more collegiates where the tone is set by the upwardly mobile? Or should we send a SWAT team into your school on parent's night to carry off the parents who are unable to face the teachers without half a bottle of gin under their belts, if they show up at all? What the hell! The rich get what they want and the poor get what they deserve. Right?

What should we do about you? Teachers could refuse to work in your school. The government could prevent families like yours from coming into this country. We

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could put all the kids like you into the armed forces or turn the schools into reformatories. Society could issue licences to those who want to have kids. We could increase or decrease the amount of money your old lady gets on the dole. We could send in more special education teachers to raise you because your parents can't. The Board could bust up your school and send all the kids to other schools in the city so you guys could encounter a more respectable life-style. Or we could give you what you deserve—ashittyeducation.

Hey! T.J.! That's how it is. Only fairies believe in happy endings. Br'er Pox really does eat Br'er Rabbit. So whet you need is ammunition. Don't look to the North York Board for help, They just gave a million dollars back to the province. No, look to yourself. The only kids who make it out are those with talent or brains and a sponsor. So work like hell to perfect a skill you have and bring yourself to the attention of a teacher or an organization. Get an adult on your side. And it's like breaking out of a concentration camp. Some of your friends won't make it.

But if you do get out remember this. It's a beer commercial. Harry and the boys are at summer cottage. Harry is rubbing his stubbled beard and grimacing into a mirror hanging on the porch. He says, "I think I'll leave it on," to which his fellow savages contemptuously reply. "Joyce'll kill you!" In Canada this sells beer by the barge. There are other versions of the same theme. It's "Hello, Jeanie?", Maggie and Jigs. Blondie and Dagwood. Hagar the Horrible, Stanley and Harriet Parker, Maude, The Born Loser, and even *The African Queen*. It's this disease which has caused much of your problem and it is sweeping all modern society. R's an epidemic of raging infantil-



ism and galloping midgetry. Then are very few adults left in Canada. So if you do get out of the Corridor and get married, help your owe kids to become independent. Because, T. J., the mot cause of the mental and social illness that McLaren describes in his diary is quite simple — nobody cares. □

When Big Bird went to war

From Hell to Breakfast, by Douglas Alcorn with Raymond Souster, Intruder Press. illustrated, 339 pages, \$19.95 cloth.

By GILBERT DROLET

BERT STILES'S *Serenade to the Big Bird* was published in 1952, eight years after the author was shot down in a P-51 while escorting bombers to Hanover. Stiles had transferred to fighters after having completed 35 ops in B-178. His book remains one of the most moving accounts of life on a bomber squadron during the Second World War.

Now there appears *From Hell to Breakfast*, Douglas Alcorn's account of his war in the air. Despite the assistance of Raymond Souster, who agreed to "fill in the gaps and expand a few areas," the book falls on several levels. Alcorn tries to encompass too much. His purpose is to record the achievements of 418 Squadron RCAP and his own involvement in that unit. He also elaborates upon the role of that group of airmen called Intruders.

The book needs a sharper focus. A squadron history would have been feasible. After all, Alcorn himself enthusiastically states that 418 was the "best damned squadron in the whole RCAF" (a passionate bias shared by most regimental historians for their particular subjects). With *The Regiment*, his story of the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, Farley Mowat showed that such writing could approach greatness. Another factor that makes Alcorn fall short is his failure to involve his reader on the psychological level. Nowhere does he probe the nature of courage or fear or the intense personal struggle to control the "worm" of terror, as Mowat so honestly and accurately calls it.

There are also editing flaws in the book. Specific events exciting enough in their own right but not sufficiently so to warrant repetition manage to reappear in incongruous places. Important dates are sometimes confused. A chapter that begins with events following the Dieppe mid end describing the exploits of Caldwell's crew on Sept. 17, 1942, are later recorded in an official form as having occurred on the night of August 17/18, just before the fiasco at Dieppe. A non-existent German aircraft, the Ju 109, appears on page 227. But to harp on these lest defects is to cavil.

And though he is no Ben Stiles, and certainly no Farley Mowat, Alcorn manages to save the book. There are occasional descriptive gems that have both emotional involvement and precise observation so that writer and reader become one. This account

of an aerial traffic jam on returning from a mid synthesizes the drama of war in the air:

one Halifax landed, then a Wimpey, and a further big boy was just about to muck down when we stopped another one coming in from the sea. It was quite obvious that he was in trouble; only two engines were turning over. . . . Fortunately, it was light enough for everyone to see that the cripple . . . was going to attempt a landing regardless. So we all gave her the right of way. . . . In she came like a bull in a china shop, wheels up and head high. She bit the runway perfectly, skidded for about twenty yards. . . . Her tail and half her fuselage lay across the runway. . . . The pilot . . . was helping to haul out his dead gunner and navigator. . . . How it ever managed to stay in the air remained a mystery to everyone except the young New Zealand pilot, whose only comment on the whole episode was: "Well, I just had to get the boys back. . . ."

There is pride in *Finn Hell to Breakfast* and heroism and bravado and pain and a desperate *joie de vivre* that could only be experienced by men whose lives hung by such a thin and fickle thread. The tragic waste caused by senseless accidents is the book's most disturbing element. The in-trapidity and tenacity of the young men (Kurt Vonnegut called it *The Children's Crusade*) are fully deserving of the attention paid them in books such as these. □



For now he sees through a glass, darkly

Smoke and Mirrors: The Inside Story of Television News in Canada, by Peter Trueman, McClelland & Stewart, 218 pages, 914.95 cloth (ISBN 07710 8613 X).

By BOB BLACKBURN

THE AUTHOR, chief news anchorman for Ontario's Global TV network, has many things to say about television and journalism and television journalism that are worth paying attention to. He has other things to say about them that should be dismissed with snorts of derision. Thus this is a book for the discerning reader — that is, the reader who can discern what is sense and what is nonsense.

The arrogance of the subtitle poses a problem. It doesn't say "an insider's view," which would have been acceptable. It says "the inside story," implying that here is a definitive work that we outsiders should accept as gospel. It is anything but

that. What it is is a slim, undisciplined personal memoir, in which the author reflects discursively on the ups and downs of his dozen years in TV journalism and delivers himself of many opinions — some of them no doubt well-considered — on the ills and achievements of the medium.

Born in 1934, Trueman began his career at the *Ottawa Journal* in 1953. After 15 years in and out of print journalism, he joined CBC-TV as a news writer. After a year in that volatile establishment, he was catapulted into the post of executive producer of *The National*, and in one more year was named the network's head of TV news and information, a job of awesome importance for anyone, perhaps particularly for a 36-year-old veteran of two years in TV news.


Awed or not, the author, by his own admission, did not quite manage to acquit himself of the obligations of this lofty office with flawless distinction during the two years he held it:

I found, in the end, that I was an unimportant cog in a vast and mindless machine that was to grind on without me. . . . I was an uneven administrator, an erratic leader, and young enough to think I wasn't. It gives me no pleasure to put all of this on paper, but I think the people who pay the bills deserve to know what we were up against.


(Throughout, Trueman appears to believe that to confess is to be absolved. He has

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discovered and mastered the device of self-serving self-deprecation.)

The part (more than one third) of the book that deals with his CBC experiences — potentially the most significantly revealing — is dealt with in a manner more anecdotal than analytical, and reveals only such information as his *mea culpa* for the fact that posterity has only a butchered segment of a record of reporter Tim Ralfe's historic 1970 confrontation with Prime Minister Trudeau over the imposition of emergency measures during the October Crisis — the notorious "bleeding hearts" interview. That was a dark chapter in the history of CBC News. Trueman, who was in the middle of it, gives it a brief and fragmentary treatment, with such impressive documentation as, "I still have the empty cigarette pack on which I noted Kerr's instructions."

Kerr is John Ken, who was then one of Trueman's bosses, and who pops up again in what is surely the most irrelevant passage in the book. smack in the middle of a lengthy account of a petty squabble between Trueman and crack correspondent Michael Maclear: "In the early days, Kerr and I took our morning coffee breaks together. He had a fixation about the kind of sexual immorality that seemed to permeate the CBC, and it was often a topic of disapproving conversation at those morning breaks." That's it — the beginning and end of the book's appeal for the prurient. We are left to wonder what "kind of sexual immorality" it was, and

what kind would have met with Kerr's approval; why the author felt it necessary to emphasize that these were morning breaks, and what in hell it all had to do with Maclear, anyway.

The quote is not untypical of the book. Trueman writes in a vigorous, often colourful, conversational style (he dismisses former CBC Resident Laurent Picard's understanding of the corporation's problems with, "He was talking through his tongue") but the easy informality of his prose smacks more of carelessness than craft.

As the book meanders on, Trueman drifts into a succession of scattershot diatribes about bureaucrats, critics, advertisers, and the very medium itself. Many of his shots are pungent and considerable: "Much of television advertising ... is not salesmanship; it's cheating. . . . That endless parade of smooth-talking actors and shameless celebrities, who seem to be prepared to swear to anything for a buck . . . debases the currency everywhere in television. news included." But then he asks us to take him seriously when he says, "If we ever needed a Royal Commission on Broadcasting, we need one now."

In his introduction, Trueman explains that "smoke and mirrors" is a phrase his current boss, Bill Cunningham, "uses when we are about to embark on an assignment we hope will make our news service look bigger and better than it really is." So, in fairness, he does warn us with his title that

we are to get the illusion of a book, rather than the important, useful, and interesting book he unquestionably could have written had he cared to marshal his experience, ability, concern, and wit for the job. Perhaps he no longer considers print a worthwhile medium. □

A pile with a past

From Front Street to Queen's Park: The Story of Ontario's Parliament Buildings, by Eric Arthur, McClelland & Stewart. Illustrated. 160 pages, \$22.50 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 0010 3).

By ROGER HALL

ERIC ARTHUR's latest book is not so much written as assembled. If Ontario's Parliament Buildings were as disjointed as this account of them, they would have fallen to ruin long ago. Still there is pleasure among ruins.

Arthur has borrowed too freely, admittedly with frank acknowledgements, from a number of "authorities" on the legislative buildings, reproduced at considerable length excerpts from official reports and documents, and appended further documents (even part of a chapter from his own earlier book, *Toronto: No Mean City*). There is also a problem of focus in the text. Frequently it is hard to tell whether the book is architectural history, travel brochure, or personal recollection. In the end it is something of all three but the whole falls considerably short of being the sum of its parts. And there's a final graft as well: tacked on is a well-researched chapter by Fern Bayer on the "Ontario collection," the at sponsored and encouraged by the Ontario government for exhibition in the buildings. Colour photos, both of the buildings and the art, are gathered at the front of the book whereas black-and-white shots are scattered throughout, giving a further sense of discontinuity.

There are redeeming features, however. Arthur gives us considerable insight into the architectural squabbles that produced the Ontario Parliament Buildings and discusses the whole question of competition for major buildings among architects in the late 19th century. Canada, if not in the mainstream, was not relegated to some distant backwater. And he effectively demonstrates the tangled procedures and difficulties of financing major public buildings in a society that was not yet certain of what government's priorities should be. Arthur's observations could have been further enhanced by a more extensive consideration of the politics of the time, particularly as they related to Ontario's view of its pivotal role in the Canadian confederation.

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Arthur's description of the buildings themselves, and many fine photographs accompanying tile teat, help to make a convincing case for the architectural importance of these buildings — a point hotly debated by many who have viewed them and still view them as squat, ugly, and dysfunctional. And if the book were to serve

no other purpose it celebrates the interior of the building and features particularly the fine, intricate, imaginative wood carvings of Ontario's William McCormack, whose work both in the Parliament Buildings and at Toronto's University College demands more recognition than it has received up to now. □

on the racks

by Paul Stuewe

The thrills, chills, and attractions of a sweet summer's supply of fiction

IT'S A MERRY month for fiction with the paperback release of four noteworthy novels and an excellent short-story collection, and among all these goodies Clark Blaise's *Lunar Attractions* (Seal, \$2.50) and William Weintraub's *The Underdogs* (Seal, \$2.25) stand out as exceptionally fine contributions to our literature. *Lunar Attractions* is Blaise's first appearance in novel form and he's written a pretty novel book to commemorate it, adding a healthy dash of surrealist terror to the sure evocation of times past already exhibited in his short stories. The essence of Blaise's art is his ability to translate familiar commonplaces into unique particulars via the deep pmbii of experience and a masterful literary style, and in *Lunar Attractions* this talent has been refined into the stuff of first-class fiction. There is, unfortunately, nothing at all refined about the shoddy *Clockwork Orange*-ish cover art, and an unforgivable misprint ("punishable" for "publishable" on page 251) suggests that Seal's proof-readers need their flippers sharpened.

The *Underdogs* is a delightful future-fantasy of an oppressed Anglo minority in an independent Quebec, possessing all of V. S. Naipaul's acuity regarding the bibles of Third World states minus his debilitating bitterness, and is certainly among the best humorous novels ever written in Canada. Some of the more obtuse members of the reviewing fraternity have described it as anti-French Canadian, which is about as accurate as describing *Gulliver's Travels* as anti-Houyhnhnm: the satiric point is the exaggeration of certain human tendencies in a believable but clearly non-realistic manner, accompanied by the implicit suggestion that shoes that appear on other feet have had at least one previous wearer.

Three other recent fictional offerings deserve kudos. The stories collected in Margaret Gibson's *The Butterfly Ward* (Totem, \$2.50) have been justly lauded for their incisive explorations of character under stress, and it's good to have them available in an inexpensive mass-market edition. Katherine Govier's *Random Des-*

cent (Signet, \$2.25) is a" ambitious family-chronicle novel, perhaps too complexly structured for its own best-selling good, but imaginatively compelling and written with a poet's eye for the telling detail; and if this publication's Award for First Novels were, as I think it should be, an award for first fiction (thereby disqualifying *Lunar Attractions*), I would have been hard-pressed to choose between it sad Betty Lambert's *Crossings*. Matt Cohen's *The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone* (Seal, \$2.50) is also a very competent and engaging novel; although the author's penchant for syntactic oddities ("Grey her hair was") occasionally gives it an excessive literary air that conflicts with an otherwise acute ear for the rhythms of everyday speech.

The thriller box contains one clear winner and the usual bunch of also-rans. *Hambro's Itch* (Signet, \$2.95) by Howard Robens and lack Wassermann is an extremely well-written book that takes unusual pains to construct a credible fictional reality, while taking care to dish up enough sea and violence to satisfy eve" R. Lance Hill fans. Thrills and chills, at least of the meteorological 'variety, are provided by D.K. Fmdlay's *King Winter* (Signet, \$2.25) and Crawford Killian's *Icequake* (Seal, \$2.25), whose respective strengths would have made for one good book, rather than two mediocre ones, if they had been melded — or perhaps that should be melted — together: *King Winter* has the more interesting characters, who even threaten to develop individual personalities until the demands of the disaster genre take over, whereas *Icequake's* fast-paced action and technological expertise grinds to a halt whenever its *dramatis personae* begin to mouth banalities at one another. Ivan Shaffer's *The Sixth Day* (PaperJacks, \$2.95) brings us close to the sun again with an over-long but picturesque terrorists-versus-the-state opus set in contemporary Mexico, and it's both reasonably entertaining and a definite improvement over the author's lacklustre *The Midas Compulsion*.

In non-fiction, the Farley Mowat and

EDITED BY J.M.S. CARELESS

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I live at,

Pierre Berton industries show no signs of declining productivity. Mowat's *The Dog Who Wouldn't Be* (Seal, \$1.95) centres some enjoyable childhood reminiscences on a marvellous mutt named Mutt, and relates them with his customary flair for vividly portraying the tastes and textures of experience. Berton's *Drifting Home* (Seal, \$2.50) proffers a smooth blend of past and present history in narrating the story of a voyage down the Yukon, River by the Berton clan, making it good family reading in all the right senses.

If you sometimes feel deficient as a conversational cut-and-thruster, Nancy McPhee's compilation of *The Book of Insults* (Penguin, \$2.95) is just the thing for running Wilde until you're Shaw of yourself again. Half the fun of pursuing such collections is quibbling with what has or has not been included, so permit me a quibble. McPhee &es offer one example of the rough-tongued wit of the American literary critic James Gibbon Huneker, but she has not cited the inimitable (and editorially censored, unfortunately) opening sentence of his review of a pretentious musical play: "This is art," Huneker thundered, "with a capital F." But every reviewer who has ever groped for words to express total repugnance will find much to ponder in *The Book*

of Insults, a most useful encyclopedia of epithets for those times when only outrageous slings and arrows will do.

The Flotsam and Jetsam Department, finally, brings up the rear with Jack Cahill's *The Hot Box* (PaperJacks, \$2.95), the story of the Mississauga train derailment and the year's most potentially misleading titk. It contains a few cheesy photographs presumably excusing the price tag, and demonstrates that Canadians can produce instant schlock as well as the next persons. Also overpriced is Alan Easton's *50 North* (PaperJacks, \$5.95), the moderately interesting recollections of a North Atlantic naval commander in the Second World War. With its smattering of photographs and illustrations, the book might as well have been reduced to pocket-size format and price. Speaking of reducing, Doug MacLennan offers *How to Keep Fit at Your Desk* (Totem, \$1.95). The author is obviously no slouch, and you won't be either if you follow this simple program of exercises for the office-bound. It's well-illustrated, comprehensible and cheap at the price, and it should be perfect for those slack periods when there's no papershuffle and you're in danger of becoming chairperson of the bored. ♦

Despite its title, *The Land of Look Behind* by Paul Cameron Browne (Three Trees Press, 79 pages, \$4.95 paper) isn't science fiction, though a couple of its fables offer such unlikely protagonists as a pipe stem and a dandelion. Browne's slender collection contains some rather pretentious short stories (ba are frequently confusing, partly because they're fragmentary and often because they're illogical. He also has the annoying habit of using footnotes to point out how clever he is in referring to obscure events and people — things a more skilful writer either rejects or weaves seamlessly, without self-congratulation, into his work. Brown trades in cliché (of a hag in "The Hive": "Every detail was complete, right down to that proverbial one decayed tooth dangling from the centre of her facial cavity") and, perhaps intentionally, perverts realism in tortuous dialogue:

"I'm sick of the confidence racket we've been pitting against ourselves. What's more, my body fluids are near depleted. I'm numb with heat — I can imagine myself thirsty for disaster drinking seawater and thinking there's a spring nearby. And that sun grows more forbidding tk lower it drops."

Another repository of beast fables is Gerald Donaldson's *Frogs* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 128 pages, 514.95 cloth), one of the spate of large-format picture books that have recently brought us gnomes, fairies, dragons, giants, and heaven knows what eke. (I am preparing a book titled *Weevils*, and currently seeking a publisher.) Donaldson celebrates the frog as folk-hero, plague, and object of man's cruelty and joy (Dutch microscopist Anton Van Leeuwenhoek reported, of the bleeding of a dissected tadpole: "This pleasure has often-times been so recreating to me, that I do "a believe that all the pleasures of fountains or waterworks . . . could have pleased my sight so well"). Also notable are *Bright Sunshine* and *a Brand New Country*, edited by David Mitchell and Dennis Duffy. (*Sound Heritage*, Volume VIII, Number 3, Aural History Series, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 84 pages, \$2.50 paper), about the remittance men and settlers who peopled the Okanagan Valley between 1890 and 1914, and *The Danforth in Pictures* by Barbara Myrvoid (Toronto Public Library Board Local History Handbook Number 3, 36 pages, \$3.50 paper), which includes a photo, among others, of baskets of asparagus — a noble vegetable whose delights are preferable to anything dty life can offer-harvested in what now is a hectic commercial district in the east end of Metropolitan Toronto.

Finally, I wish I had owned David Crane's *Dictionary of Canadian Economics* (Hurtig, 372 pages, 518.95 cloth and \$8.95 paper) when, as a reporter for the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, I was occasionally required to interpret suck ponderous phenomena as the ritual monthly increase in the consumer price index. Faced, for instance, with the federal government's decision to allow the bank

the browser

by Michael Smith

Up the river and out into space with a backward glance at asparagus and frogs

THE NIGHT OF December 13, 1967, Joe Haywood, an alcoholic career soldier, shot to deah a Winnipeg man and woman apparently because he mistook them for his wife and her lover. He was in such a boozy stupor that he didn't know what he was doing, and still can't remember the details of the shooting. They have been assembled by his co-writer, Peter Warren, in Haywood's confessional autobiography, *Mr. God, I'm Sorry* (Gateway Publishing, illustrated, 150 pages, \$11.95 cloth) — a crudely narrated, badly organized inventory of scrapes with liquor and the law from the time he was a young boy. The words of the title recur throughout the book as a catchphrase for Haywood's remorse, but it's probably too simpk an excuse for him to blame all his anti social behaviour solely on drink. He's insensitive enough to rhapsodize a woman encountered aboard ship as nothing but "a good fuck" and continually refers to the Congolese, among whom he was posted in the early 1960s, as "Jigaboos." Haywood was convicted of manslaughter for the killings, and sentenced to 24 years in penitentiary. He was released after five years, has quit drinking, and now

26 Books in Canada, May, 1980

is the owner of a prize-winning horse ranch.

Oscar Magocsi's autobiographical ordeal, *My Space Odyssey in UFOs* (Quest Group Publications, Box 215, Station "Q", Toronto M4T 2M1, illustrated, 210 pages, \$5.95 paper) purports to be "not just another book, but rather a coded transmission from the Space Beings to you." Yipes! During Magocsi's confusing trip by flying saucer from a remote rendezvous in Muskoka m the planet "Argona" and beyond — a voyage that mixes pseudo-scientific doubletalk with elements of religion — he learns that the paternalistic aliens want to lead Earth out of its current "psychic pollution" into a new Golden Age, the Age of Aquarius. "The essence of these messages will be the same all over. Earthman, change or perish!" At any rate, it's reassuring that the aliens drink gin and tonic, and that a least one — a dazzling redhead named Melodv — knows the words to "I Left My Heart in San Francisco." (A large format, portfolio edition is published for \$7.95 simultaneously by the UFO Media Group, Northeastern UFO Organization, Box 781, Streetsville, Mississauga, Ont. L5M 2C2.)

rate to float on the basis of sales of treasury bills. I discovered in Crane's book, for the first time, a lucid explanation of how and why this weekly auction of government securities is conducted. After looking up Crane's definitions for the laws of diminishing marginal utility and diminishing returns — the only two things I thought I

remembered from a freshman course in economics — I found it easier than ever to blame on somebody else my failure to comprehend it all. Crane's definitions do tend to be wordy at times, but by comparison my standard college textbook (*Economics*, by Paul A. Samuelson) might as well have been rendered in Urdu. □

In Edmonton, Tree Frog Press is the home of the famous Bonnie McSmithers. The third volume in Sue Ann Alderson's series is *Ronnie McSmithers Is At It Again* (41 pages, \$5.95 cloth and 53.95 paper). As in the previous two books, Bonnie and her mother resolve their differences perfectly and reasonably. Again it's a book with a lesson. But the rhythm of the language and the cheerfulness of Fionna Garrick's illustrations seem to captivate young children.

For children of the same age range (three to seven), Tree Frog Press also offers Monica Tap's *Mr. Brown and his Magic Mustache* (44 pages, \$7.95 cloth). Mr. Brown EM make anything disappear by wiggling his mustache and Martha Jablonski-Jone's witty illustrations convey the confusion that ensues.

For older readers, Brenda Bellingham has written *Joanie's Magic Boots* (Tree Frog Press, 125 pages, \$9.95 cloth and \$3.95 paper). Here the magic takes the form of a perfectly happy resolution to the problems of a lonely and fatherless 10-year-old girl. And for still older readers, Career *Girl* by Joan Weir (Tree Frog Press, 141 pages, \$8.95 cloth and \$3.95 paper) tells how the heroine, a ballet student, allows her better self to triumph over her selfish ambitions. Some children are addicted to ballet stories and *Career Girl* should at least feed their habit.

Also intended for older readers — for

in the beginning

by Mary Ainslie Smith

A squirrely plan to grow peanuts in the fairy-tale world of small presses


ANYONE INTERESTED in Canadian children's literature most regret Tundra Books' decision, announced last fall, to cease publishing Canadian children's books. With grants cut and production costs rising, it had become simply too expensive to produce children's books of a quality to meet Tundra's high standards. These problems most he felt everywhere. And yet Canada does not seem to lack small presses anxious to continue publishing books for children. From Breakwater in Newfoundland to any number of presses in British Columbia, there exists a determination to reach the children's market. And although none of these presses seems about to fill the gap left by Tundra, some have acquired a good reputation for publishing attractive, honest books at reasonable prices.

One good example is Kids Can Press, which has several new books on the market. The *King's Loon* (45 pages, 52.25 paper) by Mary Alice Downie, illustrated by Ron Berg, is one of a series of stories from Canadian history. It is about Count Frontenac's expedition to establish a trading post in Iroquois territory on Lake Ontario told from the point of view of an 11-year-old stowaway. It has been translated into French by Jacques Loic Lorioz and the French version is bound in the same book.

The *Peanut Plan* (63 pages, \$2.25 paper), written and illustrated by Claire Watson Garcia, was originally published in 1975 by Kids Can Press and now has been revised and reissued. This is a "message" book, stressing, rather emphatically, cooperation and a return to a more natural and self-sufficient way of life. A young squirrel learns, in part from her grandmother, in part through her own initiative and in part from research on George Washington Carver, that cultivating peanuts can improve the quality of life for her end her people. The book includes recipes and activities to involve children in what it preaches. However, Garcia's statement at the end of the book, "If you live in a place where frost occurs in April, you may not be able to grow peanuts successfully," would seem to exc-

lude geographically about 99 per cent of Canadian children who might like to try. But according to the Stokes seed catalogue, Garcia is wrong about that anyhow.

In 1978 Kids Can Press published their excellent *Folktales* Series, stories from a variety of different cultural backgrounds. In the same spirit, although an original and contemporary work, is *Earth Magic* (59 pages, 62.95 paper). Dionne Brand's poetry about the Trinidad of her childhood combined with Trinidadian artist Roy Crosse's line drawings results in a beautiful and evocative little book.



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adults as well — is *Maizy's Scarf* (Sono Nis Press, 64 pages, \$4.95 paper). Maizy, a girl on the verge of puberty, gives a boisterous account of life in a Yorkshire mining village in post-war Britain. Its author and illustrator, Eliza Hawkins, grew up in Yorkshire herself and came to Canada in 1956.

Books by Kids produced *Wordsandwich* in 1975 — a collection of writing and illustrations by school children. Another *Wordsandwich*, edited by Anne Millyard and Rick Wilks (94 pages, \$4.25 paper) is a sequel, presenting the work of 50 children, ages eight to 13 from across Canada. *Riding an Apple*, *Facing the Sun* (60 pages, \$4.50 paper) is the same thing but intended for younger readers. These books are attractive, important for what they offer, and fun to read. But I wish we had more facts about the writers and artists. We learn their names but not how old they are nor where they live. These things seem important because the books' value lies in the feelings and ideas expressed by these children as individuals, rather than in any objectively assessed artistic merit.

Oberon's Pernilla in the Perilous Forest by Muriel Whitaker (24 pages, \$9.95 cloth) is a curious mixture of a modern story and a medieval fable. Pernilla is an independent and determined little girl. Her quest for a pet horse takes her into the Perilous Forest where she encounters seven animals representing the Seven Deadly Sins. Colourful and ornate illustrations by Jetske Ironside suggest illuminations from medieval manuscripts.

Another mixture of traditional and modern is *Woodsedge and Other Tales* (Gardenshore Press, 105 pages, \$2.95 paper), a collection of 12 fairy tales by Michael Bedard. The stories' themes are familiar: a king sacrifices what he loves most in order to try to cheat death; two brothers go out into the world to seek their fortunes and prove their merit to their father; a prince breaks a magician's spell and changes a golden bird back into a beautiful woman. What makes them different from traditional stories are the endings; they are so completely resolved and happy that the reader can't believe that the evil in the stories was ever much of a threat. In traditional fairy stories, evil is very real and never to be taken lightly. However, the general design of this book and the illustrations by Stan Zych make it attractive.

Borrowing from a more recently established tradition is *The Case of the Moonlit Gold Dust* by George Swede (Three Trees Press, 32 pages, \$2.95 paper). Inspector Holmes of the Halifax Police Force solves a mystery with the help of his dog Sherlock and his cat Watson. This is to be the first book of a series. It seems a shame that children are expected to work their way through this sort of thing as well as *Sesame Street's* Sherlock Hemlock and a dozen other parodies before they are old enough to encounter the real Conan Doyle.

Borealis is another publisher of books for children (pamphlets rather than books actually, because none of their current stories exceeds 14 pages of text, including illustrations). The seven recent Borealis titles are: *Inuk, Yookie, Heroes* Three, and *The Little Star* by Marjorie Kendall; *Angelina and her Friend Giorgio the Squirrel* and *Grandpapa's Cherries* by Gabrielle Kirschbaum; and *The Missing Numbers* by H. B. Paquette. They cover a range of categories: Eskimo adventures, science fiction, fantasy, and cross-cultural understanding. All rather crudely illustrated, some are printed in one jarringly bright

colour of red or purple ink. None seems to justify the price of \$2.95 each.

Tales from Canada for Children Everywhere (108 pages, \$8.25 cloth) is a collection of stories set in Canada edited by Stephen Gill of Vesta Publications. This is undoubtedly a sincere effort, but unfortunately sincerity alone cannot compensate for the embarrassingly bad writing in some of the stories, the plethora of typographical and grammatical errors, and the general carelessness of the book's presentation. CI

by Wayne Grady

on/off/set

Poetry by permutation: when writers play word-games, the style is in the exercise

THIRTY-THREE YEARS ago, the French author and mathematician Raymond Queneau (1903-1976) published his *Exercices de style*, a series of 106 variations on a single, simple anecdote: a man gets on the Number 5 bus in Paris, complains about being jostled by a fellow passenger, and sits down; two hours later he is seen in front of the Gate Saint-Lazare with a friend, who is saying, "You must have another button sewn on your overcoat." And that's it. The remaining 105 exercises take the reader through repetitions of that one trivial incident the story is retold backwards, inside out, from every conceivable point of view and in every possible verb tense, dialect, jargon, and genre. Words are fragmented, their letters rearranged in groups of two, three, and four to form new words and no words at all. These are arranged on pages the way they would appear to readers with certain eye diseases (Synchysis: "For he would push him, time every that got off people"); or to a mathematician: "In a rectangular parallelepiped displacing itself along an integral line, solution of the differential equation of the second order $y'' + TCRP(x)y' + S = 84..$ " Or to someone interested in permutations in groups of five: "Ytowa oneda onont rdsno rplat herea fanSI formo tobus inean ceday..."

It is a delightful series of *jeux-de-mots*, the seemingly idle doodlings of a far from idle mind. It is also, or perhaps consequently, a profound investigation into the traditional structure and meaning of language. Once you know the story, each variant can be read and understood (even the apparent gibberish cited at the end of the last paragraph): the communication is verbal, but only indirectly linguistic. "Je n'ai pas une confiance absolue dans le langage," Queneau once remarked — a startling admission from one of France's foremost writers until one begins to think of Samuel Beckett and Marshall McLuhan. In

Exercices de style, we read in the introduction in the as-yet-unpublished translation from which I have been quoting, "Queneau questions the relationship of the conscious to the unconscious by questioning traditional modes of utterance and communication." Queneau is, in other words, making the very difficult transition from a Newtonian universe to that of Einstein.

The occasion for these remarks about Queneau is the recent publication of bpNichol's *Translating Translating Apollinaire* (Membrane Press, 46 pages, \$4.00 paper), which is extremely reminiscent of *Exercices de style*. Nichol's book has nothing with Apollinaire, except that

departure, corresponding Queneau's man on the first, published Nichol, "Translating Apollinaire," which appeared in *blewintment* in 1964. It begins:

*Icharrus winging up
Simon the Magician from Judea high in
a tree
everyone reaching for the sun*

In his introduction to the present volume Nichol explains how, while flying back from the Eighth International Sound Poetry Festival in 1975, he conceived of the need for "a pure bit of research," and hit on the idea for this book: "I recalled the first poem I had ever published ... & decided to put that poem thru as many translations/transformations as I & other people could think of." This sounds very much like watered-down Queneau, isometric exercises. But Queneau is not mentioned anywhere, which is just as well, because Nichol suffers by comparison. The fifth poem in the series, for example, is headed "rearranging words in poem in alphabetical order":

*a a a
an and aware Aztecs back backs
beating becoming bodies,
brown built by by cars,*

which is deliberately random precisely where Queneau is intellectually consistent. Number 13 is a "sound translation," in which the words in the original poem are replaced by their approximate homonyms:

hick or ass wan king cup,
Samantha my chess yen front chew.
deo hyena tory,
heavy Juan Gris chin guffaw earth son

Nichol is more concerned with technique than he is with sense, and this destroys his poetry. Queneau destroys language, but he does not thereby destroy poetry. Nichol's word-games visit the same war-torn terrain charted by Queneau 33 years ago, and the differences between the two correspondents

are worth noting. Nichol's variations on his original poem produce new poems rather than, as in Queneau's case, a kind of cubist encirclement of the fundamental question. As a result, Nichol is continually moving on to new questions without stopping to consider the prime one: He takes us into a country without maps, and then abandons us. He doesn't disintegrate language and then put it back together again; like a child with an alarm clock, he smashes language's face and hands and heart, and then moves on in search of a new toy. Queneau's questions are agonized and profound. Nichol's are rather like a cryptic crossword puzzle — something with which to kill time during a long trans-Atlantic flight. □

first impressions

by Douglas Hill

From Manitoba's fleshpots to a measure of manhood that might have been pruned

The **Kanner Aliyah**, by Mark Gordon (Groundhog Press, 509 pages, \$6.95 paper), announces a new season for this column with a thick plop. No doubt it was proper Lenten fare: penitential, bland, about 40 times too long. Friends who chopped through the first few pages of Gordon's glacially gelid prose will be astonished I survived. Observe, third paragraph:

The kibbutz was a couple of miles from where the bus stopped. Martin remembered a few days ago getting off the bus. He was walking up the sun-baked highway on leather shoes. Ordinary street shoes worn in Toronto. Thin-soled shoes that made his feet feel each pebble dig and the heat from the highway. It was told that this country got so hot in the summer you could fry eggs on the pavement. This was not just a way of saying things, a convenient metaphor, but here on this long strand of sand, rock, heat, this patch of land at the Mediterranean's far eastern tip, this was the truth. An egg placed on the pavement would actually sizzle, the mucous fluid turning to white, the yellow jelly in the centre slowly hardening, hardening, hardening.

As this electric style jolts us along, we catch, usually more than once, a few thousand details in the life and mind of Martin Kanner, Gordon's autobiographical hero. He's in his 20s, from Toronto; living in Israel. He spends time on a kibbutz, at university, on the road, mostly in Catatonia. He searches, sexually, spiritually, slowly, slowly. He contracts dysentery: that takes seven pages and the chapter is called — no kidding — "Dysentery." He gets Bell's palsy (15 pages), crabs (*passim*), and his penis measured by a girl friend (only two pages but the prose makes it longer). He often says things three times, for effect.

Someone should have edited this outrage — or compacted it (as in waste). I'd rather not say any more.

* * *

IT'S HARD TO say enough about W. D. Valgardson's **Gentle Sinners** (Oberon, 213 pages, \$17.50 cloth and 57.95 paper). The author has built a solid reputation with his volumes of short stories, and experience and maturity show everywhere in this his first novel. Technique is so accomplished here it may even seem too studied, too self-conscious, but I'd argue that all the craft and polish serves Valgardson's larger purposes — the moments and motions of great beauty, high humour, quiet illumination.

The story unfolds in a drab Manitoba shanty-town along the CPR tracks. It's a memorable landscape of harsh light and dust, primary colours and spiritual poverty, peopled chiefly by grotesques. M&I act or aim seems unlikely in this Breughel- or, better, Bosch-like scramble, until Valgardson begins carefully, steadily, to move his principals to the front and to redeem the bleakness of scene and behaviour with hope.

The exemplar of possibility is the boy Billy, renamed Eric by his uncle Sigfus, to whom he flees from his fanatically religious parents. (They are chilling caricatures of Protestant zealotry, going in for prayer-vigils and hunting down sin; the father's speciality is harassing ice-cream parlours.) From Sigfus and his brother-in-law Sam, Eric learns humanity. That word will have to suffice for an education into the meaning of family, ancestry, and community, and eventually of love and responsibility. He also experiences amorality through his un-

Two new books from the National Gallery of Canada

"Our Own Country Canada": Being an Account of the National Aspirations of the Principal Landscape Artists in Montreal and Toronto MO-1890 by Dennis Reid

"Our Own Country Canada is at heart the tale of two cities, Montreal and Toronto, that played so important a role in Canada's early, artistic development. In this book, packed with never-before-published material, Dennis Reid provides a wealth of information about the painters and photographers who moulded the cultural life of English-speaking Canada: William Notman, Lucius O'Brien, John A. Fraser, Otto Jacobi and many others. More than just a chapter of Canadian art history, "Our Own Country Canada" delineates the vitality of an extraordinary period.



An important study of a neglected period in Canadian history, this book offers new insight into the development of our vision of the Canadian landscape. It is a must for any serious student of Canadian history. 529.95 (hb)

Canadian Video

by Bruce Ferguson

Canada's trilingual (French, English, Italian) catalogue of the Venice Biennale 1980, presents video artists Tom Sherman, Lisa Steele and Colin Campbell; Pierre Falardeau and Julien Poulin; and A.A. Bronson, Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal. The book also contains a valuable list of video production and distribution centres in Canada. \$9.95 (pb)

National Museums of Canada

wanted sidekick Larry, an appalling adolescent nemesis, and a fair measure of incidental brutality, fear, and pain.

Valgardson's style relies on precise if often oblique similes and metaphors to etch the details of place and character. His dialogue is span, country-laconic, and the

narrative moves with quick, rich grace. While the book's conclusion dares to balance irony and sentimentality, Valgardson's skill makes it credible. This is a tough, funny, tender novel, and it all works. □

interview

by Phil Surguy

How the magic harpoon that didn't impale made a true believer out of James Houston

JAMES HOUSTON served in the Toronto Scottish Regiment in the Second World War. Afterwards he studied art in France and it was following his return to Canada, on a sketching trip, that he first saw the Arctic. He stayed 12 years. The first nine were spent as a northern service officer, and then he was appointed civil administrator of West Baffin Island. He played a major role in introducing Inuit art to the outside world, and his Arctic experiences have, so far, been the inspiration for many sculptures, engravings, and drawings, as well as 11 adult and children's books. His latest novel is *Spirit Wrestler* (M & S). Houston now divides his time between a Rhode Island farm and a home in the Queen Charlotte Islands, spending half a year in each place. He spoke to Phil Surguy while on a recent visit to Toronto:

Books in Canada: Can you think of an initial or primary experience with the Inuit that you are now reliving or recreating in your novels, particularly *The White Dawn* and *Spirit Wrestler*?

Houston: I'm especially interested in contact between native people and newcomers, cultural clashes between the two. We have a remarkable thing; we always feel that we are well-educated and that other people are not. But look at an Inuit hunter. He's using all the careful, specialized education that had been given to him down through his grandfathers for 5,000 years in a direct line, none of this classroom stuff of 40 pupils, but one-to-one. Yet somehow we can sit around in supreme confidence, and feel that we are wonderful, masterful people and all other people are just poor simple people who have not taken calculation.

BiC: Do you ever feel self-conscious about writing from an Eskimopoint of view?

Houston: Perhaps I should. But the thing about a writer is I do think he's got to be a bit bold. I had the luck to live with those people for a long time. They're godfathers to my children and I'm godfather to their chin and we have a very close, family relationship. My son is still in the Arctic, working and doing things. So we have an ongoing, close connection with the Inuit world.

BiC: In *Spirit Wrestler* you come within a hair's breadth of actually saying that the magic that lives in the Inuit world and Inuit imagination is real.

Houston: Well, I do.

BiC: Is it real?

Houston: Yes, I think it's real. I find that hard to say. Part of me says it cannot be, but another part of me says, how could it possibly be like that if it wasn't so? I did see a man weaving on a snow bench inside an igloo — almost 30 years ago and they were using an accordion instead of a drum for a shamanistic s-. and that man, when I least expected it (and I was as close as I am to you) he lunged onto a harpoon and drove it straight through his chest and it came out his back. Blood gushed from his mouth and people were screaming and I looked at him and I thought, what am I going to write in the government monthly report about this? I was horrified. I thought he was dead. This man's just committed suicide right before my eyes. Two men grabbed him under the arms and dragged him out of the snow house. I started out after them, just expecting to see him lying there dead and figuring out what I was going to do about it. I was the coroner in the area as



James Houston

well. But as I went out he was on his way back in. There was lots of blood all over him. He pulled up his parka in front and back, and there were big holes in it, but no hole in his chest, and he said, "I'm not dead."

BiC: There's a scene in *Spirit Wrestler* where Morgan, the anthropologist, is trying to roll his kayak and he's grabbed by Talulijuk, a goddess, half-woman, half-seal, dragged underwater, towed under the ice and rammed up through the ice head first. It's written as if you believe that could or did happen.

Houston: I certainly believe that such a thing could be. Whether anything happened in precisely that way, I don't know. There was a storm of shamanistic activity around West Baffin Island at about that time—the mid-1950s — the church really did blow away. The man [that Morgan is based on], the man without my life support, was truly seen by the people walking up on the great plain. Eleven people saw him. Now, I have written that novel from an Eskimo point of view, not saying what I thought about Morgan so much as what Shoonaa thought, what they think caused all those things to happen.

BiC: Was there any irony in your portrayal of Morgan, an anthropologist, a southerner, a superficially weak white man, as someone who appears to have more access to the magic than the Inuit now do?

Houston: No. Well, possibly a little bit. I think they were even. I had a little wind-up saying that the conflict hadn't yet ended and it would perhaps go on forever. It was like the Archangel Gabriel wrestling on the Plains of Heaven or something. We only witness something like that for an instant, but that conflict is one that will go on into endless time. I think Morgan was an enormously powerful person; and I felt that the most powerful shaman was old Wolf Jaw, who could hardly speak and was dying, a ruin of a man, but still he tried to go after Morgan and he apologized in the end and said he just missed.

BiC: One last question. What's in the works now?

Houston: I'm working on *The Fourth Eagle*, a novel about the Northwest Coast and the sea-otter trade in the early part of the

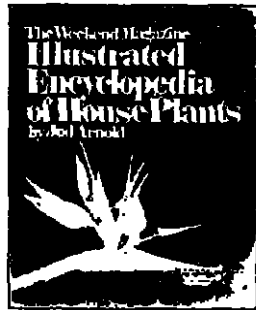
19th century. The fast ships to Canton, the beginning of the clippers. A cultural conflict between the captains, who were pretty sharp, smart dealers, and the Northwest Coast chiefs, who were quite a lot smarter than the captains were. There is a quotation from a chief there. He said, "Before the whites came, there were rivers of blood here from our fighting, from wars. But when the whites came with the trade goods, we started to trade with them and then we started to fight with wealth." Now, I'm interested in "fighting with wealth," and they did it in the absolute extreme—at the potlatch and so on. I'm just about finished that book. It's been a great delight to me. I live there, in the area, for study and because I hope to live there all my life. I adore it. □

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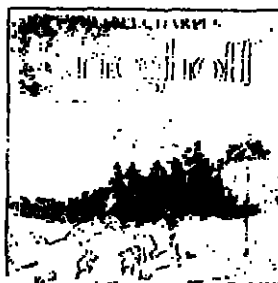
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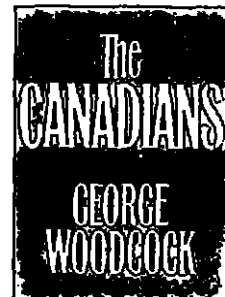
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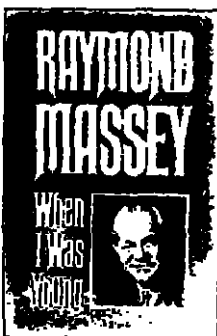
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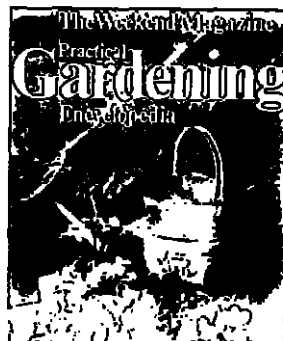
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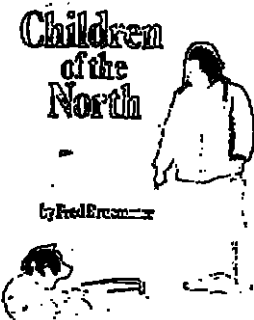
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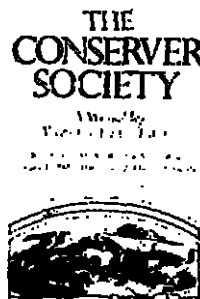
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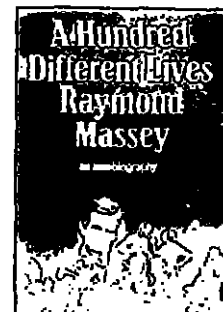
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Letters to the Editor

HEAT FOR AUGUST

Sir:

Hiding among all that bitterness in August Kleinzahler's Montreal review (March) WY the petty motive of revenge. Augie feels slighted as he was never asked to be in a Montreal anthology. Those are the facts. Hidden within the four or five fragments of mine that Augie has chosen to quote are the five worst misquotes I have ever suffered in my life. They were made by a person who has no right advising others to go on to subsequent drafts in their own work.

Artie Gold
Montreal

0

Sir:

It was a surprise to me to learn that August Kleinzahler had once again wended his way north from New Jersey to participate in Canadian literature. When, two years ago, the Canada Council changed their regulations excluding landed immigrants from receiving Arts Grants he couldn't get out of the country fast enough. I remember having a conversation with him at the time in The Word book store in which he quizzed me on American grants and was happy to learn that he could apply to the National Endowment of the Arts in Washington, D.C., and would have the best chance if he were on American soil. Soon after he left Montreal for his home in the U.S. I guess we can thank the Council's decision to once again make landed immigrants eligible for arts grants for prompting his speedy return and recent high profile.

There is much about Kleinzahler's review of six Montreal books (March) that I find particularly offensive. That he seems more interested in literary assassination than book reviewing is a first point to be considered. In his review, Kleinzahler seems hellbent on wiping English Montreal off the literary map, cancelling our franchise at it were. When living in Montreal I suppose Kleinzahler felt somewhat alienated from the main body of literary activity and now wants to get in a few good kicks for spite. If Kleinzahler felt on the outside of things it was because he had no desire to participate in a community of poets and, indeed, his aggressive literary careerism did not do much to endear him to the local residents, nor does it now.

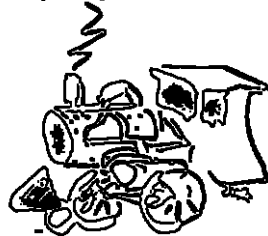
Myself and André Farkas come in for a good bit of Kleinzahler's heat and I suppose that's because we lacked the vision to include him in our anthology *Montreal English Poetry of the Seventies*. I can only agree with the man who first said that editing is a thankless job and reaffirm my belief that Kleinzahler is a third-rate talent. His views on my work would seem to indicate that he places me in an even lower bracket than that and I guess we'll have to leave the final judgement of both of our works to posterity or the Ultimate Canada Council Jury.

When it comes to talking about the organization of the literary presses in Montreal (something he spends some time rehearsing), Kleinzahler doesn't know what he's talking about, though that doesn't seem to bother him, Véhicule Press, CrossCountry Press, Maker Press and New Delta Press are all very distinct organizations owned and edited by different groups and individuals:

their funding (or lack of it) comes from different sources though none of them are particularly "well-funded" as Kleinzahler would lead us to believe. Publishers in Montreal have been working on a financial shoestring for the past 10 years and should be admired for their tenacity and dedication.

I personally resent Kleinzahler's statement that the editors of Véhicule Press have "done very nicely for themselves," implying that they've been hogging the pie that is Véhicule. Véhicule Press has published over 20 titles of poetry, fiction and literary criticism. I have had two books published by Véhicule (the first published two years before I was an editor there), André Farkas has published one, and Artie Gold has published one. One book published by each editor during a tenure of four years doesn't sound particularly piggish to me and there are many other literary presses that have a higher ratio. . . .

A final twisting of facts that Kleinzahler perpetrates is in saying that *The Véhicule Poets* (published by Maker Press) is an embarrassment to Véhicule Press. This simply isn't so. Because of the fact that there is a Véhicule Art Gallery and a Véhicule Press (both stemming from the same initial organization) the owners of the press weren't so crazy about there being Véhicule Poets too, thereby hopelessly and forever confusing everyone, particularly since the Véhicule Poets are not poets necessarily published by Véhicule Press but who met and worked together at the Véhicule Gallery. In this paragraph you can already see how confusing it gets. Unfortunately, we couldn't come up with a better descriptive title for the book and so the confusion does, perhaps, deepen. That Kleinzahler attributes Véhicule Press's change in publishing policy of doing



books other than poetry titles to some theoretical embarrassment over the anthology is the last pernicious spin of his spider web. Two years ago we began to widen the scope of Véhicule's publishing, attempting to find a wider market for our books.

I regret having to write such a lengthy letter in response to Kleinzahler's review but the number of factual errors, lies, distortions and miscues that he manages in some MO words is unparalleled. As to views on the poetry itself we obviously disagree: I like it, he doesn't. Only time and readers will tell which one of us was right, but I obviously wouldn't put so much time and energy into the Montreal community ad its poetry if I didn't think it was important and worthwhile and so stand fully in support of it.

Ken Norris
Montreal

WARM ABOUT 'BATH'

Sir:

Mary Ainslie Smith's review of *The Ordinary Bath* by Dennis Lee and Jon McKee struck me as something of a satire on book reviews until I realized it was serious and might prevent your readers from thoroughly enjoying an unusual and special story.

Her remark that this book is different from Lee's previous works — all of which are completely different from each other — bad a miffed know-your-place quality. She might as well have said that Dennis Lee used black ink for

his last book and blue for this we and she's not going to be comfortable with it.

And her careful computation of the number of words in the book per the mice completely ignored the fact — which she should know — that many children have read and reread and reread it in its few months of publication. Why not start labelling books like cereal boxes, so many cents per so many grams?

The Ordinary Bath is written as a touching, probing story with a dance of a rhythm, and McKee's illustrations evoke age-old images with great vitality. The parents, teachers, and general people I know find more in each page on every reading, and will probably turn it into a classic in spite of anything else Ms. Smith has to say.

Loris Lesynski
Toronto

STEAM FROM FRASER

Sir:

In the April issue of *Books in Canada*, I. M. Owen challenges the historical accuracy of my novel. The *Emperor's Virgin*, by citing such "blunders" as my use of "A.D. 51" as part of an inscription indicating the birthdate of Emperor Domitian. To make sure the dullest reader understands what a "classical howler" this is, he explains: "Even the Christians hadn't invented the numbering of the years of the Christian era yet." What Owen doesn't seem to know is that the "se of the Christian dating system is a convention employed by most writers of both fiction and non-fiction to render the dates meaningful to the modern reader. It is a convention followed, for example, by the classical scholar Robert Graves to annotate the text of *I, Claudius*. Since his use of dates was extensive, he explained the appropriate classical system in an author's note: "The Greek reckoning, "ted by Claudius, counted the years from the First Olympiad, which took place in B.C. 776." Because I avoided internal dates except in one instance, I felt that such a footnote would be both distracting and pretentious, and all but the worst sort of smart-ass would understand that my use of the Christian system was merely a part of the translation from Latin to modern English. I am still of that opinion.

(Footnote: The "se of Roman numerals, in the bar over the review, to denote the price and pagination of *The Emperor's Virgin* is a piece of mockery that must be assumed to reflect editorial judgement; that it is prejudicial, and no light-hearted joke, is proven by the fact that another Roman novel, reviewed on the same page, is not treated in the same derogatory manner.)

When Owen gets around to his social interpretation of Imperial Rome, his arrogance combines with his stupidity to produce what I now nominate as my choice of "howler" of the century. I quote from his review: "But above all the author should be able to imagine what it was like to live in a period when many of the assumptions that were taken for granted were quite different from our own. . . . So unaware is Sylvia Fraser of this necessity that she has a Roman, complaining of the numerous nationalities in Rome, say, 'We've become a city of mongrels.' Now, quite apart from the fact that Rome had been cosmopolitan for a very long time, what she has done here is to impute to a first-century Roman a post-Darwinian notion of racial purity that would never have crossed a Roman mind."

I am delighted to inform I. M. Owen that this sentiment, which I have put in the mouth of one of my senators, issues from the work of Decimus Junius Juvenalis, probably born A.D. 55 (according to the Christian dating system) and chief chronicler of the times I have dramatized. In fact, the mongrelization of Rome, both through illicit

sex and the infiltration of foreigners into the ranks of wealth, prestige, and power, was one of his main targets of satire. I quote from the Penguin Classics translation:

Satire VI: "You might become some piccaninny's Papa, and find yourself making your will on behalf of a son and heir whose off-black face was better not seen by daylight."

Satire I: "That Delta-bred house-slave, sib washed down by the Nile, now hitches his shoulders under Tyrian purple."

Satire III: "When some creature blown into Rome along with the figs and damsons precedes me at dinner-parties — me, who drew my first breath on these Roman hills, and was nourished on Sabine olives! — things have come to a pretty pass."

Post-Darwinian? Clearly I. M. Owen is a monkey's uncle.

Now that we've had our comic relief, let's pass on to more serious matters: the manner of Owen's attack on the literary merits of my novel. In order to hold up my work to ridicule, he quotes a long sexual passage, wrenched out of context, so that the intent, the characterization, the symbolism, the emotional matrix are completely destroyed. The effect of such an act, in human terms, is as if one were suddenly to turn a spotlight on a couple who were making love — whether they are old or young, married or single, tender or brutal, in a parked car or home in bed, the act of exposure is in itself an obscenity that debases that which is revealed. The offence, in literary terms, is no less vicious. Every author — and critic — knows that the sexual scenes in any novel are the riskiest and most vulnerable. How does Owen's act of dismemberment differ from that of the book-banners who snip out sexual scenes to be raffed against, sneered at and drooled over?

Books in Canada is a government-assisted publication whose purpose is to foster greater interest in Canadian writing; it is circulated throughout the media, and becomes a permanent record in libraries. As a writer I believe I have the right to expect (1) judgement by my peers; (2) competence; (3) neutral editorship; (4) basic respect for myself and my work. Instead, this magazine has, all too often, functioned as a haven for second-rate academics, failed journalists, and other literary hangers-on who rejoice in the opportunity it affords to spit on the accomplishments of their betters.

As a critic, I. M. Owen has proven himself to be without credibility. I offer him what he most deserves: my contempt.

Sylvia Fraser
Toronto

CanWit No. 53

WE SEEM TO have lost the fine old art of coining words for new objects or remarkable actions from the surnames of the persons who either invented them, made them popular, or first performed them. Cardigans and wellingtons are among the classical examples, along with bloomers, the sandwich, and the act of bowdlerizing. Were we living 100 years ago, presumably anyone wearing a rose boutonniere would have been identified as spotting a trudeau. Or the relentless habit of collecting quotes and literary quirks would have been known as colomboizing. We'll pay \$25 for the

wittiest surname coinings, complete with definitions, we receive by July 1. Address: CanWit No. 53, Books in Canada, 366 Adelaide Street East; Toronto M5A 1N4.

RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 51

OUR REQUEST FOR distinctive Canadian pub names brought a host of entries and many duplications (with The Fox and Signature forging ahead of the pack). The winner is *Anthony Hopkins of Toronto*, who not only chalked up 108 names that could only happen in Canada but also enclosed a glossary for the uninebriated. He receives \$25 for the selection that follows:

- The Ballot and Blacktop (electoral reality in many provinces).
- The Bomb and Mailbox.
- The Clock and Mother (shades of Mackenzie King).
- The State and Bedroom.
- The Chief and Camp.
- The Cow and Candybar (Laura Secord).
- The Rail and Coolie.
- The Flag and Furore.
- The Fort York and White House..
 - The EastemBaswd.
 - The Albertan's Head.
 - The Barn and Dynamite (RCMP).
 - The Dime Bag and Horseman (RCMP).
 - The Volunteer and Zombie (patronized by Second World War vets of both stripes).
 - The Bennett and Buggy.
 - The Crutch and Staircase (near St. Joseph's Oratory, Montreal).
 - The Stack and Sulphur (Sudbury).
 - The Tunnel and Causeway.
 - The Hole and Half-moon (an outhouse bar).
 - The Tent and Thespian (Stratford, Ont.).
 - The Dog and Pancreas (the beer is insulin-tested).

Honourable mentions:

- Sauvé's speakeasy.
- The Eye Opener.
- The Odd Man Out (no gays allowed).
- Loblaw's No Name Lounge.

—Shirley Dunphy, Ottawa

* * *

- TheFoamandBmggatt.
- The Hanging Gut.
- The Soaking Sleeve.

—David J. Paul, Lucan, Ont.

* * *

- TheFullenAmw.
- TheTwSaatlctws(forcmIFCsl.
- The Letter Openers (RCMP).

—Mrs. A. J. Ducker, Keswick, Ont.

* * *

- The Tap and Splice (RCMP).
- The Keg and Cleavage.
- The Crock and Bull (a politically neutral pub near Parliament Hill).

—Brian McCullough, Ottawa

* * *

- The Red Parrot (for inside postal workers).
- The Farewell to Alms (for drinkers removed from the welfare rolls).
- The Rising Mortgage.

—Barry Baldwin, Calgary

* * *

- The Voyageur's Retreat.

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□ Juice Hostel.
—Lillian I. Rouse, Toronto

□ The Red Ion (for Hydro workers).
—Mary Lile Benham, Winnipeg.

□ The Moose and Goose.
—Paul Booth, Toronto.

The editors recommend

THE FOLLOWING Canadian books were reviewed in the previous issue of *Books in Canada*. Our recommendations don't necessarily reflect the reviews:

FICTION

Spirit Wrestler, by James Houston, McClelland & Stewart. A magical mystery tour of Inuit culture conducted by a novelist who has seen the wand.

Kowalski's Last Chance, by Leo Simpson. Clarke Irwin. Cops and leprechauns, collusion and collision, farce and fantasy — a merry time will be had by all who sip Simpson's highly potable poteen.

NON-FICTION

Men in the Shadows: The RCMP Security Service, by John Sawatsky, Doubleday. Required reading for all Canadians concerned about the extent of secret-police operations in this country — and all who should be concerned.

Rough Road to the North: Travels Along the Alaska Highway, by Jim Christy, Doubleday. One man's joyous celebration of his experiences going down the road to the far edge of the world.

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:

Agling in Canada: Social Perspectives, by Victor W. Marshall, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.
Between Sea and Sky, by Eoid D'Oyley, illustrated by Albert Huic, Williams-Wallace Productions International.
Biological Sciences at the National Research Council of Canada, by N. T. Gridgeman, Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
The Book of Numbers, by Paul Dunton, The Porcupine's Quill.
The Boy with an R in His Hand, by James Reaney, The Porcupine's Quill.
Canada: Our Home, by Barry Griffiths and J. M. Daly, Macmillan.
Canada's Political Economy, by Grant L. Reuber, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

Canadian Cities and Sovereignty Association, by Jane Jacobs, CBC.

Canadian Coastal and Inland Steam Vessels 1809-1930, by John M. Mills, The Steamship Historical Society of America.

Contexts of Canada's Past: Selected Essays of W. L. Morton, edited by A. B. McKillop, Carleton Library.
Crisis in Iran, by Robin Woodsworth Carlsen, The Snow Man Press.

The Crow Journals, by Robert Kroetsch, NeWest Press.
Cry Evil, by Leon Rooke, Oberon.

Detecting Prejudice, by Popukit Educational Resources, Williams-Wallace Productions International.
Dieppe 1942: The Jubilee Disaster, by Ronald Atkin, Gage.

Dragon Lady, by Silver Donald Cameron, M & S.
The English Fact in Quebec, by Sheila McLeod Armpoulos and Dominique Clift, McGill-Queen's University Press.
50 North: An Atlantic Battleground, by Alan Baston, Paperjacks.

For My Neighbours in Hell, by Irving Layton, Mosaic Press/Valley Editions.

Freed Blue and Other Poems, by Gary Boring, Red Deer College Press.

Gateway to Oblivion: The Great Lakes' Bermuda Triangle, by Hugh Cochrane, Doubleday.

Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack, by Ausia Clarke, M & S.

Hesperus and Other Poems and Lyrics, by Charles Sangster, revised edition edited by Frank M. Tierney, The Tecumseh Press.

History, by H. O. Barrett, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.

Honour Your Partner, by Helen Levi, Queenston House.

How to Make Advertising Work for Your Small Business, by Larry White, Financial Post/Macmillan.

HumaniTies in the Present Day, edited by John Woods and Harold G. Coward, Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

The Impossible Quebec, by Pierre Vallières, translated by Jeffrey S. Moore, Black Rose Books.

In the Country of the Antipodes, by Ludwig Zeller, Mosaic Press/Valley Editions.

Intimate Distortions, by Steve McCaffery, The Porcupine's Quill.

Joe Howe: The Man Who Was Nova Scotia, by Kay Hill, M & S.

The Joy of Christian Fathering, by Donald N. Bastian, G. R. Welch.

Koble, by John Trengrove, Paperjacks.

The Last of the Free Enterprisers, by J. D. House, Carleton Library (Macmillan).

Lester Pearson and the American Dream, by Peter Sturteberg, Doubleday.

The Little Bell Maker, by D. J. Flac, Borealis Press.

The Little Red Cart, by A. P. Campbell, Borealis Press.

The Living Ice, by Pol Chantaine, translated by David Lobdel, M & S.

Loosing Grounds: The Erosion of Property Rights in Ontario, by A. H. Gosterhof and W. B. Rayner, Ontario Real Estate Association.

Magic Realism, edited by Geoff Hancock, Aya Press.

Manifest Destiny (Revised Edition), by Kenneth W. McNaught et al., Clarke Irwin.

Mind Your Own Business, Be Your Own Boss, by Marilee Allen Winter, Waxwing Productions.

The Mole Men, by Negovan Rajic, translated by David Lobdel, Oberon.

the mountain deep as a lake, by Marlin Richards, Gabbro Press.

The Murdered Dreams Awake, by Cathy Ford, Cajidin Press.

Nellie McClung and Women's Rights, by Helen K. Wright, Book Society of Canada.

Ontario Country Diary, by Susan Ferry and Joe McKeedy, Nelson/Canada.

Pentecost, by Robert Marneau, translated by David Ellis, Exile Editions.

Physical Education, by Cressy A. M. McCarty, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.

The Pre-Confederation Premiers: Ontario Government Leaders, 1841-1867, edited by J. M.S. Cutless, U of T Press.

Pride's Court, by Joy Carroll, Dell.

Rag Doll's Shadow, by Myron Turner, The Porcupine's Quill.

Roots and Branches: Current Directions in Slave Studies, edited by Michael Craton, Ferguson Press.

Selected Short Poems, by Kevin McCabe, published by the author.

Shore Lines, by Roy MacGregor, M & S.

Sinclair Ross, by Lorraine McMullen, Twayne Publishers.

The Sleeping Lady, by Joe Rosenblatt, Exile Editions.

Someone With Me, by William Kurelek, M & S.

The State Elite, by Dennis Olsen, M & S.

Still Standing: Cape Breton Buildings From Days Gone By, by Terry Sunderland, The College of Cape Breton Press.

Sunnyhill: The Health Story of the 80s, by Bruce and Barbara Small, Small and Associates.

Superwoman in Action, by Shirley Cooran, Penguin.

The Swordsman, by William C. Heine, Seal Books.

To a Young Horse, by Sharon Berg, Borealis Press.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson et l'Arctique, by Alexander Gregor, translated by Gerard N. Houle, Book Society of Canada.

War of 1812 Resource Guide, by John C. Fredriksen, published by the author.

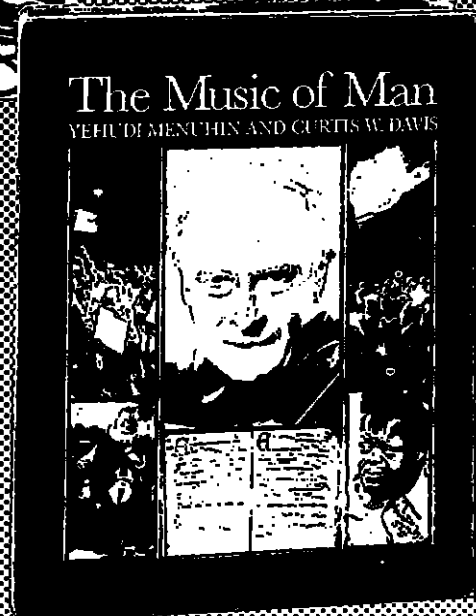
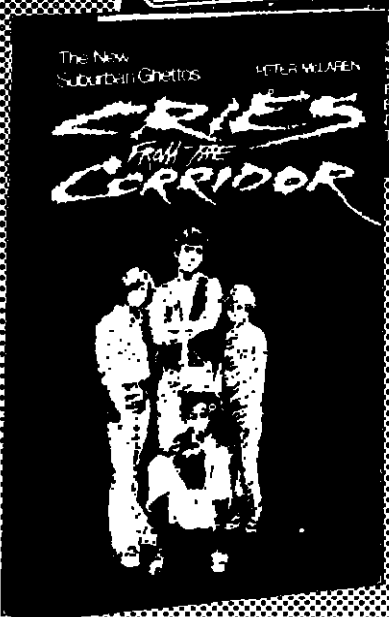
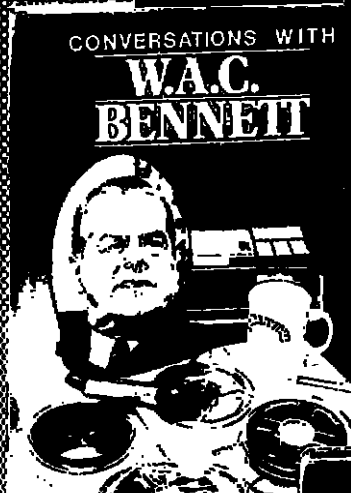
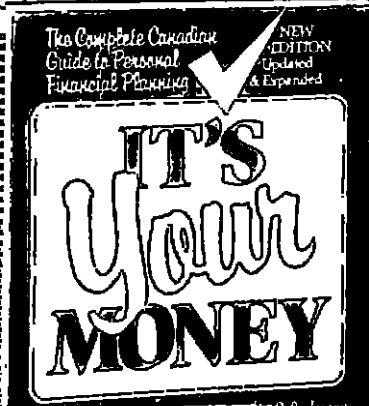
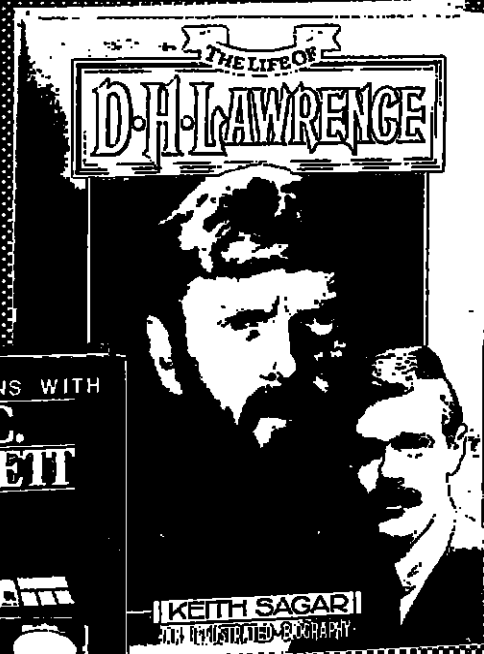
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