Volume 10, Number 4 A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS April, 1981

W. D. Valgardson, winner of our award for best first novel of 1980
Requiem for John Glassco, 1909-1981, poet and pornographer
Fiction by Marian Engel and Joyce Carol Oates • Poetry by Al Purdy

BOOKSINCANADA

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: $9.95 A YEAR

The chief glory of every people arises from its authors. — Samuel Johnson

BOOKS IN CANADA

FEATURES

REVIEWS

DEPARTMENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

CONTRIBUTORS

Canadian expatriate **Mark Abley** surveys the literary scene from Eynsham, Oxfordshire. **Joe Alcock** is a Toronto photographer. **Bob Blackburn** is a frequent contributor to *Starweek*. **Doris Cowan** is a contributing editor of *Books in Canada*. **Stephen Dale** is a Toronto freelance writer and broadcaster. **Howard Engel** is the author of *The Suicide Murders* (Clarke Irwin). **Stephen Godfrey** writes about entertainment for the *Globe and Mail*. **Geoff Hancock** is editor of the *Canadian Fiction Magazine*. **Jane W. Hill** is a Toronto freelance writer. **Michiel Horn** teaches history at Glendon College, York University. **Linda M. Leitch** is a Toronto freelance writer. **David Macfarlane's** articles appear frequently in *Saturday Night*. **Joss Maclennan** is a xerographic artist whose work appears often in these pages. **Judy Margolis** is an editor at *CA magazine*. **Mary Jane Miller**, who teaches Drama at Brock University, St. Catharines, recently spent 12 weeks viewing CBC docudramas as a consultant to the National Film Archives. **Richard Plant**, who teaches Drama at Queen's University, Kingston is co-editor of *Theatre History in Canada / Histoire du Théâtre au Canada*. **Stephen Regan** of Durham, England, is teaching English at the University of Toronto. **Stephen Scobie** teaches English at the University of Alberta, Edmonton. **Mary Ainslie Smith**, a belle of St. Marys, Ont., writes frequently about children's books in *Books in Canada*. **Paul Stuewe** is a Toronto freelance writer. **Kent Thompson's** latest novel, *Shacking Up* (Oberon Press) was reviewed in our March issue. **Morris Wolfe's** article on the past decade in Canadian publishing will appear in our tenth anniversary issue next month.

Books in Canada is published 10 times a year, with the assistance of the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council, by the Canadian Review of Books Ltd., 366 Adelaide Street East, Suite 432, Toronto, Ont. M5A 1N4. Telephone: (416) 363-5426. Available to the public free in subscribing book stores, schools, and libraries. Individual subscription rate: $9.95 a year ($15 overseas). Back issues available on microfilm from: McLaren Micropublishing, P.O. Box 972, Station F, Toronto, Ont. M4Y 2N9. Indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index. Member of the CPPA. Member of the Bulk Distribution Audit Division of CCAB. Material is commissioned on the understanding that both parties are bound by the terms of the standard PWAC contract. The editors cannot be held responsible for unsolicited material. Second Class Mail — Registration No. 2593.

Printed by Heritage Press Co. Ltd.
ISSN 0045-2564

GENTLE WINNER

With ferocious economy, W.D. Valgardson tells a compassionate story of humour and affirmation — the best first novel of 1980

THE FIFTH ANNUAL Books in Canada Award for First Novels — and a cheque for $1,000 — goes to W. D. Valgardson for *Gentle Sinners*, published by Oberon Press. The quality of the competition this year was such that any one of the finalists would have given last year's runaway winner, Clark Blaise's *Lunar Attractions* (Doubleday), a hard fight.

Twenty-three novels were available for consideration, somewhat fewer than last year. The judges (translator and critic Sheila Fischman of Montreal; novelist and poet Robert Kroetsch, who teaches English at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg; Toronto critic Sandra Martin; and John Richardson of A Different Drummer Books in Burlington, Ont.) worked from a short list prepared by *Books in Canada*. It included, besides *Gentle Sinners*: *Laughing War*, by Martyn Burke (Doubleday); *The Charcoal Burners*, by Susan Musgrave (M & S); *Seahorse*, by Graham Petrie (Academic Press); and *Fat Woman*, by Leon Rooke (Oberon Press). In a less competitive year, *Dragon Lady*, by Silver Donald Cameron (M & S), *Shaman's Daughter*, by Nan F. Salerno and Rosamond M.Vanderburgh (Prentice-Hall), and *Odd's End*, by Tim Wynne-Jones (M & S), would surely have been in the final running as well.

Each of the authors on the short list has considerable experience in short fiction, poetry, film-writing, journalism, or some combination of these media. The judges were thus precluded from discussions about the wisdom of giving the award to a tested rather than an apprentice writer (an annual discussion that properly raised an objection from Clark Blaise last year), and could concentrate simply on rewarding excellence. In awarding our prize to W.D. Valgardson, *Books in Canada* believes they have done so. Here are the comments of the judges.

Sheila Fischman: Even though literary publishing in general and the novel in particular is in trouble, it's heartening to see that some publishers continue to take risks by bringing out first novels. And considering what we're told by various publishers in search of a made-in-Canada *Scruples* or *Shogun*, it's encouraging that four of the five finalists this year have literary pretensions — even if they're not completely successful.

Except for Valgardson's *Gentle Sinners* I didn't particularly like any of these novels. Burke's *Laughing War* didn't convey either the horror or the humour of Vietnam, except in one scene — Barney's cathartic act with the empty shoes, which wasn't enough to sustain an entire novel. Rooke's *Fat Woman* (or is it, as the cover typography suggests, really called *Fat WomMan?*) seemed to me more like a fleshed-out short story and the central character never captured my sympathy. Petrie's *Seahorse*, an interesting attempt to explore the worlds of reality and dream or fantasy, I found more confusing than enthralling. Musgrave's *Charcoal Burners* is shocking, but it's even more ridiculous, and I didn't believe for one moment in any of her singular characters.

Which brings us back to *Gentle Sinners*, an engaging exploration of adolescent rebellion and awakening sensibilities. I particularly admired the way Eric's spare account of his parents — a sketch — nonetheless presents the pair in all their horror.

There are faults — I particularly disliked what seemed for a while to be an unending procession of grotesques. Somehow, though, Valgardson has integrated all of them, together with his central characters, into a satisfying whole. And that's why he has my vote.

Robert Kroetsch: The winner for me is Leon Rooke's *Fat Woman*. The growth (literally) of character in the context of people and place and language in that book makes it the most

W. D. Valgardson.

novelistic of this year's first novels — though the ending reminds us that the author is primarily a short story writer. *Fat Woman* is a beaded moccasin, a triumph of hand and eye.

Another accomplished short story writer, W.D. Valgardson, in his *Gentle Sinners*, writes what must be called a book-length short story. The ferocious economy of that form intrudes on a story that wants to expand, winning out finally over detail, over development, over character, even. The genius of the book is the way in which Valgardson, a Prairie-born writer, dares to touch his tongue to cold metal on a cold day.

The poet Susan Musgrave has not yet figured out how novelists hear language. *The Charcoal Burners* is uneasily paced; it hears, beyond itself, a novel about vision and pain and cruelty and desire, but cannot get there. Its attraction is its failed ambition: the lover who so desires to come, but can't.

Graham Petrie's *Seahorse* has all the technique of that night-

marish vision. Without the desire.

Laughing War, by Martyn Burke, is a reminder that a long tradition makes war the central concern of a central group of novels. Burke has the courage to measure himself against that tradition. It is not his knowledge or his sense of the novel's form that beats him, but his own deafness to the huge demands that war makes on language — and this in a book about a *talk*-comedian.

Against the war novel, the family novel. I put the five books on a shelf and asked myself which I would reread. I chose *Fat Woman*, surely because of Rooke's ear for language. I began, again, to enter that fully realized world of appetite and speech: "What she sees first thing as she slows to turn Edward's truck into the driveway is a complete stranger in bulky overalls up there on a ladder..."

Sandra Martin: I found the books on the short list interesting and accomplished this year, and in the end I struggled between Susan Musgrave's *The Charcoal Burners* and W.D. Valgardson's *Gentle Sinners*. Musgrave's book is a West Coast novel not only in setting, but in mood and tone. Her gruesome tale of cannibalism in the interior of B.C. is chilling yet plausible, for while Musgrave writes imaginatively and often horrifyingly, she always maintains a sharp control. She has made the transition from poet to novelist easily, allowing the rhythm and imagery of her poetry to infuse her fiction, but never permitting it to slow down the narrative. It is a fine first novel.

Still, for me, *Gentle Sinners* is the winner. I knew as soon as I read the serpentine phrases of the first sentence, so richly resonant with nuances and harbingers, that I would like this novel. I have always admired Valgardson's short stories — grafted Norse legends many of them about individuals oppressed by injustice or even nature who, while they rail, never sacrifice independence or pride. *Gentle Sinners* is like that too, but it is also a compassionate, often humorous story of affirmation, love, and hope. Mainly it is the story of a lonely old man, succumbing to old age, who is wrenched from his somnambulist existence by the unexpected arrival of his nephew, newly run away from home and a set of parents who are religious perverts. The boy is searching for ancestors and independence, love, and a sense of worth. The old man provides these and more, and on the way he teaches his nephew patience and tolerance. In return the boy revives the old man's spirit and purpose. In the end the two characters are separated, but you know it is only temporary and, besides, each has changed the other's life and made it better. *Gentle Sinners* is a finely realized novel, well deserving of the prize.

John Richardson: *Gentle Sinners* by W.D. Valgardson is not only the best novel of the five submissions, but is also one of the most engaging novels I've read since Robertson Davies's *Fifth Business*. Although I thought early in the book that I was in for another "sensitive novel about a young boy reaching manhood," this premonition was quickly squashed. The tension and conflict start almost immediately in *Gentle Sinners* and they culminate in an escape scene that few thrillers can match.

Each of Valgardson's creations attains a vividness and clarity simply because of the grace and ease of his writing. . . . Each reading strips away another layer and exposes another dimension of the novel

But this is not to say that Valgardson has written just a superior potboiler with a collection of paperback heroes. There's not one cardboard character to be found here, and each of Valgardson's creations attains a vividness and clarity simply because of the grace and ease of his writing. There's Eric, who lives with his uncle, and who seems driven by his new-found sexuality. Early on in the book he comes up against the plottings of Larry, a rather pathetic creature who is finally destroyed by his insecurities. Eric's uncle Sigfus, the ruthless Tree brothers, who are the focal point of the tension in the book, and the unattainable Melissa all round out the novel.

Like Robertson Davies's work, Valgardson's book can be enjoyed simply as an engagingly-told story, but each reading strips away another layer and exposes another dimension of the novel. If any mass-market publishers are listening out there, all I can add is: buy this book. *Gentle Sinners* deserves to be in every book store, airport, and news stand in the country.

Seahorse, my second choice, is an extraordinarily inventive novel about a world where everything seems turned on its head. It's a world of high imagination, with a strange card game, unrealized sexual encounters, and names that are never the same twice around. But in the end, I felt somewhat let down with Petrie's book. It was like being in the audience of a master magician who dazzles you with his sleight of hand. In the case of *Seahorse*, the one big trick that you wait for at the end never comes. The illusions and magical events in the novel seem to be variations on a very similar theme and, as a result, the rhythm of the novel stays unchanged from beginning to end.

Susan Musgrave, whose *Charcoal Burners* is the literary equivalent of a collision with a Mack Truck, makes Margaret Atwood look like a Pollyanna. Musgrave has brought the knife-like language of her poetry into a novel that grabs you by the throat and shakes you until you can only wish for it to end. Her language is brilliant and her vision uncompromising, but ultimately one doesn't feel much sympathy for any of her characters.

Leon Rooke's *Fat Woman* is a novel that never gets off the ground. Rooke's ear for dialogue and rural expression is faultless, and Ella Mae is a character you want to hug but, like an eccentric relative who visited you as a child, the novelty of both encounters wears off after a very short time.

Of all the novels, Martyn Burke's *Laughing War* was the least satisfying. Maintaining one's sanity and dignity amidst the horrors of war is an honourable theme, but in Burke's hand it turns into a horrible cliché. He has brought to the book all the stock characters: the fanatic colonel, the mysterious woman, and the main character who appears soft but in the end is indomitable. It's a novel lacking authenticity and crying out for an editor. □

A DOCUMENT IN MADNESS

'In the final analysis, the Stratford affair was a crisis of misjudgement and miscalculation, of incompetence and ambition that will probably never be adequately explained'

by David Macfarlane

WHEN ROBIN PHILLIPS left the Stratford Festival Theatre late in the afternoon of Saturday, Dec. 6, 1980, he did so by himself, without fanfare. Behind him, in the crowded foyer, the 900 people who had gathered for Stratford's annual general meeting were still asking the questions and proposing the theories that had been filling newspaper columns for weeks. The hiring of the acclaimed British director, John Dexter, as Phillips's successor, following so hard upon the graceless firing of the four-man artistic directorate, had thrown the theatre into a bog of intrigue and incompetence that threatened to become as tragic in fact as it was embarrassing in appearance. Actors' Equity was threatening a boycott. The minister of immigration, Lloyd Axworthy, had denied Dexter a work permit. By its own admission the Stratford board of governors had arrived at its wit's end; few present that day could believe the journey had been a very long one. Cries of "Shame" and "Resign" punctuated the meeting. The afternoon wore on in outbursts and procedural wrangles. The board managed to out-proxy a poorly organized motion of non-confidence, and by five o'clock the assembly had adjourned. It would be almost two hours before the meeting re-convened and Richard Monette, one of the Festival's leading actors, hurled his now-celebrated "Pig" speech at a startled R. V. Hicks, president of the board. It would be another week before John Hirsch emerged from the fray as the new artistic director. But at the moment that Phillips made his quiet exit, nothing had been resolved. The Stratford Festival was closer to disintegration than it had ever been in its 28-year history. Wrapped in his sheepskin coat, Robin Phillips left the crisis behind him and stepped out the lobby doors into the cold grey afternoon.

His entrance at Stratford had not gone so unnoticed. In the late summer of 1973 it was rumoured that the 31-year-old Phillips, then the artistic director of the Greenwich Theatre in London, was the most likely candidate for the post of artistic director at Stratford. The mere possibility of a British appointment raised the hackles of Canadian nationalists, but the board of governors decided to weather the storm, and on Sept. 25 the rumours became fact. Robin Phillips would succeed Jean Gascon at the close of the 1974 season, after spending the winter and spring travelling throughout Canada and acquainting himself with Canadian theatre and Canadian actors.

"Sharp, waspish, theatrical, and vain," commented an English newspaper, "but very charming, very sure and enormously confident. And very good." Phillips's reputation preceded him to Canada, but when he caught up with it, he found it had done little to soothe the Canada-firsters who saw his appointment as the worst kind of cultural colonialism. He remained unruffled at first, and even though he was challenged to a duel by one of the more ridiculous of the outraged Canadian directors who had not been offered the Stratford posting, he expressed some sympathy for his detractors. "I'm not at all resentful of the turmoil of the nationalist issue," he said. A year later his comments had become more

trenchant. "I'm not objecting to true nationalism. But some of the loudest screams were not based on true convictions but on self-interest and self-advancement."

Phillips secured his reputation as a brilliant and inspired director with his 1975 production of *Measure for Measure* with Brian Bedford, William Hutt, and Martha Henry. At the same time he served notice to his bedazzled board that his vision of what Stratford could become was not confined to the stage alone. Looking back on Phillips's early days, Toronto drama critic Gina Mallet wrote, "In fact, it was with an infectious enthusiasm that Phillips started taking over — everything." Nothing was too small for his attention, and his authority began to spread like a fog of dry ice throughout every department of the Festival. He moved with a political surefootedness that played his mercurial personality, his stage triumphs, and his heady ambitions against the misgivings and disunity of the board. In the same ingenious, sometimes ruthless way that he got what he wanted out of actors, he got what he wanted from the people who had hired him. He established powerful alliances, and employed with the board whatever leverage was necessary to bring his vision of Stratford to life. Not surprisingly, he could brook no rivals. As Gina Mallet pointed out, "Ever since Phillips arrived, he had felt his authority as artistic director overlapped by that of general manager. The upshot was that Bruce Swerdfager, a 24-year Stratford veteran, resigned as general manager. He has not been replaced."

It was a one-man show. But however grand Phillips's ambitions for the Festival as a whole (The Stage One drama school, video and film studio, a Toronto winter home, touring shows on Broadway and in the West End), his greatest achievements were invariably on the stage. Among the actors he favoured, he was regarded as something close to a dramatic guru. "The kind of thing Robin did here," said one young actor, "could spoil an acting community for anything else. His energy was superhuman. Working with him was, perhaps, a once in a lifetime experience." Stars like Maggie Smith and William Hutt, as well as much of the company core, blossomed under his attentions.

At his best, Phillips was in a league that no theatre in Canada could touch. His eye for expressive detail, his visual sense and the intelligence of his blocking, his precise and uncluttered reading of a script, and his uncanny ability to point an actor toward an emotion, a gesture, a motivation, brought a glistening quality to his productions that ranked them with the best in the world. In his six-year

Hirsch: The man behind the arras

CONSIDERING THE extremes of furious opinion that accompanied the most highly-publicized cultural appointment in Canadian history, it is ironic that the matter of finding his successor as Stratford's artistic director three years from now is one of the few areas in which John Hirsch displays ambivalence. "I don't know what will happen in three years," he says. "I have ambiguous feelings about Lloyd Axworthy's involvement in the whole matter. I feel the board should come to the right conclusions on their own. But it's also discomfiting if we have to legislate to preserve our self-identity."

His view of Canadian self-identity is not hardline, however. He calls ACTRA's decision not to allow Maggie Smith and Brian Bedford to perform in a radio version of *Richard III* two seasons ago "crazy. Does one have to go to England to see these people?" He is delighted to welcome French actress Danielle Darrieux as the star of Swiss playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Visit* this coming season: "She is simply a fabulous woman." The possibility that "a non-Canadian could never become artistic director again terrifies me. It is not a goal with me to have no foreign talent. It is not a goal not to. It is only a goal to create excellence or excitement. There are no formulas to this." And he has approached John Dexter to be a guest director for the 1981 season. (Dexter's answer? "I'll show you the letter sometime.")

What Hirsch is more interested in than protecting Canadian identity is that we act upon what he calls "the consciousness of our own resources."

"This *has* to begin," he says, his voice breaking with the weariness of having said it so often before and of knowing he will say it so often again. "I have to scour the country for talent. It requires money and long-term training. We tend to take our artistic talent full-blown from England, just as we take our industry from the U.S. It's nice to be cavalierly nationalistic, but it costs. If Canadians are not willing to put in that investment, they should shut up."

Hirsch has said he will not pursue some of Robin Phillips's objectives, such as having a television studio, a theatre school, or a Toronto base. What he wants instead is more grass-roots training including apprenticeship programs for directors and a form of "post-graduate" training for actors who have already had extensive experience elsewhere. His idea of rebuilding will follow the more modest lines of the Seattle Repertory Theatre, where he has been artistic director for the past year and a half. "The Seattle people wanted first-rate people there," he says matter-of-factly. "John Dexter and I were both on the short list. They wanted me badly enough that they were willing to take my plan to have a resident director and associate director. I think of my job as a kind of *animateur*, an orchestrator for directing talent. I have no desire to turn any place into my own image."

Stratford's board of governors had offered Hirsch the artistic directorship long before its disastrous approach to John Dexter. But Hirsch had turned the position down. "Canada has had a history of disastrous boards," he explains, "and not only in theatre. It's because of the tight kind of establishment in Canada that the proper blend of people never happens on the boards. One needs businessmen, people who understand the importance of public relations, fund raising, marketing, real estate. But you also need artists and educators, people who know *nothing* about administration but understand the process of creating art. Whatever one's opinion of their business practices, the Rockefellers, on the board of Lincoln Centre, are an example of businessmen who are very cultivated, who can make this kind of cross-over. In Canada, there are people like Hamilton Southam. But there are very few."

There are, it seems, too few of them at Stratford: "There must be a demonstration on the board's part that the strategic and other disasters that caused the alienation among the company will not happen again. The board must reconstitute itself. Until there is some kind of representation of the theatrical constituency, some people — like Douglas Rain and Martha Henry — will never come back." What made Hirsch come back?

"I felt it possible that I could supervise the 1981 season when I learned that someone I could trust, like Muriel [Sherrin, producer of the 1981 season, who has worked with Hirsch before], was available. I hadn't known that before. I also had an intuition that Dexter wouldn't be allowed into the country whether I took the job or not. The possibility that the theatre could be shut down had to be avoided at all costs.

"I was convinced to take the job because of Julian Porter," Hirsch continues. Porter was head of the hastily-appointed search committee to find an artistic director after Axworthy's verdict; "I had cause to believe Julian was sincere and honest in his dealings with me. He was not part of the mess, but he showed some understanding of it. And finally, I was heartened by the fact that the fate of the theatre became a front-page story in all the newspapers. I think this is an important cultural-historical event."

And so to the season: the eight plays have been announced and, as expected, expediency was a prime force in the line-up. Hirsch did not look for the availability of favoured plays but based his decisions on "the availability of certain people: to get Brian Bedford back," he says, "you have to give him something he wants to do — *The Misanthrope* — and something to direct, *Coriolanus*. Those were his conditions. And you know that Jean Gascon, one of the few mature directors in Canada [and Hirsch's co-director of Stratford from 1965-69] is also interested in doing *The Misanthrope*. You need a leading man for *Coriolanus* and you find out that Len Cariou is available. And so it goes."

Hirsch doesn't play down the difficulties that still face him. "Agents were saying over and over again from all corners of the earth that Stratford was no longer reliable: I asked John Neville to direct and he said 'Sorry, nothing personal, but I won't work at that theatre with the board there.' I went through a whole, long process with Robin Phillips. First he was coming, then he wasn't, then he was. And then he didn't."

It may be just as well that the break with the Phillips era is near complete. "I am by nature a more volatile, emotional, confrontational, less stylish person than Robin," says Hirsch. "I look for a distinctive sensibility in the people I work with. I don't know what that means yet. I'll know it when I see it."

— STEPHEN GODFREY

tenure he expanded the season from seven to 15 plays. Incredibly, he directed 35 of the productions. There were more than a few gems: *Measure for Measure*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Richard III*, *King Lear* and *Virginia*.

Robin Phillips's failures were no less spectacular. There were critical disasters such as his sombre *Macbeth*, but the shortcomings that will be remembered are those that occurred off-stage. In spite of all his efforts, Stage One remains little more than a pipe dream; not a single film of a Phillips Stratford production exists. Stratford still does not have a Toronto winter base, and indeed, the Toronto theatrical community seems farther away from Stratford than ever before. Such gifted young Canadians as Fiona Reid, R. H. Thomson, and Gary Reineke were noticeably excluded from the Phillips coterie; the playwright Rick Salutin went so far as to say that "Stratford has become culturally irrelevant to Canadians." And then there was the *Lear* tour.

Robin Phillips's failures were ... spectacular.... Playwright Rick Salutin went so far as to say that 'Stratford has become culturally irrelevant to Canadians.' And then there was the *Lear* tour

At the opening of the 1979 season, Phillips tendered his resignation, effective as of November, 1980. His health had not been good — he had undergone surgery in England the summer before — and the burden of his responsibilities at Stratford had simply become too great. The season did not prove to be a success. The box office bore the predictable brunt of a summer of Shakespearian histories, but on Oct. 4, Peter Ustinov and William Hutt opened an eccentric and, at times, brilliant production of *King Lear*, directed by Robin Phillips. The critics were critical, the scholars scowled, and theatre-goers came to Stratford in droves.

On Oct. 30, 1979, Phillips announced the 1980 season. Among the star-studded productions — *Virginia*, *The Seagull*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night* — there would be a re-mounting of *King Lear*. By early January of 1980, Ustinov had made it clear that his participation would be contingent upon a West End tour of the Stratford production. Phillips, naturally, was enthusiastic, and by the end of March the Stratford board of governors had committed itself to raising $200,000 against expenses for *King Lear*'s proposed run at London's Haymarket Theatre.

When the 1980 season opened, the board of governors' search committee had still not found a successor to Phillips. Although John Dexter, director of productions at New York's Metropolitan Opera, had been tentatively approached as early as the spring of 1980, he expressed little interest, and increasingly the committee favoured the establishment of a plural directorate that would maintain a close association with Robin Phillips. The idea was not a new one; Brian Bedford had publicly discussed the possibility of a directorate a year before. Clearly, with Phillips's unswerving ally, Barbara Ivey, on the search committee, the plan had Phillips's approval and, most importantly, his attention. During the first weeks of the season he had no less than five productions in the wings: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Foxfire*, *The Seagull*, *King Lear*, and *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. The casting and contractual arrangements for the *Lear* tour had still not been sorted out, and as time passed by it seemed less likely that they ever would be. Actors were committing themselves to more definite winters. Never would the absence of a general manager be felt more acutely.

The two-tiered directorate was announced in August. Not all of the board was happy with the arrangement. Brian Bedford, Len Cariou, and Martha Henry comprised the first level. Pam Brighton, Urjo Kareda, William Hutt, Peter Moss, and Peter Roberts made up the second. Robin Phillips was the only member of both tiers; and although his position had officially diminished, the entire structure was obviously built around his desire to maintain effective control of the Stratford Festival without carrying its entire weight on his ailing heart and his exhausted psyche. "Phillips has got to be the fulcrum," said R. V. Hicks.

By September it was apparent that the *Lear* tour was folding. Phillips's father was dying in England. He was in rehearsals with both *Lear* and *Long Day's Journey*, working from nine in the morning until 11 at night, and, at the same time, trying to contract the original cast of *Lear* for the Haymarket engagement. But time had run out. Douglas Rain, Martha Henry, Richard Monette, and Richard McMillan had made other commitments. In a dizzying

On Sept. 18, 1980, Peter Moss, Pam Brighton, Martha Henry, and Urjo Kareda were appointed as the artistic directorate. 'We are totally committed to this new cohesive group,' wrote R.V. Hicks. . . . The stage was set

flurry of contradictions between Robert Hicks and Robin Phillips, the tour was off, on again, and finally off. Ustinov grumbled, "I find it incredible that a board consisting largely of businessmen and presided over by a lawyer should enter into a contract without knowing who's going to be in the cast," and he threatened to sue. But it was Phillips who Ustinov finally blamed.

Depressed, exhausted, and worried that the 1981 season would prove to be no less onerous than any of the previous ones, Phillips announced that he would stand by his original resignation. The two-tiered directorate crumbled immediately, and on Sept. 18, Peter Moss, Pam Brighton, Martha Henry, and Urjo Kareda were appointed as the artistic directorate. "We are totally committed to this new cohesive group," wrote R. V. Hicks, in a statement that would come back to haunt him two months later. The stage was set.

THE HIRING OF the artistic directorate — immediately christened the Gang of Four — and their subsequent "disbanding" six weeks later was a clumsy and distasteful ordeal that left few heroes in the wake of its hysteria, and that threatened the very survival of Canada's premier theatre. It was the Festival's board of governors who were portrayed as the villains of the affair, and although their machinations were at times reprehensible, it was their consistent disregard for public relations that most clearly demonstrated their incompetence. They managed to give the impression of being genuinely surprised by an entirely predictable furor. Hounded by an unsympathetic press, Robert Hicks, as president and spokesman for the board, simply never got its case across to a bewildered public. On the occasions that he opened his mouth — at press conferences, in interviews, and at the December annual meeting — he only changed feet, infuriating the more rabid and adolescent journalists in attendance and confusing everyone else. The more facts that were revealed, it seemed, the murkier the affair became.

It was in October that the newly appointed executive director, Peter Stevens, arrived in Stratford to fill the gap of general manager left by the Robin Phillips autocracy. Intelligent, skilful, and highly respected in his field, Stevens came to the Festival via London's National Theatre and New York's Shubert organization. The directorate was busy planning its 1981 season, but Stevens apparently had reservations about their collective ability. There seemed to him only one step forward the Festival could take from the Phillips era, and it was not the one being planned by the Four. The Metropolitan Opera was, at that time, paralyzed by labour disputes, and Stevens knew that Dexter was available and already planning a classical season in association with Christopher Plummer. Most importantly, he knew that the celebrated director of *Equus* and *Royal Hunt of the Sun* "would kill" to come to the Stratford stage as its artistic director. The news was passed on to the executive committee of the board.

Ignoring, for the moment, questions of ethics, courtesy, and nationalism, the board's dilemma was an understandable one. There were good reasons for doubting the wisdom of appointing a remnant of Robin Phillips's bolt of cloth as an artistic directorate. Peter Moss's *A Servant of Two Masters* and Pam Brighton's *Henry VI* were cause enough for hesitation. Martha Henry, a gifted actor, was no administrator and certainly no director. Urjo Kareda, former Toronto *Star* drama critic and literary consultant to

Robin Phillips, had proven himself a man of ability and dedication, but he was not a director of vision and not an artist. Had the choice been presented a few months earlier, the decision would have been virtually painless: flag-wavers notwithstanding, Dexter was the man. As it was, the decision was a difficult and potentially catastrophic one, but Dexter, in the board's opinion, was too much of a good thing to pass up. "We hoped," said one board member, "to ride out the storm."

On Friday, Oct. 31, at a budget meeting, the executive committee of the board of governors was informed that the proposed season of the directorate ran the risk of losing as much as $1.3 million. This was nothing very unusual — Phillips's previous season, it was said, had been close to $2 million over budget at the same stage — but with Dexter in the wings, the board wanted an excuse, and the mere possibility of a losing season would do as well as anything. Dexter was telephoned that evening, and on Sunday he flew from New York to Toronto and met at an airport hotel with board members Robert Hicks, John Lawson, Oliver Gaffney, and John Heney. Dexter made it clear that he was not prepared to share control of the theatre with a directorate, and on Nov. 5 the executive recommended to the board that the directorate "be asked to relinquish their responsibilities with the option to resign without loss of income until October, 1981." The board approved the decision.

The next step was to win the approval of the department of immigration, and between Nov. 5 and Nov. 10, the board stated its case to Ottawa and was given the assurance that a work permit would be forthcoming. On Nov. 10, in Stratford, the executive met with Urjo Kareda and Martha Henry. At that point, it was still hoped by the board that some kind of cooperation could be established between the original directorate and John Dexter. Obviously, the Four's support would not only assist Dexter; but quell the inevitable outcry of the nationalists. To say the least, the board's hopes were unrealistic. Kareda and Henry listened to the board's announcement and asked for 12 hours to consider their options. Thirty minutes after they had left the theatre, Martha Henry's husband, Douglas Rain, put through an angry call to a Toronto newspaper and the story broke.

In the ensuing hue and cry, there were more unanswered questions than there were deliberate lies. Lacking the courage to simply say that in its opinion Dexter was the best man for the job, the board hid behind the smokescreen of the projected $1.3-million deficit, and ultimately became entangled in a web of accusations and denials concerning who had approached Dexter and when. Hicks insisted that, apart from Hume Cronyn's tentative overtures in the spring of 1980, no member of the board had been in contact with Dexter prior to the decision of Oct. 31. Bubbling with near-Watergate suspicions, the press was in no mood to buy the denial. A coverup seemed confirmed when Robin Phillips revealed at the annual meeting that as early as the summer, Dexter had refused an invitation to direct a 1981 production of *Coriolanus* at Stratford until his "ongoing responsibilities" were clarified. "I don't do audition performances," Mr. Dexter had explained. Someone, Phillips implied, had been working behind the scenes. From that point on, no one believed a word that Robert Hicks said.

It was an unfortunate point of credibility for the board to lose, and it was an unfelicitous accusation for Phillips to have made. Never mentioned was the altogether likely possibility that Dexter had simply guessed that he was being considered for the artistic directorship. He had been approached once already, after all, and he had been questioned about the possibility by British reporters while in London rehearsing *Galileo*. Rumours spread quickly in theatre. That Stratford was interested in him for more than a single production was not a very unlikely conclusion for Dexter to draw.

The board seemed as mystified by Phillips's accusation as it had been dumbfounded by Lloyd Axworthy's denial of a work permit for Dexter. So far as the board was concerned, the only backstairs business that had been going on had been going on in Ottawa. Although Actors' Equity claimed that it had been their lobbying and threatened boycott that had finally swayed Axworthy, it seems more likely that it was pressure applied by the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council that tipped the scales. Both councils were angered by the Stratford board's actions and by the fact that they had not been consulted, and yet both councils were unwilling to shatter the facade of non-interference that they maintain. Immigration could do the dirty work. Anything else would be unseemly.

Even the motives behind Equity's boycott, at first blush so uncomplicated, were not without their darker side. There has long been a rift between the 100 or so members of the Stratford company and the 6,000 members of Equity. As one Stratford veteran says, "Not only is Equity always jumping on its nationalist bandwagon, but it's been absolutely ridiculous about all kinds of things." Indeed, there are two agreements between Equity and the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT) — one for the Equity members of the Stratford company and one for everyone else. The differences in salary scales and rehearsal hours between the two contracts have always been as unpalatable to the Equity executive as they have been protected by the Stratford actors. Dan MacDonald, a past-president of Equity, calls the arrangement "an historical accident," and explains that "after some discussion we have decided there is no longer any reason for them to be separate." Few members of the Stratford company would agree. As one actor put it, "Equity does not regard this theatre as being anything special. But we are a classical repertory company — the only one in the country and the only one on the continent. Stratford has a different kind of company construction, a different philosophy, and a different attitude toward the status of its members. What Equity doesn't understand is that we have more in common with the Metropolitan Opera, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Berliner Ensemble, the National Ballet, and the Canadian Opera Company, than we do with Toronto Free Theatre."

'Equity does not regard this theatre as being anything special. But we are a classical repertory company.... We have more in common with the Metropolitan Opera than with Toronto Free Theatre'

The Stratford agreement was due to expire at the end of March 1981, and Equity's boycott would have been simply a refusal to re-negotiate the contract. The Stratford crisis could hardly have been more timely. With the Festival in disarray and with the boycott in effect, Equity could have pulled a broken and unprotected company under the umbrella of a single Canadian Theatre Agreement.

Nor was the disbanded directorate the unified front it appeared to be publicly. Each of the four was paid a year's salary as severance pay. Partly as a protest against the board's actions, and partly as a way of leaving the door open for a return to Stratford should the Dexter plan fall through, they decided not to cash their cheques. It did not take long, however, for Pam Brighton to break rank. Before Axworthy denied Dexter's work permit, Brighton had cashed her cheque and had even telegrammed Dexter in New York proposing that her production of *Hamlet* be incorporated into his plans for Stratford's 1981 season.

In the final analysis, the Stratford affair was a crisis of misjudgement and miscalculation, of incompetence and ambition, that will probably never be adequately explained. It will not, however, be easily forgotten. The approaching season will undoubtedly suffer. The company itself has already suffered, and it will be some time before anyone will speak of the Festival Theatre's reputation for professionalism without first muttering an apology for the events of last December. Saddest of all things, perhaps, has been the turning away of excellence from Stratford's doors. The theatre was remarkably, undeservedly lucky in signing John Hirsch, although Hirsch at present writing is still in Seattle and it is his casting director who is, effectively, organizing the approaching season. Robin Phillips is returning to England to accept a post at the Haymarket, and John Dexter keeps his silent distance, refusing to direct a single play at Stratford. Martha Henry says she will not return. There is no victory here for Canadian theatre. □

Future schlock

A wealth of publications raises the question whether serious plays or fluff will mark the drama of the '80s

by Richard Plant

THE PROBLEM WITH drama publishing in 1980 — and anyone interested in our theatre will recognize it as a good one to have — is that there has been so much of it. And that's surprising, for this has been a difficult year in publishing, with several publishers suffering severe financial pressures and book sales generally slower than in previous years.

The other world that bears on drama publishing, the live theatre, also had troubles, highlighted by the nationalist squabble at Stratford and by further cutbacks in government subsidies. By now the belief that having control over our theatres necessitates having Canadian plays to perform in them is widely held. We are gaining the repertoire, and this year's drama reflects that. But what are those plays like? That's where the other struggle becomes important.

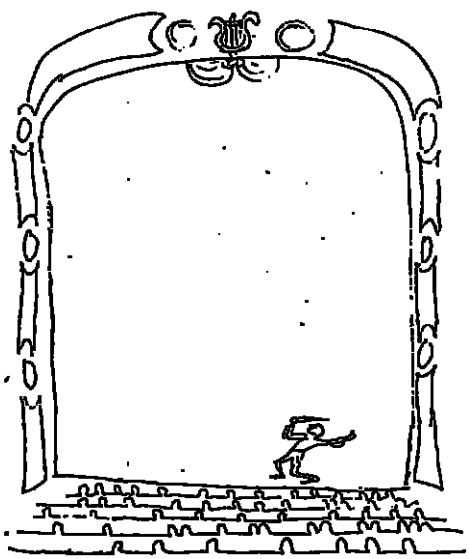
The attempt to meet subsidy shortfalls with larger box office receipts has resulted in smaller cast shows, plays that seek a broad popular appeal, more light comedies, musicals, and potboilers. Out of this, if there is one over-riding question with which a playwright must wrestle, either consciously or unconsciously, it is whether to write a play that is good box office or one that is artistically satisfying. On the other hand, because the major drama publishers are still subsidized well enough to survive, this year has not seen a cutback in the number of plays printed.

In fact, Talonbooks has its longest and strongest list in some years. Playwrights Canada brought out more than 50 plays either as regular paperbacks from their newly-founded Playwrights Press or as mimeographed scripts. As well, a few houses added significantly, a play at a time, to what was printed. There are plays by established as well as beginning authors and some notable efforts in all camps.

Leading the field are the attractive, high quality paperbacks we have become accustomed to receive from Talonbooks. In 1979, Talon entered the international market in a strong manner by adding plays by Israel Horowitz and the challenging works of Sam Shepard to its list. But that left little money to publish Canadian scripts. This year Talon has nine native dramas.

Balconville, David Fennario's 1979 Chalmers Award winner, heads the nine. A hugely successful play given its first performances by Centaur Theatre in Montreal, subsequently in Toronto, and then on a nation-wide tour, *Balconville* shows life as it is for French- and English-speaking families living side by side in Montreal's working-class tenements. The tensions that govern these people's lives are created by their poverty and the feeling they are trapped in the slums, oppressed by the rich they see in other parts of Montreal. These tensions are aggravated by the cultural and language barriers that exist especially for the men. Only the greater awareness of the women who keep the families together and an abundance of humour save the characters and the audience from despair.

Fennario has succeeded with at least two of his previous three plays, but they were shorter than this one. Apart from his evident command of a larger canvas and the hilarious fun his dialogue and situations engender, Fennario has created fuller and more satisfying characters than ever before. He has also kept his tendency to preach a "free the worker" message under control. The message is still there but implied rather than obtrusive in the vibrant life he captures on the stage. As a result, the message is more powerful. Unfortunately, this important play is likely to see few future productions because the dialogue, half English, half French, however Canadian that may be in theory, will render it inaccessibly to many companies.



The previous comment aside, *Balconville's* obvious public success to date has proven that thoughtful, perceptive drama need not be so "arty" that it speaks only to the intellectual élite. David French's **Jitters** (Talon) suggests the same because, although decidedly commercial in nature, the play reveals a lot about Canadian life. It's ostensibly about our theatre and centres on the opening of a new work by a young Canadian playwright. A neurotic, middle-aged actress has been lured back from New York to play opposite an actor equally famous if only in the Canada he seems afraid to leave. Their bickering and that of the cast, crew, director, and nervous playwright float the action along on a sea of acerbic dialogue. For the most part the comic situations these people get into — an actor gets drunk and nearly misses the opening and the actress resigns after being panned — are capably handled. Admittedly not everything works (there is a locked bathroom with everyone trying to get the occupant out in time to go on stage that smacks of cliché), but French has shown a strong grasp of dramatic construction and a keen ear for witty dialogue.

The criteria for judging a playwright's success — box office, intellectual, artistic — have special bearing on two plays, **Maggie and Pierre** (Talon), Linda Griffiths's one-woman, three-character show, and Erika Ritter's **Automatic Pilot** (Talon). Both have received immense popular acclaim, and one might well ask why.

In Griffiths's case the topicality of the characters, the notoriety of one in particular, must have a lot to do with it. As well, Griffiths's own virtuoso performance, which sees her shifting from one role — Pierre, Maggie, or Henry, the journalist — to another is a novelty passing for greater achievement. The script itself is woefully light-weight, coming nowhere near achieving what Griffiths says in her informative introduction that she is attempting:

> The play is a metaphor for the country's involvement in politics and love, based on the political and personal realities of two individuals.... I like to think of Maggie and Pierre as 'epic characters.' They are heroes in that they contain all the elements of humanity magnified.

It's an excellent idea. But we are shallow people, indeed, if the cardboard characters sketched in the play contain "all the elements of humanity magnified."

"Erika Ritter's dazzling play ... just keeps going on and on," Bruce Blackadar wrote in the Toronto *Star*. *Automatic Pilot* has been produced in Toronto, Calgary, Victoria, Edmonton, and Vancouver, and was recently broadcast on CBC-Radio. But why? Certainly it is funny, in the same way a stand-up comedian's patter of one-liners is funny. In addition, the idea of a comedienne whose comedy routines come out of her own personal anguish, although not new, offers rich potential for drama. The lightly-veiled comments on the exploitation of women, achieved through the metaphor of women as stand-up comediennes, offer some substance to the piece. But in the end what we get is a love story involving Charlie, the comedienne, and the younger brother of her short-term lover who, in turn, had replaced her former husband when she (and he) discovered he was a homosexual. As tangled and potentially informative as these problems of sexual identity are, thoughtful audiences surely want more than the superficial insights this play gives us. Like David French, Erika Ritter has demonstrated a quick ear for dialogue and an apt dramatic sense. One hopes she will put these tools to use in creating plays of more substance than this one.

Some playwrights have tried for commercial success totally at the expense of substance. For a number of years we have heard about George Hulme, the Orillia-born writer who has been working in exile in England. Finally we have one of his plays published in Canada. **The Lionel Touch** (Talon), when it ran in London's West End in 1969, starred Rex Harrison as a con-man artist. Lionel Fairleigh, who paints nudes because they sell but squanders his money to the extent that his family is evicted. He may be redeemed in their eyes by his supposed charm and imagination, but he goes off to jail just the same. For all of me, he can stay there. The play is "clever" comedy, too lightweight for serious consideration. It represents the fluff that can be created when an author pays little attention to what he is saying and a lot to one-liners. George Hulme is not Canada's Alan Ayckbourn.

Since one-person shows and plays with small casts seem the order of the day, one has to admire the courage of playwrights like Ron Chudley and James Nichol whose **After Abraham** (Talon) and **Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons** (Talon) require the resources of large theatres and large companies. *After Abraham*, with a cast of 38 when it was done in Victoria, has conversations between the spirits of Wolfe and Montcalm, commenting on themselves and the events that unfold up to and during the battle in 1759. We see Wolfe, obsessed with victory and death — the latter as much a release from the pain of his illness as an entry into the kingdom of heroes — battling opposition within his own camp. Montcalm, troubled by being away from his home in France, finds his effectiveness destroyed by the lack of cooperation from a corrupt intendant, François Bigot, and a weak governor. The play is not a great work, but it does possess a number of effective scenes and intriguing ironies such as that presented in the contrast between Simon Fraser, a supporter of Wolfe, and James Johnstone, Montcalm's aide-de-camp, beside whom Fraser fought at Culloden. *Sainte-Marie* is also a cut above most plays without achieving distinction. The subject is a Thomas à Becket-like questioning of a martyr's motivation, this one a Jesuit during the 1600s in what now is Midland, Ont.

The lightness and delicacy of water-colours come to mind as describing both the strengths and weaknesses of many of this year's plays. We have long been a country of one-act playwrights, too many of whom have stretched one-act subjects beyond their compass. But it seems to be the intention of John Murrell in **Waiting for the Parade** (Talon) and new-comer Gaëtan Charlebois in **Aléola** (Talon) to write plays that are muted in effect and create an impression on the diminutive scale of miniature paintings.

Aléola is a two-acter about a husband and wife, the former 72, the latter 68, who are celebrating their 52nd anniversary. They saw their life in rural Quebec pass behind them when they moved to the city years ago. In these somewhat hostile surroundings, they wait in vain for their family to phone, and in the end, through a tacit agreement, commit suicide by drinking poisoned wine. As gruesome as all this sounds, the play is a poignant, haunting celebration of the love and humanity that have sustained them through the years, rescuing them from despair and raising them above the petty concerns of daily life. It might be called a beautiful play. The language is spare, everyday dialogue often made poetic; the characters are warm, vulnerable but strong when with each other. However, because we are so close to these people and because they are so deceptively simple, the action glides by before we know it, without fanfare or fireworks. Charlebois, only 20 when he wrote the play, has demonstrated an extraordinary perceptiveness and maturity.

John Murrell's **Waiting for the Parade** shares the same close-up quality; as a result, we don't see the forest for the trees. In a series of very short scenes, five Calgary women wait out the Second World War. Janet is married to a news broadcaster who is having an affair with another woman. Betrayed in love and troubled by guilt over her husband's not going to war, Janet throws herself into organizing help-the-war-effort activities. The group she runs dislike her but carry out their assignments.

Margaret, a bleak pessimist whose husband is dead, worries about her son overseas until her other son's jailing as a Communist humiliates her. Eve, a school teacher, is married to Harry, 20 years her senior and too old to go to war, although he desperately wants to. She continually fights with him and lives in a fantasy world in which she is in love with Leslie Howard. Catherine is married to Billy who is taken a prisoner of war. She gets a job at a local industry, meets Jim and has a fling with him. Considered a whore by many, she eventually breaks off with Jim and eagerly awaits Billy's return as the play and the war end. The fifth woman is Marta, German-born, whose father is put in a detention camp as a spy. But he is insane rather than a spy and is eventually released. Marta faces racial slurs and the horrible experience of living with a father who believes she is only someone disguised as his daughter in a plot to persecute him. Throughout the play, the lens is close-up; the insights are so minute and intimate that one is forced to agree with Clive Barnes when he says that for all the insight, the play has "more atmosphere than character and more character than plot."

It is good this year to see that scholarship has taken a further interest in our drama and produced two valuable anthologies. These combine important 20th-century plays with useful critical comment. From the west, **Diane Bessai has given us Prairie Performance** (NeWest), a collection of eight short plays that range from early works by Elsie Park Gowan and Gwen Ringwood (useful for putting today's works into historical perspective) through intriguing newer pieces by talented young playwrights Frank Moher, Gordon Pengilly, and Ken Mitchell .(his ambitious **Great Cultural Revolution** also appeared in 1980 from Playwrights Canada). Poet/ playwright Wilfred Watson's experimental ***Women Taken in Adultery*** is also included.

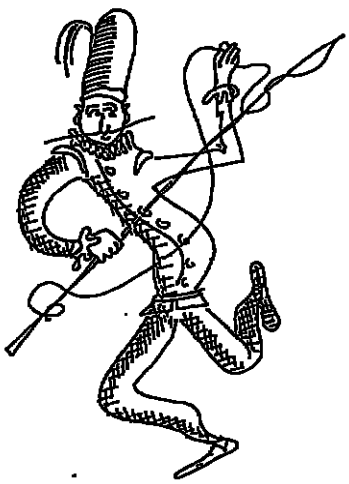
Anton Wagner's The Developing Mosaic, volume three in the Canada's Lost Plays series (CTR), offers more critical commentary than Bessai's, with seven plays. They include Merrill Denison's ***The Weather Breeder***, a light comedy about a man who is only happy when he can complain; ***Murder Pattern***, an example of Herman Voaden's 1930s "symphonic expressionism"; and an often overlooked Robertson Davies play, ***Hope Deferred***, which uses the famous ***affaire Tartuffe*** in the 1690s to make an eloquent plea about the necessity for art in the New World.

Playwrights Canada has also brought out a revised and updated Brock Bibliography of Published Canadian Plays 1766-1978. An invaluable tool for scholars, this book annotates some 2,500 plays from the 212 years it covers in such a way that theatre companies can turn to a title or author and quickly get an idea of what a play is about, how many characters it has, and where it received its first performance.

For quite a few years now, Canadian Theatre Review at York University has published its well-known theatre review, as well as such important books as the annual ***Canada On Stage: CTR Yearbook***. **Canadian Drama/ L'Art Dramatique Canadienne,** now published at University of Guelph complements *CTR* by covering drama in a scholarly way. This year these two journals have been joined by **Theatre History in Canada/ Histoire du Théâtre au Canada** published jointly by the Drama Department at Queen's and the Graduate Drama Centre at the University of Toronto.

This has even been a good year for young people's plays with no less than four books appearing. Playwrights Press has an excellent collection of six plays, including Eric Nicol's **Beware the Quickly Who,** Carol Bolt's **My Best Friend is Twelve Feet High,** and Gwen Ringwood's **The Magic Carpets of Antonio Angelini.** Steel Rail Press brought out an equally attractive volume of three plays, two of which are by Robin Mathews (one is adapted from a Farley Mowat story). The third anthology contains seven puppet plays by Betty Jane Wylie and the Winnipeg Junior League Puppeteers with the endearing title, **Don't Just Stand There — Jiggle** (Black Moss Press). The fourth book is **Juve,** a rock musical by Campbell Smith that came out of workshops in Vancouver. Apparently ***Juve*** was smashing in performance, where it was choreographed by Judith Marcuse. As a published script it is banal, really only a souvenir of what was probably an exciting personal experience. It should not be passed off as drama.

And What Are You Going to Do For Us?, just barely making it into a 1980 imprint, is published by Simon & Pierre and contains audition speeches from more than 40 Canadian plays. The book includes information on where to obtain the original play, brief biographical notes on the playwright, and a slight sentence or two to



suggest how to handle the speech. The intention is admirable; the need is there; we can only wait to see how effective this pioneer effort is in practice.

So, what have we got in 1980? An exciting amount of activity in many areas at a time of general retrenchment in publish-

ing. But it may be just the final flurry before the gas tank runs dry. People with a prophetic bent claim that the '80s will be the age of business, a time during which free-thinkers and serious artists will be muffled — a 20th-century dark ages. Certainly we have seen our theatres and playwrights over the past two or three years move ever closer to writing for the box office. The appearance in print of plays like *The Lionel Touch*, or a totally ignorable piece of drivel like Keith Roulston's **McGillicuddy's Lost Weekend** (Playwrights Canada), would suggest that there are playwrights getting published who are without the insight to separate worthless fluff from satisfying entertainment.

That is worrying. In the past there have been many unsuccessful plays, but by and large those that got into print had a serious concern at their core. Mildly troubling too is the huge attention showered on such works as *Maggie and Pierre*. They are not great works and should not be considered as such.

In these cases, however, we can rest assured that the playwrights involved do possess the talent and insight to create works of more lasting significance. We can only hope they do so. The artistic standards for which many people have fought must not be lowered in deference to economic concerns. Fortunately we can hold up models like *Balconville*, which achieve a satisfying level of box-office success without compromising their artistic integrity. The year now in progress looms important as one that could well tip the scales in the direction of commercialism. *Caveat emptor.* □

The hurricane's eye

Behind CBC-TV's docudramas lies a contract with the viewer: the promise to show the difference between fiction and fact

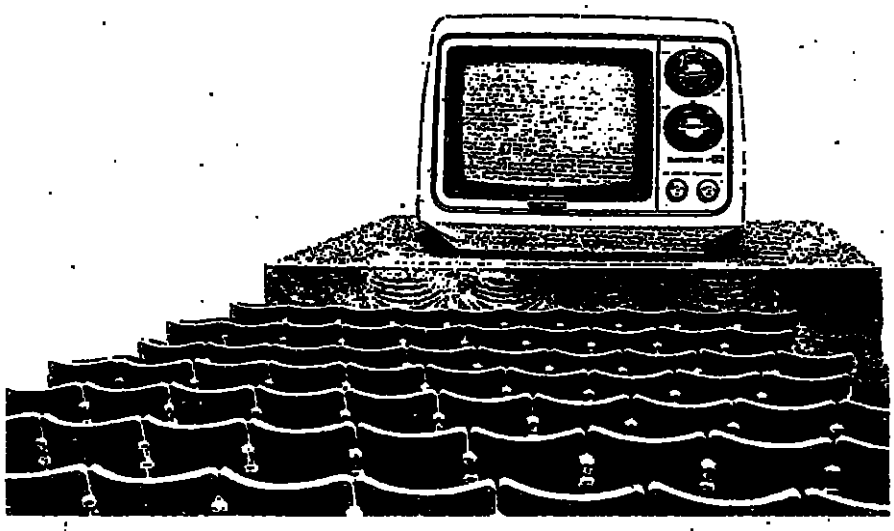
by Mary Jane Miller

WITH THE EXCEPTION of a waspish comedy called *Sunspots* and a softly focused version of Constance Beresford-Howe's romance, *A Population of One*, much of this season's Canadian television drama has been coloured by the tone and conventions of CBC documentary drama. Among the series, *Ritter's Cove* began with *The Beachcombers'* formula (an unusual profession, a lovable codger, two boys, spectacular scenery), replaced the broad comedy with a dash of feminism, and discovered that it could stay aloft for the season. *Hangin' In*, on the other hand, sanded away the gritty, battle-weary humour of its model, *Barney Miller*, while raising and then too often dismissing some serious social issues. Unfortunately the camera work, sitcom sets, and obtrusive laugh track are by now tired devices. Even the pace drags. For a few weeks *Up At Ours* did give us some fresh material with a regional flavour, but the series that survived from last season — *Flappers*, *The Great Detective*, *The Phoenix Team* — are frankly not worth detailed analysis. They are competent. No fuss, no muss.

The same might be said for two docudrama recreations of the Second World War, *Home Fires* and *War Brides*. In both, the period designs were imaginatively detailed, the actors reasonably good, the plots adequate. A more contemporary mini-series, *You've Come a Long Way, Katie* was a three-hour attempt to document in a believable and interesting way the alcohol and drug dependence too commonly encountered in modern life. What survived all the good intentions, the research, the substantial budget, and location shooting was a heavily didactic, distended, and thoroughly predictable yet implausible melodrama.

There was far more information as well as deeply felt sadness, irony, and quirky humour in the very simply staged one-hour version of Antonine Maillet's *La Sagouine*. There was also a far more sharply etched set of contemporary issues, as well as scenes of startling beauty, in Beverly and Raymond Pannell's short opera *Harvest*. Most striking were the sketches presented in the play within the play, which were drawn from the distinctive blend of magic, merriment, sharp satire, and protest developed by the Theatro Campesino (who performed for the itinerant farm workers of César Chavez), and from the eerie, often poetic giant puppets of the Bread & Puppet collective. When the cameras and the puppets danced with one another the effect was extraordinary. Although *La Sagouine* and *Harvest* were not documentary dramas *per se*, in their portrayal of the dispossessed they informed, entertained, and challenged the audience far more than the overblown *Angst* of *Katie*.

The genre of documentary drama itself has considerable range. It has become an accepted truism that Canadian audiences prefer this form, whether in films, radio, television, or theatre. Consequently authors, directors, actors, and technicians



have extended the form in many directions. The sub-genres developed for television are [illegible] from last season — *Puppers*, *The Great* [illegible] National Film Board, and 25 years of CBC news, features, and such news magazine programs as *Explorations*, *This Hour Has Seven Days*, and *The Fifth Estate*, as well as such specials as Allan King's *Skid Row* (1950s), Beryl Fox's *Mills of the Gods* (1960s), *Air of Death* (1970s), and now *The Ten Thousand Day War*, Michael [illegible] drama recreations of the Second World [illegible] of the war in Vietnam.

This season *The Canadian Establishment* and *Escape From Tehran* were typical of many lightly dramatized documentaries. [illegible] encountered in modern life. What survived In *Escape*, the narrative was assembled through the intercutting of anecdotes, extreme closeups of the protagonists being interviewed, and multiple perspectives on events, including flashbacks and snapshots, to fill in the background. The camera was the only "actor" — representing an escaping American ducking through bazaars and back alleys, dialling a Canadian diplomat, and threading through the crowded airport to safety. Many series on subjects as diverse as whole decades, prime ministers, entrepreneurs, and the history of flight have used this kind of technique to create a dialectic structure or to build to a dramatic climax.

Many other documentaries use fully dramatized episodes based on research into letters, newspaper reports, autobiographies, and the like. One of the CBC's earliest efforts, *The Odds and the Gods* (January, 1955) broke the ground. A look at Hurricane Hazel, the program used news film clips, location shooting, narration, and a "dramatic" subplot about whether the rookie weather forecaster should trust his judgement and call a hurricane alert. Pop sociology in a scene set in a trailer camp was followed by shots of two real policemen in a squad car out "in the hurricane." (Later the credits included the Cross Town Car Wash.) The dialogue and mix of conventions were fairly clumsy and the special effects were crude, but the basic format was established.

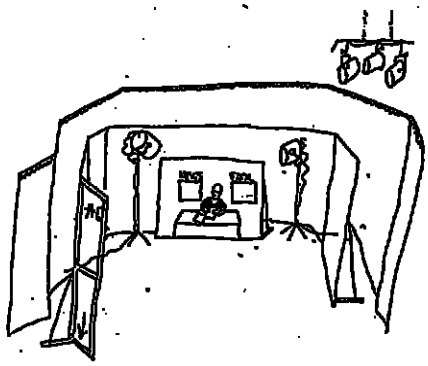
Two documentaries made in the 1960s pushed the form in new directions. The CBC commissioned, then refused to broadcast, Allan King's *Warrendale* because of the uninhibited language used by the emotionally disturbed children it portrayed. A documentary drama should have been safer. *The Open Grave*, however, proved to be otherwise. The approach to its subject matter reflected the program's origins in the Public Affairs Department. It was to have opened with no title. J. Frank Willis played the anchorman of the dramatized news coverage and Gil Christie, Percy Saltzman, and Fred Davis appeared as reporters. As when a news event is breaking live, the TV crew appeared on camera. Their story was that an empty grave had been discovered, where J. Corbett, railroaded to execution at the Don Jail because his pacifist beliefs were hurting the arms industry, was buried. Much of the dialogue was improvised; only principal actors saw the script; mistakes were retained in the print; the Toronto locations were varied and authentic; the cast of extras huge. As a final touch, *The Open* [illegible] Sunday.

However, between filming and airtime word of its content leaked out. An Anglican archbishop asked that the broadcast be deferred. John Diefenbaker demanded an emergency debate in the House of Commons. Fortunately, the minister responsible let the CBC make up its own mind. Just 24 [illegible] the president of the corporation, previewed the program and approved its broadcast — but added a disclaimer that destroyed the jolt of the opening scenes.

Subsequent events added to the list of ironies. The play was pre-empted by a Stanley Cup hockey game and postponed. Reviews were mixed, but usually praised the concept and defended the corporation. Eventually the BBC, West Germany, and Australia bought the program and showed it without incident. Finally, in the fall of 1964, *The Open Grave* won the City of Genoa prize.

Nevertheless, for a season or two the CBC tried to avoid controversy. Instead, programmers developed the first of several series about professionals responding to topical issues, which were often written, cast, photographed, and acted in the style of *cinéma vérité*. *Wojeck*, *Quentin Durgens MP*, *Corwin*, *The Manipulators*, and *Sidestreet* followed one another over 15 years.

In the '70s the CBC used the conventions of dramatized documentary in its belated but detailed examination of the October Crisis. Here dramatized segments protected the anonymity of sources, recreated key moments, and occasionally lightened the grim story — as when the police, searching *Winnie-the-Pooh* for clues, raided a Tupperware party. This kind of episode was not presented in a neutral way. Politicians



were shown playing billiards with their ethics; a policeman told us how and why he went on strike in a scene staged to look like a macho deodorant commercial. But these scenes were supported by interviews and news clips that confirmed the basic facts. Much less effective, because the scene was overly explicit, was the decision to stage Pierre Laporte's imprisonment and murder.

But the program's most dramatic moments, the ones that now tend to stay in the memory as catching the essence of those events, were fragments of recollection by real people. Justice Minister Jerome Choquette: "The arrests were somewhat wide-[illegible] of Robert Stanfield's honest, rueful face, after he admits, "I would feel easier with myself if I had voted against it"; James Cross, head framed by a wing chair, hands very still, voice carefully controlled, as he tells us, "I composed myself for death. What did this mean, the extinction of Jasper Cross?" Dramatized documentaries like [illegible] fact and fiction are juxtaposed, fact often has a more distinct and subtle intellectual and emotional impact on an audience than fiction.

Though the FLQ crisis is a spectacular example, the CBC often uses documentary drama to explore topical issues. In the 1950s there were docudramas on sabotage in a Canadian nuclear power plant in India, an aging hockey player's struggle to stay on his team, the aftermath of an attack in the last hours of the Korean War, a confused but rebellious patient's view of authoritarian hospital procedures (a distinct contrast to the era's favourites, *Ben Casey* and *Dr. Kildare*), and George Ryga's look at the prospects of nuclear war seen through the eyes of two soldiers. This kind of docudrama culminated in Munroe Scott's play, *Reddick*, which, among other things, pitted the traditional church against new forms of social action and raised questions of media manipulation against the silence of the majority. It also examined the conflict between public ambition and the expectations of idealists, and portrayed one activist minister's private doubts. *Reddick* was used as study material for men's groups in churches across Canada.

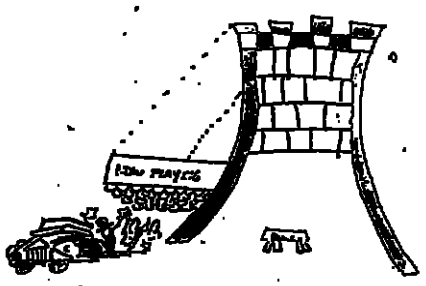
Recognizing the renaissance of Canadian theatre in the late '60s and '70s, the CBC also tried to adapt the innovative conventions of theatrical docudramas to television. *Red Emma*, *1837*, *The Farm Show*, and *Paper Wheat* broke from the naturalistic style of most docudramas, while in a less obvious experiment Allan King filmed Rick Salutin's *Maria* in the style of Frank Capra's upbeat movies of the '40s to achieve a look less naturalistic than *cinéma vérité* but "more real." "Real in the sense of someone actually in there trying his damnedest to distinguish [what] is trivial from what is significant and what must be grasped in order to be changed," said Salutin — providing an interesting though not always appropriate definition of the function of CBC docudrama.

Maria, a play about union organizing in the garment trade, appeared in 1976, the first season of *For the Record*, the most consistent series of CBC docudramas. The two experienced documentary (not drama) producers who got the series started, Ralph Thomas and Stephen Patrick, told the *Globe and Mail* they were not interested in "dramatized history"; their focus was to be the "human story," entertainment not polemics, "our contemporary reality" with "some idea of what's happening in other parts of the country."

This season's *Record* series opened with a 90-minute special on battered wives, which gave us little characterization or complex subtext or background, but did provide a gripping account of how wife beating happens, how difficult it is to escape, and why. On the other hand, *Snowbird*, Margaret Atwood's second play for television, was an often improbable but mildly engaging comedy about a runaway grandmother's declaration of independence and belated discovery of romance. The other new plays include such contemporary subjects as the death of a newspaper, the problems of a married homosexual, and the aftermath of a policeman's error in judgement.

One of the hazards of topical docudrama is that it can date very quickly. Yet many of the subjects presented in this series have, not, witness the recent sale of 10 episodes to the U.S. Public Broadcasting Service. Euthanasia, pro hockey, the election of the Parti Québécois, the impact of the Tar Sands project, the attempts to assimilate Indian children are issues still with us. (The "real" world and the world of *For the Record* have also overlapped in other ways. *Maria* has been shown to a union local on strike. A teenager with Down's Syndrome played the lead in a docudrama about Down's Syndrome and then *Man Alive* made a program about his experience as an actor.)

Some of these docudramas are better than others. In a few the issues are oversimplified and the melodrama is very thick. Sometimes whimsy, slapstick, one-dimensional characters, or sitcom dialogue weaken both the message and the entertainment. But usually *For the Record* avoids the obvious traps of the genre. The viewer is not afflicted with clumsy exposition, or dialogue stuffed with undigested facts and statistics, or a bewildering succession of stereotypes. Even more important, *For the Record* very rarely breaks the contract that



docudrama must make with the viewer: the promise to make clear what is fact and what is fiction.

In the last few years, whether in print, film, radio, or television, that distinction has been dangerously blurred. Canadians were co-producers of *A Man Called Intrepid*, which appeared in a television version a couple of years ago. It opened with news footage of Churchill's funeral. The camera followed the Queen and the cortège up the steps and into St. Paul's Cathedral, where the draped coffin passed down the aisle between Michael York and David Niven. On the sound track, the voices of the choir and congregation of St. Paul's mingled with Niven's voice singing the hymn. Already the director had skilfully blurred what had happened, what was being re-enacted, and what had never happened — because Michael York played a character who was completely fictional. Indeed, his romance with Madeleine (a real character), which was a major focus of the play, never happened.

It may be argued that with such first-rate gossip as *Edward and Mrs. Simpson* or even *Death of a Princess* (which did strain relations between the U.K. and Saudi Arabia) such liberties do not matter. But in a series that puts our fears, preoccupations, failures, and successes on the record, it matters very much. Whether the program is dramatized documentary, historical anecdote, an impressionistic recreation (such as *Riel*), or topical docudrama, the basic distinction between fact and fiction and the imaginative presentation of both is the essence of good documentary drama. Inevitably over the years CBC docudramas have fallen short on one or both counts. But more often program planners, producers, writers, technicians, and actors have excelled in this difficult but distinctive form of television. □

This wide and universal theatre

by Wayne Grady

The Well-Tempered Critic: One Man's View of Theatre and Letters in Canada, by Robertson Davies, edited by Judith Skelton Grant. McClelland & Stewart, 285 pages, $18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 2567 X).

NATHAN COHEN AND Robertson Davies were quite opposed in their solutions to the problem of Canadian theatre, but they both clearly understood its source. "Canadians have never really taken the theatre seriously," wrote Davies in 1969. "Our attitude towards all the arts has until recently been poisoned by a mean puritanism. . . and we still tend to value them for the social prestige they confer rather than for any enrichment of spirit they might encourage." Cohen, writing in the *Tamarack Review* fully 10 years before, recognized that

> Theatre as a mirror and critic of the moods, tones, idioms, paradoxes, virtues, and inadequacies of life on a thinly populated, four-thousand-mile, sub-Arctic strip: as a concentrated artistic statement with a persevering dynamic; as a body of imaginative work with themes and standards — in short, theatre as something of value to a discerning public has never counted in the life of English-language Canada.

Cohen was an implacable foe of Stratford. In his *Tamarack* article he stated that "the Festival inflamed two chronic, understandable but thoroughly dangerous Canadian yearnings; the itch to win international glory by excelling, in some branch of the arts, the two big brothers — Britain and the United States. . . and the passion to bypass the apprentice stage of culture and metamorphose overnight from an instant, quick-frozen state, as it were, into a full-fledged artistic maturity." Stratford, Cohen continued, substituted spectacle for drama, imported film stars (Alec Guinness; James Mason), and staged pyrotechnical extravaganzas that soon "evolved into a cultural equivalent of the Canadian National Exhibition." He perceived Stratford as draining public money from the many indigenous pocket theatres struggling for existence in Toronto: the New Play Society, started by former actress Dora Moore and her son Mavor; Robert Gill's Hart House Theatre (where Cohen felt Shakespeare really belonged: "*King Lear* was presented with just five days of serious rehearsal," wrote the normally acerbic critic, "and with an actor in the title part still suffering from laryngitis. But it really did not matter"); and the Crest Theatre, which had already presented three new plays "by Peterborough editor Robertson Davies."

To Davies, who was educated at Oxford (his thesis, *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*, was published in 1939), who had worked at London's Old Vic as assistant stage manager, and who served on the Stratford Board of Governors for its first 19 years, the Festival was simply the best thing that could have happened to Canada. The people of Stratford, he wrote in *Saturday Night* after the Festival's first season in 1953, had achieved "a stupendous undertaking. . . . Their venture is one of historic importance not only in Canada but wherever the theatre is taken seriously — that is to say, in every civilized country in the world." Performed in the first theatre-in-the-round to be constructed in 300 years, *Richard III* (starring Alec Guinness, directed by Tyrone Guthrie — both Old Vic old boys) announced Canada's position "in the forefront of the theatrical art which has its roots deep in what is best in the classic theatre, and which sweeps aside much of the accumulation of rubbish which has cluttered the theatre we inherited from the nineteenth century."

Davies's enthusiasm for the Stratford Festival has two separate but related promptings. First, he loves Shakespeare and does not (as Cohen's followers, notably Rick Salutin, do) find Shakespeare irrelevant to 20th-century Canada. Sitting in a book-lined study with a glass of tawny port, listening to an Old Vic production of *As You Like It* on the radio, is a much more real and *important* pleasure than sitting in "a school hall, smelling of chalk and kids, and decorated in the Early Concrete style," to watch a local amateur production of *Guys and Dolls* and to retire afterward to "the Big Pub" for a bottle or two of "raspberry vinegar." And if at Stratford we can mount a performance of *As You Like It* that approaches or even surpasses the Old Vic performances then, by God, we'd better do it. It's *important*; and the fact that Davies devoted column after column to explaining *why* it's important to the victims of what he calls elsewhere the Age of the Yahoos (meaning Hollywood) is a measure of his respect for those victims and of his hope that someday they will see it for themselves. Only then will we be able to build a vital and significant indigenous theatre.

The second source of Davies's en-

thusiasm for Stratford is found in his brief to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences, which was published in 1951 and is included in this selection. Davies wrote his brief, characteristically, in the form of a dramatic dialogue between two Restoration characters, Lovewit and Trueman, who, after lengthily discussing the state of the theatre in Canada (Lovewit: "You spoke of *Love for Love;* our Canadian education is so poor in quality that virtually no Canadian who is not a university graduate in English has ever heard of its author, much less felt any anxiety to see his works on the stage" — how we have changed in 30 years) conclude that "the time is ripe for the establishment of a Theatre Centre, where all the arts of the theatre could be studied and practised under expert supervision, and where our excellent amateurs could find the polishing they need to make them good professionals."

When, two years later, the Stratford Festival opened, it must have seemed to Davies that the gods had heeded him, for Stratford was conceived as just such a Theatre Centre, in which Canadian actors, directors, designers, assistant stage managers, and audiences could learn from those of wider experience in the theatre's living tradition, in its "apostolic succession." It was, in fact, exactly what Nathan Cohen said we needed: an apprentice stage. Did it work? In 1965, reviewing a Stratford production of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, Davies had nothing but praise for the actors — who included Bruno Gerussi, Frances Hyland, Douglas Campbell, Kate Reid, and William Hutt — and for its young director, "a Canadian man of the theatre in whom this country has a great possession": John Hirsch.

The second half of this volume is a sampling of Davies's myriad book reviews and literary essays. These are perhaps better known or more predictable than his theatre work; from Peterborough *Examiner* reviews of the 1940s, articles from *Saturday Night* (of which he was literary editor in the '40s and '50s), to his 1978 essay on the novels of Mavis Gallant. Davies is a generous, at times prodigal, reviewer; almost every book he reviews is the best work to appear in Canada since the last book he reviewed. But his views on such works as *Barometer Rising*, *As for Me and My House*, *The Tin Flute*, *Earth and High Heaven*, as well as the humorous correspondences of Samuel Marchbanks, are always wittily conceived and pithily expressed. They are, in fact, fine examples of what he himself pleaded for in an article in 1953: Light-Hearted Scholarship, the ideal product of the ideal man of letters. Such writing "is of general interest and... appeals to a person neglected in Canada, the Intelligent General Reader." Davies's IGR corresponds roughly to Northrop Frye's "creative reader," and it is no surprise that editor Judith Grant has borrowed her title from Frye's 1963 book, *The Well-Tempered Critic*. Both Frye and Davies are educators — to read Frye's essays on Shakespeare, for example, and then Davies's notes on the Stratford or Old Vic productions of the plays, is to be informed by an all-encompassing, universal mind bringing itself to bear upon familiar and yet continually fascinating subjects. □

Now his wars on God begin

by Mark Abley

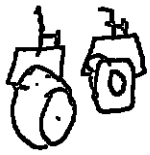
In My Day: Memoirs, by John Coulter, Hounslow Press, 357 pages, $60.00 cloth (ISBN 0 88882 033 X).

IN HIS BOOK of poetry, *The Blossoming Thorn* (1946), John Coulter spoke of "the ambushed grief in the heart/Of the immigrant-exile ... /He is a man with himself at war." An Ulsterman by birth and upbringing, Coulter moved to Dublin as a young man, to England as he approached middle age, and to Canada in 1936, when he was 48. There were good reasons for all his migrations, but the moves deprived him of a sense of community and made it difficult for his many plays to reach an audience. "I don't think anyone can emigrate successfully after their mid-20s," he said two years ago. "I never did feel truly Canadian and I don't now. Yet I feel more alien in Dublin or London than I do here." Coulter died alone in his Toronto apartment on Dec. 1, 1980, at the age of 92. Time had bruised and wearied him, but he remained indomitable to the last.

Coulter did have the satisfaction of seeing his memoirs, *In My Day*, published in a limited edition last autumn, but he never gained the recognition he desired and deserved. For his career was an important one, especially in the cultural history of his final homeland. The pattern of his work in the 1940s is, indeed, emblematic of the patterns adopted by many Canadian artists since. In a preface to the opera *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (libretto by Coulter, music by Healey Willan), he defended his choice of a Gaelic legend as the subject for a Canadian opera:

"The art of a Canadian remains, with but little differentiation, the art of the country of his forebears, and the old world heritage of myth and legend remains his heritage, to be used by him for suitable ends." Such a faith did not endure, and as Ireland receded into memory he proclaimed: "A hundred Canadian plays are waiting for Canadians who will write them." This conscious shift of subject-matter foreshadowed the nationalistic tone and the New World myths that have become so important in Canadian literature since 1960. The play that seemed to have been waiting for Coulter was a portrait of Louis Riel.

An epic drama in which he drew on Brechtian devices to tell a story of spiritual pride, personal heroism, and political misjudgement, *Riel* was his masterwork. First produced in 1950, it was an early sign of the Métis leader's continuing rehabilitation, and it must still be counted among the best plays written about Canadian history. Immersion in the language and culture of the past freed Coulter's imagination, which tended to stay earthbound when — as in his dramatized biography of Winston Churchill — he wrote about the present. For all Coulter's devotion, his listening at street corners and bus-stops for the distinctive qualities of Canadian speech, his ear and voice were most at ease with the artifices of history. The best of his late plays may have been *François Bigot*, an investigation of the decadence of New



France and the glamorous vices of its final intendant.

Coulter had grown up in Belfast; like his contemporary, D. H. Lawrence, he lost the Protestant faith of his childhood as a very young man. In his first half-century he worked as a textile designer, schoolteacher, journalist, broadcaster, and editor, not to mention dramatist (his first play, *Conochar's Queen*, was printed in 1917). When the outbreak of civil war induced him to leave Ireland for good he settled in London, becoming managing editor of *The New Adelphi* under that most gifted and maligned of critics, John Middleton Murry. He came to Canada for love — the love of Olive Clare Primrose, a Toronto writer he'd met in London but who, when she returned home on a visit, had been diagnosed as tubercular and forbidden to travel. Rather than remain in England alone, Coulter chose to emigrate.

The chapters on his life here between 1936 and 1951 are among the most valuable of *In My Day*, for they document the cultural maturing of a nation. He was a leading member of the Toronto Arts and Letters Club and a founder of the Canadian Arts Council; he also helped to persuade his old friend Tyrone Guthrie to visit Ontario and begin the Stratford Festival. These were also productive years for his own work. But in 1951, encouraged by the interest shown in his plays by British and Irish theatres, he and his family returned to England. The interest remained theoretical, and when he came back to Toronto in 1958 his energies had diminished and Canada's attention lay elsewhere. At the age of 70 he was reduced to writing propaganda for Ontario Hydro.

"Bitterness," he once said, "is the sin you must not commit against yourself, or it will seep into all you do." It seeps into many passages of *In My Day*, particularly when Coulter discusses the oblivion into which most of his work has fallen. Of his 24 plays, fewer than half have been given a professional production. He was angriest about the fate of a verse-play, *Sleep, My Pretty One*, which was bought by Laurence Olivier, rehearsed by Irene Worth, praised by Bette Davis, and performed by none of them. His adroit adaptation of *Oblomov*, though broadcast on TV and radio in several countries and translated into a dozen languages, has never received a professional stage performance in Ireland, England, Canada, or the U.S. *The Drums Are Out* (reminiscent of early O'Casey) was a sellout and a critical success at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in 1948, but its promised revival never came. And so on. Coulter's timing was bad and his luck was worse, but it must be said that he never found a unique idiom or vision. His lack of fortune, stability, and complacency drove him to explore widely different modes of theatre, and if he rarely repeated his mistakes he rarely learned from his achievements. He was, perhaps, one of those artists whom failure begins to vitiate.

Perhaps, too, the price he paid for exile was uncertainty about his own voice. In the words of Mavor Moore, "his basic tragedy was that of the uprooted man." It was one of his greatest misfortunes that *Riel*, the tragedy of another uprooted man, demands physical resources so great and a leading actor so good that its performances have been far too rare. Furthermore, the Irish theatre has shown as little interest in Coulter's Canadian plays as the Canadian theatre has shown in his Irish ones. But in defiance of the indifference of producers, Coulter kept on working till the end. In 1979 and 1980 he wrote two new plays about love and revised an earlier script, *A Capful of Pennies*, about the actor Edmund Kean.

His memoirs span nine decades, and the first memory in them is characteristic: "the cobbled stable-yard and a goldy-brown pile of manure against a white-washed wall." Later he quotes the mocking adage, "Live horse and you'll get oats!" For 92 years Coulter lived horse, and his spirit never broke. In his courage, his perseverance and his dedication to his chosen art, no matter how spasmodic the rewards, his life became exemplary. To adapt Yeats's finest poem, "His eyes mid many wrinkles, his eyes,/ His ancient glittering eyes, were gay." I met him only once, and I treasure the memory. □

To do nothing and never die

A eulogy to John Glassco, 1909-1981, poet, translator, and pornographer, and an elegant memoirist of the Paris years

by Stephen Scobie

I WENT TO SEE John Glassco at his home on Rue Jeanne-Mance in Montreal on the morning of Jan. 29, 1981, in order to present to him a copy of my book of poems, *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*, which is dedicated to him. The book deals with Paris in the 1920s from the point of view of Robert McAlmon, whose character began to fascinate me when I read about him in Glassco's superb *Memoirs of Montparnasse*. Glassco wrote in my copy of the book a note of thanks, describing himself (not quite accurately) as "the sole survivor" of that era. He dated his statement, by mistake, Feb. 2, 1981, which is in fact the 25th anniversary of the death of Robert McAlmon. It was not a date that John Glassco himself would ever see: he died, suddenly, early that same afternoon at the age of 71.

Glassco was a master of many forms: poetry, translation, autobiography, and, in his own words, "aphrodisiac works . . . as an article of commerce." He was also highly skilled at what may be called the disclamatory preface. In the prefatory note to *Memoirs of Montparnasse* he tells us that "the youthful memoirist in all his flippancy, hedonism and conceit . . . is no longer myself. . . . In my memory he is less like someone I have been than a character in a novel I have read." The preface to *The Fatal Woman* regrets that the three novellas the volume contains are in a minor vein and have "not explored [the] subject to the depth or extent that it deserves"; he concludes by describing them as "three faded tributes to the Fatal Woman who has been and remains my constant Muse, three dried-up little sticks of incense lit on her altar for the inhalation of the judicious."

The reader would of course be well advised to take these disclaimers at something other than face value. Glassco's work was anything but minor, and the two books that follow these prefaces are among the glories of Canadian prose. His output may have been small, but it was, like his sensitive and elegant translations of *québécois* poetry, definitive.

Glassco lived most of his life in rural Quebec and in Montreal, a city to whose essence and history he devoted a long documentary poem. With the exception of his years in Paris, the events of his life were quiet and largely private. But in Paris, Glassco transformed his life into literature, into what Louis Dudek justly called "the best book of prose by a Canadian that I have ever read."

Precocious as ever, Glassco began his autobiography in Paris in 1928 at the age of 18, but soon the life of that city became too engrossing to allow time for writing, and the account was not continued until the winter of 1932-33, in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, where Glassco was awaiting a possibly fatal operation. Never completely finished, the manuscript was put aside for 35 years and not published until 1970, when its appearance introduced Glassco to a whole new generation of readers who reacted with delight and amazement to the perfection of its style and the fascination of its author.

In writing about Paris in the '20s, Glassco challenged comparison with some of the major authors of the 20th century. Autobiographies of the period are numerous, and

John Glassco

together they constitute a fascinating body of work, like a multi-perspectived novel in which the authors of each book appear as characters in all the others. Buffy Glassco and Graeme Taylor appear, for instance, in Robert McAlmon's *Being Geniuses Together* (a title that might well summarize the whole genre): Buffy, McAlmon writes, "was then eighteen, and much the oldest, most ironic, and disillusioned of the three of us." Alongside works by McAlmon, Kay Boyle, Ernest Hemingway, and even Gertrude Stein, *Memoirs of Montparnasse* does more than hold its own: it is arguably the best book about the period ever written.

It owes this distinction to the elegance of its style, the richness of its evocation, the brightness of its wit, and above all to the bland precociousness of its 18-year-old persona, alternating between metaphysical speculation and outrageous sexual conceits with a quite un-Canadian panache. "I am persuaded," he writes, "half of man's miseries result from an insufficiency of leisure, gormandise and sexual gratification during the years from seventeen to twenty. This is what makes so many people tyrannical, bitter, foolish, grasping and ill-natured once they have come to years of discretion and understand they have wasted their irreplaceable years in the pursuit of education, security, reputation, or advancement."

Sexual gratification, in some of its odder forms, was a continuing theme of Glassco's later prose writings. He provided a seamless continuation of Aubrey Beardsley's *Under the Hill;* he translated Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs;* he published, anonymously, a curious novel of flagellation called *Harriet Marwood, Governess;* and in the novellas of *The Fatal Woman,* especially in the flawless "The Black Helmet," he used the scenes and conventions of pornography as a vehicle for a profound and original examination of concepts of the self, mythology, Romanticism, and fate.

Glassco's poetry shares with his prose the qualities of elegance, grace, and precision. Poems of rural life, such as "The Entailed Farm," give a sympathetic but complex rendering of the Quebec countryside. Glassco's erudition and sophistication glide easily through the arabesques of "Fantaisies d'Hiver." His "Catbird" is, I suppose, one of the earliest Canadian sound poems. His translations were, as he himself insisted by not reproducing the original

texts, poems that stood by themselves, existing in their own right.

The theme of death was prominent in Glassco's poetry, both his original works and his translations (especially those of Hector de Saint-Denys Garneau). In "The Death of Don Quixote" he sees the great fantasist stripped of his illusions, forced to acknowledge at last "the world of things, arrested." In "Villanelle II" he feared the exposure of religion's "comfortable lie," believing that "God will desert us when we come to die." But he saw, also and always, the artistic images of a great transcendence: "Listen,/ The embarkation for Cythera/ Is eternal because it ends nowhere."

In one of his most intriguing poems, Glassco presents the figure of Beau Brummell — "A foolish useless man who had done nothing/ All his life long but keep himself clean" — at the low point of his career, disgraced, in exile, going mad. One may speculate that Glassco, in his more self-deprecatory moods, saw something of himself in the elegant, hedonistic, tragic figure of this "fading Regency man." In that case, his final tribute to Brummell might also stand as an epitaph for himself, allowing him his usual self-deprecating irony — for what Buffy Glassco did was a great deal more than "nothing":

An art of being, nothing but being, the grace
Of perfect self-assertion based on nothing,
As in our vanity's cause against the void
He strikes his elegant blow, the solemn report of those
Who have done nothing and will never die.

□

New dances for Dionysus

A Sentimental Education, by Joyce Carol Oates, Dutton (Clarke Irwin), 196 pages, $15.95 cloth (ISBN 0 575 02903 X).

By KENT THOMPSON

THE FIRST TEST of all literature is truth. Is it true? we ask ourselves — by which we mean: Does what happens in the story accord with our experience? If the answer is yes, we give that piece of writing respect.

But it is the next question that is crucial to our evaluation: How far is it true? Is it true in the way we have known in our bones but never recognized before? Does it push us into those areas of knowledge we would rather not know that we know? If so, the chances are that the piece of writing is very fine literature indeed. And that's the evaluation I would place on Joyce Carol Oates's latest book — five stories and a novella, published under the title of the novella, *A Sentimental Education*.

All of these stories accord with what I know to be true, because all of them deal with the middle class, which I have known all my life. I can tell you (and Mary Tyler Moore illustrates it in the film *Ordinary People*) that the chief emotion of the middle class is fear — fear of death, poverty, mess. Because of this fear, we avoid any kind of knowledge of the senses; we avoid all emotions because emotions are messy. We are perfectly willing to sacrifice the possibility of happiness in order to avoid unhappiness.

It is precisely this kind of sentient ignorance to which Joyce Carol Oates addresses herself in these stories. For example, in the aptly named "A Middle-Class Education" she tells the story of a contended man, happy with his work — he is the program director of a cultural radio station — who through no fault of his own witnesses a senseless killing. There *seems* to be a cause, all right — the killer was apparently angry at his girlfriend, who was sitting beside him in his car, so when another car blocked the alley where he wanted to go, he shot the driver of the other car. The witness had never seen such savage senselessness before. His middle-class education had sheltered him from natural evil, from chaos, from violent death, almost (but not quite) from random chance itself. He is paralyzed by the sight of what he has been taught not to know. Although he must pass by the scene of the murder in order to get to work, he cannot.

Isn't that understandable? Don't most of us avoid those places where we have witnessed death — that back room, that stretch of road? There is a stretch of road near Sussex, N.B., that bothers me still, years after an accident in which two men were killed. The image of a single Greb workboot in the middle of the road will stay with me all my life.

But the importance of "A Middle-Class Education" — and of the collection — is not in the psychology of a man's reaction to violent death, but in the dimensions of the experience that are examined. Oates forces her readers and characters into a confrontation with Dionysian, anarchic lust and death. In another story a businessman, having a tidy little affair with a grubby, arty girl, brings her to his middle-class home while his wife is away because he wants to have the girl's earthiness there. He then must face the consequences of his lust and his tidiness when she slashes her wrists and blood is everywhere. He wanted an uninvolved affair and found horror and mess.

Some of us develop answers to the chaos: answers which, however strongly we hold to them, we do not quite understand. In "The Precipice" — to my taste the best story in the book — the amiable philosophy professor, a good rationalist, finds himself called upon to defend honour and principle against loutish anarchy, even though he does not quite know what he is doing, and always loses. Oates makes it easy to understand how a rationalist finds himself forced to take on the lout who is stalking the girl. The dialogue is perfect. "Hey, you — You — Yes, *you* — what the hell do you think you're doing?" He will, of course, get the bejasus kicked out of him.

These stories force us to recognize that life at heart is chaotic. We would do well to remember Euripedes's *The Bacchae*, in which after the women have had the fellow to their orgy (wildest of *Penthouse* fantasies), they tear him limb from limb. So all lust, however modified by love, has its seed of murderous hate. Joyce Carol Oates takes her middle-class characters and readers to the rites of Dionysus.

In the title story Duncan Sargent, a brilliant pre-med student, has in the best middle-class tradition avoided all feeling. His mother takes him off to the family cottage on an island off the coast of Maine for the summer, where he falls in love with his 14-year-old cousin, Antoinette. Duncan is his mother's ideal: he is polite, neat, well-dressed, industrious, and studious. He embodies all the middle-class virtues. But the stirrings of forbidden lust draw him to Antoinette, who responds with excitement, and agrees to meet him in a secluded place. She willingly gives herself to him: "Don't stop," she says, "don't stop." But, her virginity gone, she says: "I hate you.... What a pig you are, how nasty and ugly." So he kills her.

It's a story with a moral in a book with a moral. Blood makes its demands. In one way or another, blood will be evident. □

A fine madness

Lunatic Villas, by Marian Engel, McClelland & Stewart, 251 pages, $14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 3077 0).

By DORIS COWAN

"DON'T BROOD," says someone to the heroine of Marian Engel's new novel, *Lunatic Villas*. "Well, thinks Harriet defensively, brooding, the Holy Spirit broods too, doesn't it, or he, or she?" Engel's characters are given to brooding (as well as literary and scriptural allusions), and to reminiscence, fantasy, introspection, and retrospection. It has always been one of her primary fictional techniques to let the story develop at its own pace through the perceptions and ruminations of the central character, with many detours and backtrackings, and as little exposition as she can possibly get away with. You pick up the threads as you read, and if you miss a few, if names are introduced abruptly and mysterious references are made, it doesn't matter: the important themes will be back.

In *Lunatic Villas* she uses this technique very successfully, and enlarges its scope to include the points of view of a much bigger

cast of characters than she has attempted before. She tells a complicated tale involving three sisters, one inheritance, seven children, two custody suits, parrot fever, adultery, and an old woman who drops in unexpectedly and stays all winter. Mrs. Saxe, a tiny, ancient Englishwoman, is an unbelievable character in both senses of the word. She is the good witch who arrives out of nowhere one snowy night, riding not a broomstick but a bicycle (an antique black Raleigh), and she's a little like a cartoon character drawn onto a film of real people. But she pulls the plot together. Harriet tells her stories, introduces her to the other inhabitants of Rathbone Place (a.k.a. Ratsbane Place or Lunatic Villas), and takes her on sightseeing tours of Toronto:

> When she and Mrs. Saxe get restless they go up and down on the bus, up to the subway, down to the King streetcar by the Massey-Ferguson plant.
>
> "Our aristocracy came from manure spreaders," she says, "and tedders and harrows and the instalment plan ..." ... Mrs. Saxe's eyes bulge on the bus ... at Rastafarian braids and she takes delight in ballooned peak caps over woolly heads and accents that wobble in and out of English, students shouting at each other, "Mon?"
>
> And on the bus there are so many others too: prim-voiced ladies in saris, turbaned Sikhs looking wary, slouching or preening in their confusion at having become the new Jews; and the stout, winter-sallow Mediterranean people, hoarse-voiced, and women matronly among mobs of children, all possessed of burning, resentful black eyes.

Mrs. Saxe is Harriet's willing companion, eager to see everything and meet everybody. Harriet wonders when, or if, she ever plans to leave, and goes so far as to ask her when her charter goes back to England. But Mrs. Saxe is vague and noncommittal; Harriet, who is cheerfully bringing up six children (three are her own and three are adopted) soon accepts her presence as inevitable. "The old take liberties as the young do. They have passed some kind of watershed. They feel free." The old woman perches in the corner watching, and eventually intervenes in the action to bring at least part of the story to a satisfactory conclusion.

Engel writes, as always, with a superb and scornful wit and a hurtling energy that effortlessly fills up the spaces of her story, though she misses the rollicking good cheer, the effect of outrageous farce that she seems to be aiming at here. She is not, and never can be, frivolous. Her humour keeps bringing us back to the difficulties of reality; she can't help being serious, even gloomy, though she always pulls herself up and out of it, back to the jauntiness of her professed optimism. Her journalistic heroine is depressed about the article she is working on: "Welfare Women":

> Every word is banal. Perhaps every word has always been banal: now she sees it. More and more, she thinks, I am walking across the crusted snow of depression: if I step too firmly I'll fall in. Up to my waist. Make a bigger and bigger hole around me and never get out, never.

There are two writers in the novel, Harriet and her friend Marshallene, and through them Engel is able to express some fascinating and acute insights into writing, most of which I suspect are as much her own as they are her characters'. In such passages, and in the descriptions of Toronto, it sometimes seems that she is quite deliberately packing the novel with everything she has observed or discovered since the last one was written, whether it fits or not. The forays into the lives of the other inhabitants of Rathbone Place sometimes leave a similar impression: the history of Roger, the young father with his newborn daughter whose mother has departed; or the drunken tales Marshallene tells at the Silver Dollar. They are vivid episodes, written with finesse but not very well integrated. They seem almost to have drifted in from other novels.

But the heart of the book — the story of Harriet and her children — is thoroughly coherent, unaffected by the constellation of subplots around it. "They're not kids, they're people," she says. "From the day they're born. Think of them individually, not collectively. By name. Then they're human." □

Life begins at sixty

The Stone Bird, by Al Purdy, McClelland & Stewart, 110 pages, $8.95 paper (ISBN 0-7710-7212-0).

By STEPHEN SCOBIE

THE OPENING LINES of the first poem in Al Purdy's new book immediately alert us to the presence of a new speaking voice: no longer the old, familiar, genially shambling Al Purdy, but rather someone who has felt, in the words of Gabriel Garcia Marquez quoted in the epigraph, "the irresistible anxiety to discover what the orange whistles and the invisible globes on the other side of death were like":

I was altered in the placenta
by the dead brother before me
who built a place in the womb
knowing I was coming:
he wrote words on the walls of flesh
painting a woman inside a woman
whispering a faint lullaby
that sings in my blind heart still

The shadows of the past, the ghost voices of those who never made it yet left some message behind, have always been a major presence in Purdy's poetry, but never before have they announced themselves in images that strike quite so close to home, or that speak with such an eerie and profound authority.

Many of Purdy's familiar themes are still here — his empathy for foreign places and distant times, his affection for losers and outsiders, his fascination with pre-history and the fragmented records of dead civilizations — but they are treated with a greater depth, solemnity, and resonance. Over the past few years Purdy's work has shown a disturbing tendency to lapse into lazy self-repetition, to go through the motions of the familiar Purdy persona, indulging his prolixity, his rambunctiousness, his lovable rambling loquaciousness. Purdy as a disreputable character in his own poems appears less often in *The Stone Bird:* indeed, the one major instance of it, "Writer-in-Rez," sticks out as a poem that ought to have been omitted from an otherwise tightly edited book.

It would perhaps be too simple to attribute this deepening of tone to Purdy's intimations of mortality, though the "dead brother" certainly suggests it, and it is emphasized later in the collection:

This year I realized my dead father
was sixty when he died and I am sixty
but it's a year like any other year

But Purdy has always had this kind of awareness, this sense of time pressing in: what is different in these new poems is their concision, their ability to compress into a few resonating phrases implications that the older Purdy would have discursively talked *around*. Without losing any of the appeal of his expansive style and roistering personality, Purdy has become, quite simply, a better poet. *The Stone Bird* is the best book he has published in years.

Two poems may serve, briefly, to illustrate the quality of the book: one from the first section (Mexico and other foreign countries), one from the second (Canada). The Mexican "Bestiary" presents a series of portraits — burro, doves, rooster, dogs — each sketching in a few compact lines the essence of the animal. The rooster's boast, for instance, is

earth is best earth is best
and heart knows that isn't true
and brag-song is a grief-cry
earth at best is second-best
he mourns the sky the lost sky

Here Purdy's empathy for the "poor flightless bird" is in line with all his poems on misfits, losers, outcasts — but the identification is made without insistence, without the obtrusion of Purdy's own persona. The lines, with their concentrated word-play, are left to do their own work; they don't need the performer.

"May 23, 1980" begins with an account of Purdy returning home after a long day's drive, suddenly realizing that "the whole world smells of lilacs." Then the elegiac tone enters again:

I have grown old
making lists of things I wanted
to do and other lists
of words I wanted to say
and laughed because of the lists
and forgot most of them

On one of the lists is the name (forgotten) of a girl he once approached by the unsubtle method (typical of the buffoon-aspect of the Purdy persona) of spilling drinks down her dress. At first

. . . she smiled reluctantly
a little cautious because
on the basis of observed behaviour
I might be mad

But then she smiles truly, and that smile remains one of those moments of grace to be treasured and preserved against the madness of the world. The poem concludes with lines as utterly simple, lucid, and beautiful as any Purdy has ever written:

I have grown old
but these words remain
tell her for me
because it's very important
tell her for me
there will come one May night
of every year that she's alive
when the whole world smells of lilacs

□

Literary movements by the heap

Spreading Time: Remarks on Canadian Writing and Writers; Book I, 1904-1949, by Earle Birney, Véhicule Press, 163 pages, $5.95 paper ISBN 0 919890 25 3).

By LINDA M. LEITCH

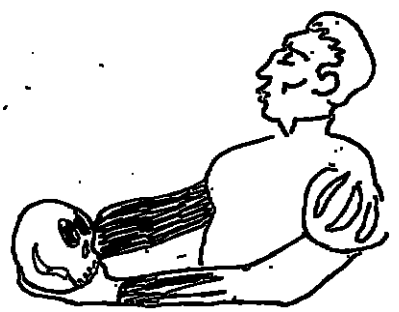
SARAH BINKS, the "Sweet Songstress of Saskatchewan," once heralded the arrival of spring with "Spreading Time," an exuberant little ditty concerning that "high endeavour" of spreading manure from "yonder heap." While the title seems appropriate enough for Ms Binks's purposes, scatological or otherwise, Earle Birney's decision to use it as the title of his literary memoirs presents something of a puzzle. What would he have us think — that in a gesture of mock self-depreciation he is referring to his own authorial powers, or that he has become a kind of honeyman, seeking to remind us of some of the more manurial aspects of our literary heritage? There is no guarantee that either interpretation is entirely true, but the latter finds the most support from the text of the work.

While in his reminiscences Birney manages to stir up some of the old antagonisms he experienced between 1904 and 1949, it is in the articles, book reviews, editorials, and radio broadcasts that it really hits the proverbial fan. Fostering an early interest in Canadian literature of quality simultaneously with a "deep-seated distrust of maple-leaf literature," the young Birney lashes out at anyone from Sir Charles G. D. Roberts to the many now-forgotten poets whose sentimental verse appeared in the newspapers and periodicals of the time. Nineteenth-century Canadiana, according to Birney, "was an overstuffed drawing-room of love-seats and embroidered snow-drops," originating in the "saccharine emptiness of the belated colonial Georgians who still pass for poets in Canada." This is the younger Birney at his best, and such pieces ring with earnestness and humour. But he has only just begun.

When Birney is offered the editorship of the *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, "a feeble house-organ of Old Guard poetasters," his long-standing disdain of the Canadian Authors' Association is given added momentum. The record of his attempts to turn the *CPM* into a publication that would better represent younger, more innovative writers from all parts of the country is exhaustive, and the same story is retold in a considerably briefer form in a retrospective article. Yet it is not so much that the reader becomes bored — an inside story of the workings of a literary magazine holds its own attractions — but that he feels cheated.

What Birney does choose to skimp on is not the stories of who paid the postage but the descriptions of the Canadian writers he knew as colleagues and as friends. A little more restraint regarding the intimate forms of names might have been mixed with considerably more candour in the portrayal of their owners: "Art" (alias A. J. M. Smith) appears as "a man as complex as his poetry, baggy pants under neatly tailored coat, cigarette-holder rakish in his mouth, coldly glittering glasses concealing bright and passionate eyes," and Frederick Philip Grove is "paranoid" and outspoken; however, figures like Malcolm Lowry, Northrop Frye, George Woodcock, and Dorothy Livesay remain undelineated but tantalizingly persistent presences in Birney's life.

For all its vitriolic attacks and passionate pleas, *Spreading Time* is a record of Birney's determination to discover that which is the "best poetry of my own century." A list of the poets he published while literary editor of the *Canadian Forum* and editor of *CPM* reads like a CanLit honour roll. Add to this the too-rarely mentioned work of one man — Earle Birney — and you have a unique gathering of talent that happened to spring from the same soil that gave us those "aging hacks and reactionaries" of Birney's tirades. But isn't it only natural? After all, spreading time just wouldn't be the same without a little fecundative substance. □



The Lyon and the lamb

Knight of the Holy Spirit, by Joy E. Esberey, University of Toronto Press, 245 pages, $20.00 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 5502 8).

By MICHIEL HORN

CANADA'S LEADING POLITICAL survivor continues to fascinate us. The study of William Lyon Mackenzie King is close to being a cottage industry. Within the last five years we have had Blair Neatby's third volume of the official biography and C. P. Stacey's study of our tenth prime minister. Now we have Joy Esberey's psychobiography, an attempt to link King's private and public lives.

Deeply neurotic, endlessly capable of hiding his motives from himself (and from many others), King escaped from unresolved conflicts in his personal life into the time-consuming demands of work and public service. Esberey argues that, whatever strains his inner conflicts may have placed on his health, their evasion was not politically dysfunctional. Indeed, the opposite seems to have been the case.

The reader must come to terms with Esberey's psychoanalytical orientation. I leave to the experts the question whether she handles her categories effectively or correctly: for my part I remain sceptical of Oedipal urges and the like, and thus am inclined to see the book as interesting and probably misguided. Nevertheless, even the non-believer will find it repays reading.

King suffered from conflicts that afflicted many if not most Victorian young men coming from bourgeois and petit bourgeois milieux: conflicts between sexuality and the inability to marry early, between duty to parents and concern for self. In Esberey's view, and she is surely right, King did not resolve those conflicts effectively. This was most evident in his courtship of Mathilde Grossert, the nurse from Chicago whom he wooed in the late 1890s, and its eventual end. Lacking adequate financial resources, and subjected to intense emotional pressure from his parents, King eventually broke the engagement: in a manner that was to become characteristic, however, the reasons he gave himself and her were widely at variance with the underlying realities.

The Grossert courtship marked King; henceforth he increasingly idolized the mother who had done much to bring her son to heel. King never did establish a family of his own. Esberey challenges as unproven, however, Stacey's assertion that King visited prostitutes for illicit purposes. He did masturbate and felt enormously guilty about it, but that in his time did not distinguish him from other young men of his class.

Throughout his life King showed an obsessive need for affection and approval, and for financial security. He got ample measures of all three, but never enough. He loathed conflict in either his private or public life, and it is Esberey's contention that he pursued policies aiming at consensus in order to minimize conflict. Thus he favoured the appeasement of Hitler in the late 1930s not only because he feared war would endanger Canadian national unity, but because he was an appeaser at the core of his being.

King's interest in the occult Esberey considers to be a function of his identity problems and constant need for guidance. Although he believed himself chosen by God to lead Canada, he nevertheless needed constantly to be told, by denizens of this world and the next, that he was on the right course. Rejecting the notion that King was actually in touch with a spirit world, Esberey states that the advice he got he actually gave to himself. This makes sense. Right or wrong, King stuck to his own lights.

A question that is bound to concern any student of King or his government is how this neurotic managed to remain party leader and prime minister for so long. Because her study is of the man and not of his country Esberey cannot provide an answer. But some of her observations are useful and thought-provoking. She notes, for example, that King's neuroses prevented him from perceiving certain difficulties, such as the early opposition to his leadership of the Liberal Party, or the basic reasons for the Progressive revolt. His failure of perception stood him in good stead, however, as he followed policies of conciliation that were ultimately successful but that a more perceptive person might have avoided as being inappropriate and unproductive. This is a variation on the theme of "if you can keep your head while all about you others are losing theirs, you do not understand the situation." Occasionally it worked for King.

Is neurosis, even serious neurosis, a condition for leadership, in Canada or elsewhere? Esberey does not try to fit King into a leadership theory, and though she does address to some extent the question of leadership in Canada, she does so with only King in mind. But she does not ask whether King, confused about his identity, was therefore an effective leader of a country confused about *its* identiy. The question is no doubt depressing, but it is not outlandish. In explaining King's political longevity Frank Underhill once said that King was the quintessential Canadian. Could it be that his neuroses, so amply depicted in this book, matched a sort of collective neurosis? It is bad form to take an author to task for not writing a book other than the one she set out to write. But I cannot escape the feeling that Mackenzie King's private fears and peccadilloes are less interesting by far than the problems of the country he led for so many years. □

Reel life adventures

Fifty Years on Theatre Row, by Ivan Ackery, Hancock House, 253 pages, $14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88839 050 5).

By JANE W. HILL

IF EVER A MAN was happy in his work it was Ivan Ackery. Now a healthy and busy though unwillingly retired 81, he began his career as a $5-a-week usher at a Calgary movie theatre in 1920 and ended it in 1969 after 35 years as manager of Vancouver's fine old Orpheum Theatre. A born showman and unabashed fan, Ackery discovered early that "people liked me, y'know? . . . a warm personality and a smile could go a long way toward making people happy and pleasant."

Although his early years as a poor fatherless boy in Bristol taught him how to fend for himself, good luck seemed to follow him everywhere. At age 14, his schooldays over, he came to Canada, and by 18 had twice joined the army underage and been found out and sent home — but not before serving as a bugler, drummer, and runner (message carrier) on the front lines in France. These vignettes of his experiences in Europe during the First World War are especially vivid.

In a friendly, chatty style Ackery gives us an insider's knowledge of the film exhibition business during its heyday. His huge, opulent movie palace offered vaudeville acts, magicians and clowns, big bands, ballet, and modern dance (although nothing risqué) alongside such films as *Wings*, *Swing Time*, and *Anthony Adverse*, and, always, cartoons for the kids. Talkies followed silents and Vancouver became a thriving, even glamorous, entertainment town.

Ackery's forte was promotion, which became increasingly important as the Depression deepened. As manager he arranged for the stage shows, emceed them, looked after visiting stars, and always tried to outdraw his competitors. One crazy stunt followed another; he once marched a fat old milk cow down Granville Street with a well-placed sign on her proclaiming, "There's a great show playing at the Orpheum — and that's no bull!" The $15 fine was nothing compared to the next day's free publicity in the newspapers. Pan Am offered two trips to Hawaii as the prize in a lottery set up to promote *Blue Hawaii*, and for *Robin and the Seven Hoods* the lobby was made over into a speakeasy.

Ingenuity was required. When a rival theatre down the street showed a Beatles film, "the line-ups were blocks long. I discovered that if I began my features 15

minutes earlier than my competitor, the freezing Beatles fans, weary of their vigil, would crowd into the warm and inviting lobby of the Orpheum and settle on the idea of seeing the Beatles some other time."

The likes of Eddie Cantor, Sonja Henie, Jack Benny, Cary Grant, and Pearl Bailey came in to promote films. If Ackery is to be believed, all the stars were charming and gracious. Only Shirley Temple, perhaps, was "a little bit of a brat that afternoon," but this could be excused by her abnormal childhood. Ackery's enthusiasm and hard work were rewarded in the many honours and prizes he received as well as exciting trips to New York and Hollywood.

With the help of colleagues from Famous Players, journalists and artists, former usherettes, and old archives, Ackery has produced a 50-year history of show business in Vancouver, with sidelights on technical developments and stage genres. His writing is often amateurish and imprecise ("Oh, boy! Did we have a good time"), personal incidents of not much interest to the reader are included, and name-dropping is endemic. But the flavour comes through, as does Ackery's complete involvement in his work and community. He revelled in being well known and admired, got a kick out of taking Gary Cooper fishing or rescuing Susan Hayward's fur coat from her hotel, was impressed when he was seated next to Lowell Thomas at a New York premiere. As a bachelor he could — and did — give his life to the theatre.

Unfortunately, Ivan Ackery has not been well served by his publisher. It is obvious that he told his reminiscences to a tape recorder, and these were transcribed by someone unfamiliar with the material. No editor seems to have intervened before publication. There is no excuse for a book on entertainment to misspell the names of Richard Rodgers, the Shubert brothers, Carole Lombard, Clark Gable, Toots Shor, and Scollay Square, not to mention such Canadian names as Bruce Hutchison, *Maclean's*, St. Catharines, and Brantford. These and the many typographical errors spoil a lively and evocative account of life in a business that appeals to our fantasies of everlasting wish-fulfilment. □

It droppeth as a gentle dew

Acid Rain: The North American Forecast, by Ross Howard and Michael Perley, House of Anansi, 208 pages, $16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88784 082 5).

By STEPHEN DALE

TO MOST PEOPLE, acid rain is known as the killer of lakes, an industrial terrorist that seeks its victims in our vast northern playgrounds. It's bad for our beautiful wilderness, bad for our national image, and a definite irritation to anglers and tourist operators. In *Acid Rain: The North American Forecast*, the authors show us what this phenomenon really is: a massive plague that has engulfed almost the entire eastern half of this continent and invaded every aspect of our lives. It's true that acid rain kills lakes: but it also erodes soil and undermines our forests, damages crops, creeps into the air over our cities to corrode our buildings and shred our flags, and liberates poisonous metals into our drinking water.

Howard and Perley provide ample (and at times burdensome) biological and technical data to chart these processes, but when reduced to human terms acid rain becomes two very apprehensible things. First, if acid rain continues at its present pace, Canada can soon write off its massive tourist industry, and can expect dire consequences for forestry and agriculture. As a whole, the authors suggest, "the cost of acid rain is so enormous it could undermine the financial stability of entire regional and national economies." Second, acid rain will damage people's health. Howard and Perley submit that dead fish are only indicators of a greater threat (like the canary in a coal mine), and the danger will eventually work its way up the food chain.

All of this makes great apocalyptic reading, but the most grimly fascinating aspect of this book concerns the politics of acid rain in North America. From the beginning, government and industry have apparently tried to ignore the problem. Sweden issued a report on acid rain in 1971 (with an advance warning to North America) that has been the basis of a definitive anti-coal, anti-acid program. Yet in North America acid rain was ignored by the press until near the end of the decade. When it did get press attention, industry explained that economic and technical barriers prevented them from solving the problem. Howard and Perley refute that claim, citing a 90-percent reduction in sulphuric acid emissions in Japan, where American-designed coal "scrubbers" had become mandatory.

Besides documenting obstructionist behaviour on the part of big business, the authors have damning words for the Ontario, Canadian, and American governments. They report collusion between the Ontario government and Inco Ltd. of Sudbury, Ont. North America's biggest acid polluter, and one that has consistently wriggled out of clean-up demands.

In the end, it's the politics that make for the disturbing proghosis Howard and Perley have formulated. They quote many influential environmental and government sources as saying that public mood and government priority, especially in the U.S., does not favour a solution to the problem. Perhaps our only hope is that public awareness can be raised by means of books like this one, and public outcry will change the myopic stance of governments and industry. □

Strange bedfellows

Love and Money: The Politics of Culture, edited by David Helwig, Oberon Press, 187 pages, $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 363 2).

By JUDY MARGOLIS

THE SHAPE OF Canadian culture is about to be cast anew, not in bronze but, like the "soft" Canadian dollar, in a form that fluctuates and reflects the harsh economic facts and gives government and the public sector greater control over the allocation of funds to the arts. It's not that the government necessarily wants to abandon its funding practices, which have been less than generous of late, but it apparently does want to alter and regulate more rigorously its cultural programs and agencies.

The well-timed release of *Love and Money: The Politics of Culture*, a collection of eight essays and one work of fiction edited by poet-novelist David Helwig, coincides with the establishment of the 15-member Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee. Headed by Toronto composer and conductor Louis Applebaum and co-chaired by Montreal publisher Jacques Hébert, the committee is currently holding public hearings across the country in the first phase of a two-year review process that will result in a white paper on cultural policy, scheduled for publication in 1982.

Theirs certainly won't be an easy task, judging by the widely divergent opinions expressed by the contributors Helwig has assembled from a cultural spectrum that spans television, publishing (Oberon's Michael Macklem), the performing and visual arts, and the Canada Council. Generally, the essays are uneven in tone and quality; some are ill-chosen, such as Thomas Hathaway's "A Clutch of Arbiters," or Paul Stuewe's barely readable "Thinking About Censorship." Some editorial bridging might have made this a more cohesive work. The only point on which there seems to be any agreement is that government has a definite role to play in culture. There is, however, a good deal of back-biting with regard to who should get a bigger chunk of the public purse.

Macklem, for example, who calls himself "a serious literary publisher," is heartily opposed to the government's view of Canadian publishing as a business, and to the incentives program that bases grants on gross sales. For reasons he doesn't understand, the government lumps periodical and book publishing into its cultural-industries category along with film, sound recording, broadcasting, and communications, and thus "sees 'publishing as an economic industry. . . . Nobody thinks the

Stratford Festival, for instance, is a *business at all*," claims Macklem, without a touch of irony. (He should try telling the Stratford board that.)

Heather Robertson, in "Starving Slowly: Notes from the Reservation," a somewhat dogmatic rehash of Susan Crean's *Who's Afraid of Canadian Culture?*, would categorize Macklem as one more "whining" exponent of the "welfare mentality" that's diminishing the creative community's political clout. She espouses the notion of public accountability and "the politicization of the arts." At one point she shrilly proclaims: "Culture is a growth industry in Canada; art is a profitable investment." For Robertson, culture and economics are clearly not only compatible but synonymous.

Her essay and Frank Milligan's "The Ambiguities of the Canada Council" are neatly set back-to-back. A former associate director of the Council, his is certainly the most lucid (though his prose is somewhat antiquated) essay in this collection — probably the only one, for that matter, that might be worth the price of the book. Like the separation of church and state, he makes a convincing case for the autonomy of what he regards as "the essentially anarchic quality of the arts" and for the Council as "public trustee." There is an inherent danger, he argues, in the government's efforts to impose a rigorous set of national standards and cultural objectives on all levels of government: it approaches totalitarianism.

The Canada Council has so far withstood the government's bid to control the assignment and priorities of funds, and after reading Milligan's essay I am convinced it should continue to do so. Its fate, unfortunately, will be determined by the findings of the Applebaum-Hébert Committee, which will be published 30 or so years after the Council was created on the recommendation of the Massey-Lévesque Commission (1949-51), the first federal public inquiry on culture. □

english, our english

by Bob Blackburn

Let us address an hypothetical assumption: that to bask in the winter is not to bake

IT IS OFTEN said by those who care about such things that one reason for their concern about the decline of English is that language, in addition to being an instrument of communication, is an instrument of thought. The person who cannot express himself clearly probably is incapable of thinking clearly. With that in mind, it is a truly terrifying experience to tune in the television coverage of the debates of the House of Commons.

Recently an Hon. Member spoke of "a hypothetical assumption." What it was I do not know, because he had jolted me onto another tack. I was wondering what sort of assumptions he assumed existed, other than hypothetical ones. Also, I was hypothesizing that this was no harmless redundancy; no forgivable slip of the tongue. Indeed, I came to presume that it was an indication that he didn't know what he was talking about, and therefore was not worth listening to. So instead of listening, I gave some time to wondering what he would say if asked to explain the difference between *assume* and *presume*.

(A presumption is something you believe until or unless proven wrong; an assumption is an hypothesis. And it is neither incorrect nor pompous to use *an* before an unstressed

syllable beginning with *h*, although Fowler says the practice is disappearing. He adds that you can't have it both ways: if you say *an*, *don't aspirate the h*. Hokay!)

The writer or speaker who forces us to pause and ask ourselves if he is, in fact, saying what he means is doing himself a disservice. That same day in the House, Herb Gray, the cabinet minister in charge of bailing out Chrysler, said: "The decision was made by myself." (The pompous or ignorant abuse of reflexive pronouns is widespread in government circles.) One could presume he meant "I made the decision." Perhaps he merely wished to use *myself* as an intensive: "I, myself, made the decision." Or maybe he meant that no one concurred in the decision. Or possibly he merely meant that, when he made it, he was alone in his office or bathroom or wherever he goes to decide things. Whatever he meant (even though there can't be much doubt about it), he didn't say it correctly.

A badly expressed statement need not be truly confusing to be a stumbling-block. A writer in *Saturday Night* recently referred to "a serious disaster," causing at least one reader to pause and try to think (in vain) of an example of a disaster which should not be regarded as serious. (The writer, by the way, is one of our best. Nobody's perfect.)

The aspiring writer who considers niceties of language unimportant fails to realize that he is jeopardizing one of his most valuable assets: his credibility. The sports reporter who tells us that this team "eked out a win over" that team does not know the meaning of the word "eke." Is it not possible, then, that he also doesn't know the score?

A program description in a leading TV listings magazine told of a movie about a man who was appointed "to head up a vigilante group to rid greed and corruption from the community." I write about television regularly, and accurate program information is important to me. Can I expect to get it from someone who writes like that?

The papers are forever telling us that so-and-so "died of an apparent heart attack." Either he died of a heart attack or he didn't. If it seemed that the cause of death was a heart attack, then he died, apparently of a heart attack. I suppose that if it appeared to one that one was having a heart attack, that might frighten one to death. That would be dying of an apparent heart attack. But I don't think that's what reporters mean when they use the phrase, and, since they can't say what they mean, I wonder whether the guy is, in fact, dead.

Usage doesn't have to be "wrong" to be bad. In February, the Toronto *Globe and Mail* informed us that "most of Canada has been basking in above-freezing temperatures." I don't know about you, but, although I welcomed the February thaw, I wasn't doing a hell of a lot of basking. You *bask* in *warmth*. Certainly, it could be argued that, in winter in many parts of this country, an above-freezing temperature could be called *relatively* warm, and perhaps the writer should be forgiven a frivolous use of *bask*, if, indeed, the writer *was* being frivolous. It's a reflection on the condition of newspaper writing today that I *don't feel secure in making that assumption*.

However, that's nitpicking, and I would like now to address myself to the problem of those who speak of "addressing a problem," a phrase popular with those same MPs mentioned above. To address something is to direct it, and you cannot address a problem. (Oh, I suppose you could put it in an envelope and address it to someone you don't like, or you could make a speech to it in the hope that it would go away.) You *can* address *yourself* to it (i.e., direct your *attention to it*).

There was a scene in Jackie Gleason's old television series, *The Honeymooners*, in which Ralph Kramden, while instructing Ed Norton in golf, ordered him to address the ball, whereupon Norton said, "Hello, ball," thereby proving himself smarter than not only Kramden but many politicians, too. □

the browser

by Morris Wolfe

What's wrong with Shakespeare's plays? Well, Othello was a man, for one thing

What's Wrong With High School English? asks Priscilla Galloway's book, and she goes on to answer the question in the second half of her title: ***It's Sexist, Un-Canadian, Outdated*** (OISE Press, 150 pages, $9.25 paper). Would that the answer were so simple — i.e. that if high school students were only reading non-sexist contemporary material written in Canada all would be well in the English classroom. Researching the material in this book (at a total of eight Ontario high schools) earned Galloway a doctorate from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. That fact, I suspect, tells us at least as much about what's wrong with English (and other) education as anything else. Galloway points out, for example, that the five most popular Shakespearean plays on the curriculum are *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*. "What impression of the sexes do [these plays] leave?" she asks.

> Four of the five have male protagonists. Three of the important women in the five plays commit suicide, and two are murdered. Four of the five men survive the important women; they are the heroic figures. . . . Cordelia is a woman of admirable integrity, but her part in *King Lear*, though memorable, is smaller than that of her villainous sisters and of at least four men.

How can one respond to logic as perverse as that?

* * *

IT'S GOOD to have a reprint of Stanley Ryerson's 1943 Marxist history, **French Canada: A Study in Canadian Democracy** (Progress Books, 254 pages, $5.95 paper). It's a book that helps one to see the present moment more clearly. At that time, for instance, the rate of illiteracy in Quebec was twice as high as in Ontario (which was spending almost twice as much *per capita* on education). In 1942, the year of the conscription referendum, National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa began *for the first time* to issue directives in French to French-Canadian army units. Ryerson welcomed the change, but argued, with what now seems to be commendable restraint, that the reforms needed to be extended to the RCAF and the Navy, so that French-speaking Canadians could participate "to the fullest extent, and with full opportunities for advancement, in the forces fighting for the survival and future freedom of all Canadians."

* * *

I HIGHLY RECOMMEND Aviva Ravel's deeply moving account, **Faithful Unto Death: The Story of Arthur Zygielbaum** (Arthur Zygielbaum Branch, Workman's Circle, 5165 Isabella Avenue, Montreal H3W 1S9, 139 pages, unpriced, paper). Zygielbaum was one of the leaders of the Polish Jewish labour movement. In early 1940, he escaped from Poland, determined to let the world know what was happening to the Jews there. For three years he desperately tried to make people listen. On May 12, 1943, after hearing the radio of the Polish underground announce that the last of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto had been

From Canadian Pacific in the Rockies: *the train that starred in* The National Dream.

massacred. Zygielbaum killed himself. In a final note he declared:

> I cannot be silent — I cannot live — while remnants of the Jewish people of Poland, of whom I am a representative, are perishing.... I know how little human life is worth today, but as I was unable to do anything during my life, perhaps by my death I shall contribute to breaking down the indifference of those who may now — at the last moment — rescue the few Polish Jews still alive, from certain annihilation.

But even then, no one really listened.

* * *

I DIDN'T PICK up the latest copy of Anne Hardy's **Where to Eat in Canada 1980/81** (Oberon Press, 300 pages, $7.95 paper) until mid-February this year. (A new edition appears every June.) I was going to be doing some travelling out west and experience has taught me that Hardy's judgements are almost always trustworthy. This time she was right about every restaurant I tried. Just one bad meal avoided more than covers the cost of the book.

* * *

Canadian Pacific in the Rockies by D. M. Bain is a kind of book in instalments being published by a group of train enthusiasts and former CP employees who live in and around Calgary. There now are six parts to the series and no end in sight. Each part is a 28-page pamphlet consisting of large, reasonably good photographs of trains in various parts of the Rockies. Beside (or beneath) each photograph is a detailed and loving description of both the train and the terrain through which it passed. The books are available from the Calgary Group of the British Railway Modellers of North America, 5124 33 St. N.W. Calgary T2L 1V4 for $5.40 each including postage.

* * *

I CONTINUE TO have mixed feelings about recent titles I've seen from Western Producer Prairie Books. John H. Archer's **Saskatchewan: A History** (422 pages, $24.95 cloth and $15.95 paper) and Evelyn Eager's **Saskatchewan Government: Politics and Pragmatism** (239 pages, $11.95 paper) illustrate what I mean. Both books are timely — Saskatchewan, after all, has just celebrated its 75th birthday — and both are reasonably well made. The trouble is that they're both so tediously written that I can't imagine anyone actually reading them for pleasure. Are there no editors at Prairie Books? What both authors have done, it seems to me, is bring together vast amounts of raw material that someone else is still going to have to turn into real books some day. □

on the racks

by Paul Stuewe

Decline and fall: from soft-core vestals to skirmishes on the sexual battleground

IF THE FAR north is the true Canadian frontier, James Houston's **Spirit Wrestler** (Seal, $2.95) is a pioneering feat of comprehension as well as a fine novel by conventional literary standards. Although I wasn't all that taken with his conception of the shamanistic experience, which is heavy on visions of grotesque animals and light on psychological spirit-wrestling, this is otherwise a marvelous book that can be read for both pleasure and enlightenment.

Houston's characters are complex human beings, not stereotypes representing this or that moral absolute, and there's nothing predictable about either *dramatis personae* or plot. He never stoops to the reverse-racist ploy of making the natives paragons of virtue and the whites exemplars of vice, and he works in all the information we need to know about this unfamiliar culture without sounding like an anthropological text. A most impressive performance by a writer who has something to say and knows how to articulate it with maximum effectiveness.

The Emperor's Virgin (Seal, $2.95) announces that Sylvia Fraser has finally found an appropriate form — or perhaps I should say "forum" — for her fictional interests. This soft-core version of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* doesn't pretend to be anything more than escapist entertainment, and as a consequence doesn't suffer from the intimations of seriousness that plague her other novels. It's still not very well-written escapist entertainment, but the sex and violence quotient is high enough to keep one reading through its frequent stylistic and grammatical lapses.

Fraser's methods might profitably be studied by Charles Ewert, whose **A Cross of Fire** (PaperJacks, $3.75) is a tedious historical romance set in 17th-century Huronia. Here events are just too widely separated by long stretches of arid prose, and it'll likely make you more cross than inflamed. Gray Wallace demonstrates an awareness of this elementary principle of successful genre fiction in **The Buddha Stone** (PaperJacks, $3.50), a thriller that does diverting things with exotic sex, drugs, and south-east Asian backgrounds, while Frank Smith's **Defectors Are Dead Men** (PaperJacks, $2.75) and **The Traitor Mask** (PaperJacks, $2.95) are the latest evidence that this prolific author has not yet mastered it: both

are flat, unbelievable, and quite unnecessary wastes of wood pulp that should entitle reviewers to combat pay.

Two excellent books for children will probably attract many adult readers. Margaret Laurence's **Jason's Quest** (Seal, $2.95) is an unusually rich story that can be enjoyed as an exciting adventure and/or a stimulating socio-political allegory. Like much fantasy fiction, it's plagued by the Defect of Gratuitous Capitalization — a legacy of its Grim Hegelian origins, perhaps — but otherwise it's an extremely engaging yarn for all ages. Mordecai Richler's **Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang** (Seal, $2.50) could be a bit too scary for younger children, even though the injustice done by this sort of adult meddling is one of its major themes. This is a sensitive and imaginative tale with darker overtones than *Jason's Quest*, and it wouldn't be going too far to say that anyone familiar with the adult fiction of Laurence and Richler will have a good idea of what their respective children's books are like.

Older children should also enjoy Doug Wilkinson's **Sons of the Arctic** (Clarke Irwin, $3.95), a pleasant story of Inuit life that exhibits much love and respect for their culture, and only some stilted dialogue and a fondness for pat moral lessons keep it out of the adults-also category.

A dash of playfulness would certainly have helped to increase the palatability of **The Landau Strategy: How Working Women Win Top Jobs** (Seal, $4.95) by Suzanne Landau and Geoffrey Bailey. If "the job hunt is a kind of guerrilla warfare," as claimed here, then *The Landau Strategy* is a von Clausewitz for employment seekers: job-hunting as warfare on the sexual battleground waged by other means. The manipulative tactics advocated here might well lead a cynical observer to reflect that women's liberation has succeeded only in entrapping females in the shackles of the traditional male-as-breadwinner role, and if that's the case it's (1) a tragedy and (2) partly the fault of books that don't think before trying to thwim.

Joan Sutton's **All Men Are Not Alike** (Seal, $2.50) takes a much more humane look at contemporary male-female conflicts. In the no-person's-land of sexual relations a good emotional binge is often preferable to the most trenchant intellectual analysis, and a few respectability-seeking "studies show" references notwithstanding, that's basically what we get here. The book is as alternately banal and fascinating as any articulate soul's experiences of sexuality, which is to say that you'll probably finish it regardless of how self-helpful it may or may not seem. One can more straightforwardly recommend Max Haines's **Crime Flashbacks** (Toronto Sun, $2.95), even though his snappy *Toronto Sun* style is perhaps a bit too lightweight for a full-length book; but read a few at a time these 40 tales of thievery, mayhem, and the like are undeniably entertaining. The book's superior physical qualities are also notable, given that the parent newspaper usually looks like a cross between a wanted poster and a grocery-store flyer, and for those of an ameliorist disposition there may well be hope that the *Sun*'s gonna shine some day. □

in the beginning

by Mary Ainslie Smith

Riches from the past, from Métis hunters to the sorrows of the little immigrants

GOOD HISTORICAL fiction provides an entertaining way of making the past accessible to many people who might otherwise never discover how interesting it can be. Two series — one from PMA Books called Northern Lights and another from Kids Can Press — have been designed to offer children some access to the past. These books are based on the premises that Canadian history *is* interesting, and that since it is our history, it is important for our children to recognize its richness. Both series have recently added new titles to their lists.

The Northern Lights books, intended for readers about six to eight years of age, are very appealing to look at and to hold. They are small, 32 pages in length, with shiny, colourful, hard covers. The text is generously illustrated and, considering the quality of the binding and colour reproduction, the price ($6.95 each) is reasonable. In each story, the protagonist is a child, a representative of a cultural group that historically has played a significant role in Canada's development.

Eight-year-old Brigid in **The Yellow Flag** by Susanne McSweeney, illustrated by Brenda Clark, leaves Ireland with her mother and little sister to join her father in Upper Canada when he is at last able to send them the passage money. It has been difficult to reduce the horrors of the immigrant ships to language for this age level, but McSweeney builds details to create the impression: Brigid's sister's red hair looks brown with dirt; their food has black beetles in it; the water is scummy and the bodies of cholera victims are "wrapped in sheets and tipped into the ocean." Clark's illustrations

also help to show what it must have been like to live in steerage for a two-month voyage. The story conveys the essential optimism of the immigrants, as represented by Brigid and her family — their faith that despite their hardships they can make a better life for themselves in Canada.

Michi's New Year by Shelley Tanaka also portrays immigration from a child's point of view. Michi's family moves from Tokyo to Vancouver in 1912, just before her tenth birthday. Although the voyage takes only 15 days by steamship, Michi is seasick most of the way and can't believe that anything in Canada is as good as it was in Japan. Illustrations by Ron Berg emphasize the contrast between Michi's new life and her old one. On a dull, drizzly New Year's Day in Vancouver, Michi sits on the front porch of her shabby, clapboard house and concludes that Canada is "big and dirty and lonely." She remembers her friends and cousins in Japan and her lovely house "with its delicate paper screen doors and quiet garden." When some friends come to share a New Year's party with her family, Michi begins to understand that it is possible to adapt to what a new country has to offer without leaving behind all one's well-loved traditions.

Pierre Bouchard in **The Buffalo Hunt** by Donald and Eleanor Swainson, illustrated by James Tughan, is eight years old, a Métis, and absolutely happy in his Prairie home. His ambition is to be a hunter like his father and grandfather and to ride with them in the fall buffalo hunt. When his father says that at last he is old enough readers share the excitement and danger of his first hunt. The text, combined with Tughan's detailed

illustrations, portrays the customs and self-sufficiency of Métis community life so attractively that readers will regret that it no longer exists.

Maps printed on the endpapers of the Northern Lights books help to place each story in its geographical and historical context. And although the significance of time and place will be beyond the grasp of the stories' youngest audience, this series should help to stimulate Canadian children's interest in aspects of their past.

The stories from Kids Can Press will continue to provide for this interest in somewhat older readers. The two recent books in this series are both paperbacks, 64 pages in length and reasonably priced at $2.95 each. They are also available in French. In each book there is again a child protagonist — older for this series, on the verge of adolescence — and each is transplanted into a strange Canadian setting.

Timothy in **A Proper Acadian** by Mary Alice Downie and George Rawlyk, illustrated by Ron Berg, has always lived in Boston. Because his widowed father is ill and finding it difficult to look after him, Timothy is sent to Acadia to stay with his mother's people. It is 1754 and Timothy has one year to grow to love and appreciate Acadian life. Then it is destroyed in the tragic deportation of 1755. Timothy must decide whether to return to his father and the safety of Boston or to share the tribulations of his Acadian family.

In **The Tin-Lined Trunk** by Mary Hamilton, illustrated by Ron Berg, Polly, an English orphan, is rescued from the streets of London by Dr. Barnardo and placed in one of his training homes. She and her brother Jack are eventually sent to Canada, where they are not particularly welcome strangers in a big, cold country. They go to live on separate farms in Southwestern Ontario. Jack is beaten by the farmer he works for; Polly is terrified of the cows she is expected to help milk and seems to make so many mistakes in the kitchen that she is sure she will be sent back to England in disgrace. But both are anxious to please and

eventually establish a home and make friends in Canada.

In the Northern Lights series, the main intent of the books is to convey information. The narrative presents children with some specific event or period in Canadian history. In the Kids Can books, plot and character are given more emphasis, although the historical events form an important background. Aimed at readers probably about 10 years of age, the Kids Can books move rapidly. The plots progress efficiently from one event to the next; transitions in setting are equally economical. Polly's voyage to Canada, for example, is dealt with in one eight-line paragraph. Secondary characters tend to be stereotypes. The main characters' feelings are often stated rather than revealed: "Polly felt miserable"; "Timothy felt very proud." These books have a lot to offer and children will enjoy them, but some readers might feel a bit cheated and wish that the stories, rather than moving so inexorably within their 64-page limit, had the chance to dwell longer on some of the simple, day-to-day pleasures and problems that would have made Timothy and Polly more immediate characters.

Another worthwhile series from Kids Can Press is The Folktale Library, a collection of illustrated folktales printed in both English and their original language. The two recent titles are **A Dream of Promise: A Folktale in Hebrew and English**, as told by Meguido Zola, illustrated by Ruben Zellermayer and **Gonbei's Magic Kettle: A Folktale in Japanese and English**, as told by Michiko Nakamura, illustrated by San Murata, calligraphy by Banri Nakamura (both books 32 pages, $2.95 paper). There now are 10 books in the series, previously published stories are in languages such as Ojibway, Hungarian, Italian, and Chinese. The tales are certainly not restricted to those children familiar with the other language; children who speak and read only English will learn something from seeing other languages in print, and everyone enjoys a good story.

People of the Ice: How the Inuit Lived by Heather Siska Smith, illustrated by Ian Bateson, is one of the series How They Lived in Canada from Douglas & McIntyre (47 pages, $7.95 cloth.) The straightforward text and detailed illustrations make this an excellent reference book for children from approximately eight to 12 who are interested in learning more about Inuit life. Although the book deals mainly with the old life of the Inuit, the present is not neglected. The book concludes: "Most Inuit families now live in conventional houses, shop for their food and clothing, enjoy television, and travel by plane and snowmobile. They have found new ways of surviving in the Arctic. Of the old ways, little remains except their art. There is no turning back — the lives of the people of the ice have been changed forever."

Good Times, Bad Times, Mummy and Me by Priscilla Galloway (The Women's Press, 32 pages, $4.95 paper) is also about survival in the modern world. The narrator, a little girl in a single-parent family, expresses the resentment and insecurity she feels because her mother must work and cannot be home as much as other mothers are. But they have both learned to make the most of the time they can spend together. Lissa Calvert's illustrations contribute a great deal to the text. We see Mummy coming home from work exhausted but gradually reviving to enjoy her daughter's companionship at bedtime.

Canadian Starters is a series of small hardcover books, each 26 pages in length from GLC Publishers. There are 91 titles billed as "Uniquely Canadian Materials." The series seems intended as supplemental readers for children in primary grades. Each title falls under one of nine categories: Places (a book for each province), People (choices such as **Bethune, McClung, Leacock**), Firsts (including **Insulin, Telephone, Candu Nuclear Reactor**), Sports (**Hockey** tops this list), Builders (from **CN Tower** to **Casa Loma**), Wonders (**Niagara Falls** of course and, not so obviously, **Magnetic Hill**), Me (**Me and School, Me and Others**, etc.), Wildlife (**Beaver, Canada Goose** to **Rainbow Trout**) and Canadiana (**Art, Music, Flowers**, but not literature). The print is large and clear and the vocabulary is suited to beginning readers but the information presented is pedestrian to say the least and often very disjointed. The illustrations are colourful but crudely done and the price ($4.94 each) is prohibitive.

Another supplementary series for beginning readers recently translated from French comes from Academic Press Canada. **Blueberry Books** (26 pages, $22.80 per set) are a series of 10 paperback stories by Muriel and Ginette Grenier, illustrated by Claire Grenier-Kennair, and come complete with a Teacher's Guide. All the characters in the books are blueberries and have punctuation names. Comma, the hero, is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Parentheses. His brothers and sisters are Question, Exclamation, Period, and Ellipsis. (They are triplets.) When Comma is born (in the first story), he is first white, then red, then blue. He is a baby blueberry. More than enough said. □

interview

by Stephen Regan

Poet Erin Mouré tracks her progress from brown paper bags to the wide open prairie

ERIN MOURÉ was born in Calgary in 1955 and now lives in Vancouver. Several of her poems, including "Riel: In the Season of his Birth," appeared in the *Storm Warning 2* anthology selected by Al Purdy (McClelland & Stewart, 1976). Her first collection of poems, *Empire, York Street* (Anansi, 1979), was runner-up for the Governor General's Award in 1980. She now is at work on a second collection of poems titled *Prehistory*. Stephen Regan interviewed her during a visit to Toronto.

Books in Canada: *How important was the* Storm Warning *anthology in establishing you as a poet, and what aims did you share with the other writers selected by Al Purdy?*

Mouré: Some of the *Storm Warning* poets are my friends, though I don't think that I've been influenced by them. Al Purdy's influence was in giving me the necessary confidence to continue as a writer. I met him at the Banff Centre in 1973; I'd been writing for years, but I'd never considered myself to be a competent poet.

BiC: *What experience did you gain from the Banff Centre?*

Mouré: For the first time, I was given exposure to other people who are writing poetry. In 1974, when I wasn't taking courses, I met several writers who have remained as friends: Andrew Wreggitt, and Al Purdy, of course.

BiC: *Did your upbringing in Calgary direct you toward writing poetry?*

Mouré: There were always books around the house when I was young: not always literary works, mainly popular biographies. My mother taught me to read when I was four years old, and I demanded a library card soon after that. At the age of six or

Erin Mouré

seven I began to make my own books by cutting and sewing brown paper grocery bags into books. I then started to fill these with poems, but as I had to throw away a whole book each time I made a mistake, it was a very primitive and inefficient method of self-publishing.

BiC: *What understanding of literature did your early schooling provide?*

Mouré: In school, Canadian literature was

not a specific subject; I discovered it in a personal way. At the age of 13 or 14 I was reading a lot of poetry on my own: I discovered Irving Layton's *Red Carpet for the Sun* and Al Purdy's *Cariboo Horses*. What I felt close to, and what stimulated me in my writing, was the Canadian literature I read at an early age.

BiC: *There's a lot of evidence to support the case that both 19th- and 20th-century writers have promoted a ludicrously false image of Riel through melodramatic representation and crude distortion of historical fact. Rudy Wiebe seems to be one of the few Canadian writers who have written with sympathetic and imaginative understanding of Riel's predicament. In your case, what prompted the poem "Riel: In the Season of his Birth"? Did you have a particular image of Riel in mind at the time of writing?*

Mouré: I had a dream of someone being hanged. I started writing the poem from this dream. I read everything I could find on Riel in the University of Alberta library. A lot of the images came from photographs: images of Riel that are still in our posssession.

BiC: *Do you feel that one of your strengths as a poet is in this kind of dramatic exploration? Your Rudolf Hess poem, for instance, is also an imaginary portrait of a character who is historically familiar.*

Mouré: I don't think that I set out consciously with accounts of historically familiar characters. It's probably that I'm swayed by visual images of the subject; paintings and drawings influence me as much as the written word. Some photographs strike me in a certain way. It was just incidental that I found a photograph of Hess.

BiC: *So your poems tend to germinate from powerful visual images and not necessarily from previous literary works?*

Mouré: I think that's true, but I should emphasize that the process of the poem is different from its visible origins. Photographs provide a static point of view; there are many connections that the camera is not capable of making. For me, the poem approaches a truer state because it can account for movement in time, for numerous angles.

BiC: *Your Riel poem is considerably long; do you think there is still a place for the "long poem"?*

Mouré: I'm sure there is. The Riel poem is the longest I've written. I have on one occasion composed something that approximates the long poem, a series of about 16 poems, but these don't simply illuminate each other as they might in a long poem; each poem can work apart from the others.

BiC: *What poetic developments have occurred for you since the publication of* Empire, York Street *in 1979? What have you been writing recently?*

Mouré: My new manuscript — which is going to be published sometime by somebody — is called *Prehistory*. I'm not conscious of developments; I let reviewers or critics worry about that. I worry about my subjects because I tend to repeat myself. There is perhaps a development in terms of the line; I think my breath tolerance for the line has increased, while my concern with the individual word has probably decreased. *Prehistory* is less disillusioned than *Empire, York Street*, less pessimistic.

BiC: *Does the title* Prehistory *has a personal significance?*

Mouré: I don't see any connection between writing poems about history or personal history and purging myself of that in order to write something else. *Prehistory* has "prehistories" of myself, but also "prehistories" of all of us; the world in which we live now is a place where our vital concerns seem to be with objects, and in that sense we exist, as Milton Acorn says, "in a dark age before history."

BiC: *You grew up in Calgary, and in many ways feel a stronger connection with Calgary than you do with Vancouver. Is this sense of regionalism important to you as a poet?*

Mouré: If there is a "regionalism" associated with Alberta, then I belong to that. I feel myself to be a Prairie poet; people who have grown up in other places have told me that they detect a "Prairie sensibility" in my work.

BiC: *Do you also identify with a wider Canadian literary tradition?*

Mouré: I see myself as following a Canadian tradition, but in one sense unlike the poets who came before me. Those poets who now are well known — Margaret Atwood, Al Purdy, Irving Layton — did not have such a distinctively Canadian tradition to follow. So I feel that a Canadian literary milieu was already set when my writing became recognized.

BiC: *At the same time, some of the poems in* Empire, York Street *span the Canadian landscape and extend further to Europe. There are poems about London and Madrid.*

Mouré: My feelings are not confined to this country; they are concerned with people of similar experiences and relationships in any part of the world. They go beyond a Canadian tradition, partly because of my Catholic education, I think. I don't have strong nationalist feelings, more of a universal sense of people and countries.

BiC: *To what extent does your working life – the specific experience in passenger services for a railway – inform your poetry?*

Mouré: My working life keeps me "down on the ground" and not in some theoretical sphere of being. I like doing a simple job that involves close contact with people. In some ways, the railroad can be as insular as the university, but it helps to remind me, visually, of my origins, my Alberta upbringing, my "wide open space." I ride to Vancouver from Winnipeg, through Edmonton, and I spend half my time on trains, mainly in crossing the prairies.

BiC: *Why did you choose to live in Vancouver?*

Mouré: Al Purdy wrote once that drunks don't freeze there in the winter. Neither, for that matter, do sober people! □

Letters to the Editor

SCIENCE FRICTION

Sir:

Your January issue I enjoyed greatly due to the article by Terence Green and the interview of Spider Robinson by Phil Milner. Wayne Grady's article, I found somewhat lacking, however. It was obvious that it was written from an "outsider" looking "in." May I now present the opposite view, that of an "insider" looking "out"?

I do agree that often literature professors at universities are at a loss to understand and therefore to teach about SF. But you yourself have fallen into their dilemma by grouping Darth Vader and *Dungeons & Dragons* (the *correct* title by the way) in the same genre as SF: George Lucas has stated many times that his *Star Wars* movies and the book spin-offs are space opera. Just as the old time horse operas could not be considered analogous to the true Old West, space operas are *not* science fiction. They carry the trappings and not the essence.

The game of Dungeons and Dragons referred to is not SF either, nor is *The Dragon*, the D&D magazine mentioned. It is in fact an information format for new ideas and aids for the aforementioned game and others.

To consider the idea that "... the cautionary normative, aesthetic, and epistemic values of an entire generation may soon be formed by science fiction and fantasy" a "chilling thought" is foolish. If you were to take up and read a reasonable cross-section of SF you would *not* find it a "trivial sub-genre." What you would find is that far from being filled with the bug-eyed monsters and brassplate breast-plated females of the early pulp magazines, it considers and explores extrapolations of our present-day situation that are nowhere thought of in other types of fiction and non-fiction and are more open-minded and tolerant of many different aspects than any other literary line. Besides, it is usually written in "layman's" terms and covers things that you would usually not think about because the report or discovery the SF is based upon is hidden under secret or exceedingly technical tomes. The idea and possible results of eugenics, or as the public knows it, test-tube babies, was explored in numerous SF books and magazines years before the first so called test-tube baby was ever conceived. There is no "future shock" amongst SF readers, simply because they have already been accustomed to "moon walking," lasers, and most of the "new" things today, and have in fact, been waiting for them for years.

The reason many scientists and computer analysts and other "scientific" types read only SF, is because it is the only fiction that has managed to keep slightly ahead of today. Most other areas are behind and are falling farther each day.

Dr. Carl Sagan, sometimes affectionately known as the "pop" scientist, read SF as a child and fell in love with science. He admits that he seldom reads it anymore, because he has so much of the "real" thing to explore and discover. I can think of other reasons to introduce my children to this marvelous section of human thought, but if they even develop their minds half as well as Carl Sagan, I shall be more than happy that I gave them a start toward *their* future today.

As a parting note, I feel I must add that by attending various SF conventions and gatherings, I have met both fans and writers and publishers. The people who read SF have a much greater tendency toward tolerance of their fellow human beings, and each other's fallibilities, than our present-day man on the street. I can think of no better example to set for future generations. I most certainly would feel better knowing my daughter loved a black or Asian or Indian SF fan than if she were to bring home a "nice white" doctor/lawyer who was anti-feminist or a member of KKK. I am bigoted that way. I want both my son and my daughter to keep their minds open to new ideas, and to be able to realize the good parts of bad ideas and the bad parts of good ones. Science fiction is the only reading that has helped *me* do that. We have never seemed to learn from our past, so perhaps we can, instead, learn from our future.

I hope Mr. Grady will reconsider his article, because I and many others are prepared to deal with what comes in the future now, and I am sorry to say that those who consider SF as "trivial" usually are not even prepared for today, never mind tomorrow. Is that not a *more* chilling thought?

Linda Ross-Mansfield
Oromocto, N.B.

BATTEN'S CRIMES

Sir:

After reading Jack Batten's "The Maltese Beaver", (February) about crime fiction in Canada, I dug out Dartmouth Regional Library's two-year-old booklist on "Canadian Crime Since Dan McGrew."

Who are the people we found and he didn't? Let's see, Margaret Millar is in his list because she was born here and moved away, but Dorothy Perkins Gilman and Sara Woods aren't because they were both elsewhere and moved here? Yes, yes, I know their novels are set and published elsewhere, but Sara Woods has lived in Canada since the 1940s. She *must* be a citizen by now.

Ian MacNeill's *Battle for Saltbucket Beach* is one of the funniest Canadian crime books I've ever read. There's no murder, but couldn't we at least mention a plot full of unscrupulous Toronto developers, dope-smoking Mounties, Maoist Cape Breton teenagers, and a plot to kidnap the prime minister?

And then there's Jim Lotz. *Death in Dawson* is as Canadian as they come in setting and plot.

Read some more, Mr. Batten.

Lynn Murphy
Community Services Librarian
Dartmouth, N.S.

o

Sir:

Firstly, my compliments to I.M. Owen ("A Knight in Rusted Armour," February). I am someone I. M. Owen does not know who has not only read all of Alfred Duggan's books but also has re-read them. I concur most wholeheartedly with I. M. Owen's comments and am glad to see a literary artist of Duggan's stature recognized.

Secondly, Canadian criminous literature will never develop as long as uncritical articles like Jack Batten's "The Maltese Beaver" praise unworthy candidates such as Howard Engel's *The Suicide Murders*. The writing is turgid, and the style is a bad imitation of Chandler, a shoddy copy too embarrassing to be called a pastiche. If Cooperman is a typical Canadian, most of us would vote for foreign travel.

As for Jack Batten's deploring of lack of Canadian locale, conspicuous by its absence was any mention of two first-rate novels laid in Ontario: Dougal McLeish's *The Traitor Game* and *The Valentine Victim*. Both are far superior to any of the titles Batten cares to mention. If any books are candidates for reprinting, McLeish's are. The next best Canadian mystery written to date is John Reeves's *Murder By Microphone*, which Batten does at least recognize as existing. For the remainder, I agree with Batten: of them, the least said, the better.

As for my credentials to discuss crime fiction, although not yet a detective story author, I lecture on the genre at the University of Toronto School of Continuing Education and am the co-compiler with my wife, who is an antiquarian bookseller of old and rare crime, detective, and mystery fiction, of *Crime, Detective, Espionage, Mystery, and Thriller Fiction and Film: A Comprehensive Bibliography of Critical Writing Through 1979* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980)

David Skene Melvin
Toronto

Jack Batten-replies: Mr. Skene Melvin has got things exactly reversed. It's Howard Engel's book that is "first rate" and the two by Dougal McLeish (a pseudonym for a man named Goodspeed whose usual field is military matters) that are "shoddy" and "embarrassing." The hero of *The Valentine Victim* is a Mountie who manages to be both a snob and a bully, and the two stout young sleuths of *The Traitor Game* suggest the Hardy boys.

HILL'S INJUSTICE

Sir:

I would like to take issue with your critic Douglas Hill's assessment of Ron Graham's novel *Naughts and Crosses* (February). This book appeared in an original edition of only 300 copies, and I fear that the unjustly insensitive treatment it has gotten will now cause it to sink into oblivion, whereas it really deserves a much wider audience.

Graham's novel is in the rather esoteric tradition of experimental fiction, a fact that seems to have escaped Hill. Its stylistic models are not Canadian, but rather American or European, yet its setting — squarely in Westmount — and its October Crisis theme give it Canadian tone and atmosphere, though not, as Hill supposes, any especially intended dimension of serious political and social criticism.

Hill admits that, depending on one's mood and taste, the events Graham relates might be uproarious. I suggest that his novel *is* uproarious, having, for its own sake, a genuinely madcap quality far too often lacking in Canadian fiction. It is most regrettable that such a book will be misunderstood — dubbed "pretentious," "self-indulgent," "self-satisfied," "shallow." Such labels, in this instance, only underscore the limitations of a given critic. One might only wish some publisher would be sensible enough to take the novel seriously with a full edition.

David Lawson
Montreal

WOODCOCK'S PRAISE

Sir:

Judi Smith's letter (January), containing criticism of George Woodcock's article "Rural Roots" is interesting, but Ms Smith is wrong when she states that Woodcock praises *As For Me and My House* for being the Great Prairie Novel. George Woodcock acknowledges it as being "as near to a classic as we have had in Canada" — a country that presumably contains the Arctic, and nine other provinces besides Saskatchewan.

Although *As For Me and My House* is firmly rooted in a particular time (the Depression), a

particular place (a small town), and a particular landscape (the flat prairie), it transcends, in its significance, any attempt to fix it simply as a prairie novel. Ms Smith notes that the novel is complex, then states that "in many aspects . . . this novel is an insult to prairie people." Presumably, she refers to the farming community of which her uncle is a part. Ross treats the farmers of Partridge Hill with great sympathy, but the farming community in *As For Me and My House* is just a backdrop to the main focus of the story and that is the town, Horizon, and its inhabitants (particularly Philip and Mrs Bentley). One need only read some of the short stories of Alice Munro set in small-town Ontario to know that the potential narrowmindedness of small-town life was not just a prairie phenomenon.

One of the things that makes Ross's novel so brilliant is the way in which the bare, rudimentary prairie land and sky — harsh, beautiful, and powerful — are complemented in the book by the bare, economical, but evocative prose of the author. This fusion of prose style and landscape is one of the things that makes *As For Me and My House* a classic in a nation profoundly influenced by a harsh climate, be it in Newfoundland, Saskatchewan, or the snow belt of Ontario.

Read again, Ms Smith, and again, and again, and again, for the novel yields nothing to the reader easily, and I believe George Woodcock is aware of this.

Anne Hicks
Kitchener, Ont.

BENNETT'S PAST

Sir:

Now that the libel suit against Ian Adams has been settled, I feel free to write to you about Gerard McNeil's report "Suit and Dagger," which appeared in your January, 1980, issue. The report was of great interest to me, but the reference to Leslie James Bennett's family background, his Communist uncle and the implications thereof, made me very angry. A year ago, in an article published in *The Observer* in this country, a Canadian correspondent, John De St. Jorre, made a similar statement. Leslie James, or Jim as he is known in Canada, Bennett did not have a Communist uncle. I wrote to *The Observer* on this point. They agreed that John De St. Jorre was wrong.

Whilst it is true that Jim Bennett was born in the Welsh mining valleys and that his family were strong Labour supporters, may I ask "So what!" Anyone with only an elementary knowledge of social history would know that some 90 per cent of the mining valleys were solidly Labour. Being Labour was the norm. Anything else would be odd. I put it to you that, had Jim Bennett had a Conservative uncle, then there would have been real cause for concern. That would really have put your Intelligence Service, MI5, the CIA, the KGB, and even James Bond and Kojak into a flat spin. Ridiculous, you might say, but no more ridiculous than the implication made against Jim Bennett's birthright. I quote from your report: "But backgrounds more innocent than his have ruined careers in Canada." If because of his lineage he is to be regarded as *persona non grata*, then it must follow that a large proportion of the Welsh nation in general, and the whole of my family in particular, are people of dubious character. The people of Wales would not take kindly to that proposition and I think it ludicrous. During the war my brother and I carried King's Commissions. It is highly unlikely that we should have been promoted from the ranks to positions of command and trust had we been of doubtful character.

Gerard McNeil in "Suit and Dagger," and Stephen Overbury in "The Adams Affair: Not a Story in Canada," printed in *Content*, make a plea for free speech and freedom of expression. I would defend these rights to the death. However, these rights carry their moral obligations. Great care must be exercised when a person's reputation is at stake. The subject should be carefully researched and facts ascertained before a stone is thrown. Character assassination, even by mistake or neglect, has no part of free speech. Out of all the supposition surrounding the events leading to Jim Bennett's departure from the RCMP only two facts emerge: the place and circumstances of his birth and that he met Kim Philby. Yet on this scant information a man's career has been ruined.

Against the odds of his humble beginnings, by dint of his own efforts and ability, Jim Bennett climbed to the top of his particular tree. An effort worthy of admiration and commendation. I can do no better than to quote a statement, made by RCMP Commissioner Simmonds to The Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, House of Commons, Ottawa, on November 27, 1977:

> In a general way, I am rather appalled at seeing the way a man's reputation can be pilloried in public, based on a lot of rumour and speculation. All the events surrounding Mr. Bennett's career occurred long before I was in Headquarters and long before I was Commissioner of the Force. A review of the file and conversations with people in the Security Service, who were present at the time, have given me every assurance that there was absolutely no evidence on which to base any charge of any sort — criminal, internal or anything else — in connection with his departure.

Leslie James Bennett and I are cousins. We last met in 1949 and until last year we had not corresponded. It was only when reading St. Jorre's report in *The Observer* that I had any idea of his remarkable career. Because of his involvement he may not have been able to defend himself against the scurrilous attacks upon his reputation and integrity. I have no such inhibitions. Like your Commissioner Simmonds I am appalled. Somewhere in high places in your administration there must be those who have more than a twinge of conscience at this outrageous miscarriage of justice.

Gordon Bennett
London, England

LEAVEN OF MALICE

Sir:

In his non-review of *Malcolm Muggeridge: A Life* by Ian Hunter (January), Dean Bonney accuses Hunter of bias, yet Bonney refers to Muggeridge as a person "whose stock in trade is malice." He challenges Hunter's research, yet describes Muggeridge as a "latecomer to piety." In fact, Muggeridge became a Christian while in his 30s. If this makes him a latecomer, Bonney must be a slip of fellow yet in his teens or 20s.

I referred to Bonney's report as a "non-review"; such it is. He starts off by challenging the competence of the biographer, then questions the need for the book, returns to attack the author, and ends with a malicious and personal diatribe against Muggeridge. Bonney has done everything a competent reviewer would avoid, and few of the things he would do.

Raymond Peringer
Toronto

CanWit No. 62

FANS OF cryptic crosswords will easily unscramble *Parthatsummeris* into the title of a Canadian book — *That Summer in Paris*. Similarly, devotees of Hugh MacLennan will recognize *Alone Alone* as *Two Solitudes* (Sheila Watson readers may substitute *Hook Hook*) and *Nightwatch* as *The Watch That Ends the Night*. We'll pay $25 for the best cryptic titles (and their solutions) that we receive before May 1. Address: CanWit No. 62, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 1N4.

RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 60

OUR REQUEST for one-line reviews of Canadian books produced a flood of entries, the most common of which were variations on the title of a novel by Richard Rohmer, *Bulls!* But none captured the essence of succinct reviewing better than a comment by Shirley J. Dunphy of Ottawa on *The Hecklers:* "Boo!" She receives $25 for this and 17 other one-liners, which include:

Quilts: "Covers the subject."
A Whale for the Killing: "I blubbered."
Niagara: The Eternal Circus: "Falls short."

Honourable mentions:

Black Around the Eyes: "A knockout!"
— Roly Wensley, Montreal

Fat Woman: "Too heavy for me."
— W. P. Kinsella, Calgary

* * *

A Jest of God: "Art thou kidding?"
— John McQueen, Saskatoon

* * *

The Boat Who Wouldn't Float: "Titanic!"
— W. Ritchie Benedict, Calgary

* * *

The Vanishing Point: "Out of sight!"
— Doug Sparkes, Winnipeg

* * *

The Stone Angel: "Monumental."
Nonsense Novels: "Novels? Nonsense!"
— Bryan King, Regina

* * *

The Edible Woman: Surfeiting."
— E. McKee, Ottawa

* * *

The Tent Peg: "A lot of flap about nothing."
— Ann Knight, Calgary

CLASSIFIED

Classified rates: $6 per line (40 characters to the line). Deadline: first of the month for issue dated following month. Address: Books in Canada Classified, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 1N4. Phone: (416) 363-5426.

BARNARDO CHILDREN IN CANADA by Gail Corbett "Reveals the courage and vision of the largest Child Immigration into Canada" $7.25 Woodland Publishing, Box 2134, Peterborough, Ont. K9J 7Y4.

BUYING all types of bubblegum cards incl. baseball, hockey, non-sports, etc. Also interested in sports & non-sports collectors' coins e.g. hockey, airplanes, etc. Write to Box 12, *Books in Canada*.

OLD AND RARE BOOKS. Canadiana catalogues. Heritage Books, 3438 6 St. S.W., Calgary, Alberta T2S 2M4.

PENFRIENDS — WORLDWIDE. Make new friends through letters. Write: Box 214, Timmins, Ont.

PROFESSIONAL TYPING — Prompt Personal Attention to All Manuscripts — BUSY FINGERS 1050-A Bloor St. W., Toronto, Ont. (416) 532-5101.

USED CANADIAN BOOKS. Free descriptive lists on request — C & E Books, Box 2744, Stn B, Kitchener, N2H 6N3.

WANTED: Info re: obscure, out-of-print English book "Tale of the Genil" by James Morel. Write Box 13, *Books in Canada*.

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

Flowers of Darkness, by Matt Cohen, McClelland & Stewart. The fourth in Cohen's "Salem Quartet," set in the countryside north of Kingston, Ont., where the forces of human desire — work both of God and the Devil — proceed with the inevitability of Greek tragedy.

Shacking Up, by Kent Thompson, Oberon Press. Beneath a soap-opera plot — about five days of adultery in a motel room — an almost full-length impersonation of the mind of a disillusioned young woman, written with deceptive ease.

NON-FICTION

Bull of the Woods: The Gordon Gibson Story, by Gordon Gibson with Carol Renison, Douglas & McIntyre. A straightforward, gruff autobiography of a self-made millionaire who has done everything a red-blooded Canadian male ought to do — from being born in a Yukon log cabin to political campaigning in a nudist camp.

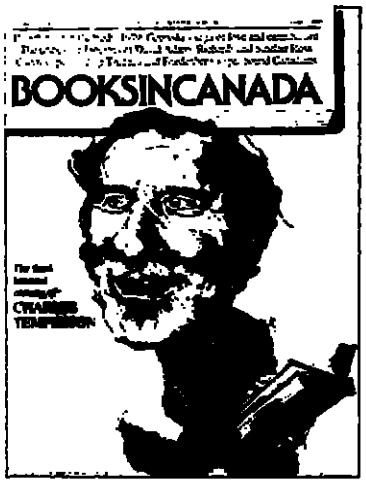
POETRY

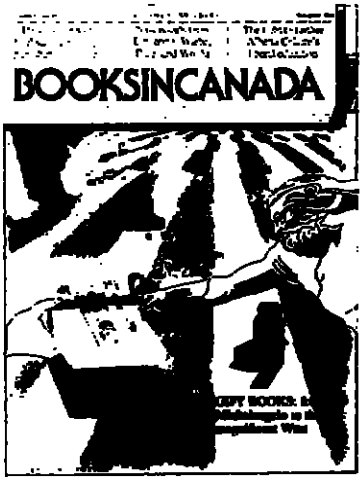
True Stories, by Margaret Atwood, Oxford. Largely inspired by her work with Amnesty International and 10 years of travelling in the Southern Caribbean, Atwood's poems mix gestures of love and family in a *danse macabre* with the chaotic lunges of poverty, torture, and imprisonment.

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:

Alcohol and Other Drug Use Among Ontario Students: A Continuing Study, by Reginald G. Smart *et al.* Addiction Research Foundation (1980).
Alcohol Use and World Cultures, by Dwight B. Heath and A.M. Cooper. Addiction Research Foundation.
Animots, by Richard Bouchoux. Editions Guernica (1980).
Antiques Afloat, by Peter Vassilopoulos. Panamora Publications.
The Arches, by Frank Davey, Talonbooks (1980).
As Elected, by bp Nichol. Talonbooks (1980).
barefaced stone, by Harry Thurston, Fiddlehead (1980).
Beyond Even Faithful Legends, by bill bissett. Talonbooks (1980).
Bird Bubble and Stream, by Deanna Barnhardt, Fiddlehead (1980).
Canadian Pacific, by George Musk. Holt Rinehart & Winston.
Cannabis Criminals, by Patricia G. Erickson. Addiction Research Foundation (1980).
Conceptions, by Jane Dick. Guernica Editions (1980).
Conrad's Later Novels, by Gary Geddes. McGill-Queen's University Press (1980).
The Country Doctors, by Henri Chatenay. Mattrix Press (1980).
Decide for Yourself, by James W. Miller. Wiley.
The Dramatic Curriculum, by Richard Courtney. Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario (1980).
easy over, by Judith Fitzgerald. Black Moss Press (1980).
Europe and Other Bad News, by Irving Layton. M & S.
Frost in May, by Antonia White. Lester & Orpen Dennys.
Great Bear, by Frederick B. Watt. Outcrop (1980).
Head Master, by J. Alastair Haig, G.R. Welch (1980).
A History of Newfoundland and Labrador, by Frederick W. Rowe. McGraw-Hill Ryerson (1980).
Invitation to the Dance, by Maxim Mazumdar. Personal Library.
John Prince 1796-1870, edited by R. Alan Douglas. U of T Press (1980).
Journey to Apriloth, by Eileen Kernaghan. Ace Books (Beaverbooks) (1980).
Lizard in the Grass, by John Mills. ECW Press (1980).
Loki Is Buried at Smoky Creek, by Fred Wah. Talonbooks (1980).
The Lost Traveller, by Antonia White. Lester & Orpen Dennys.
Le Manifeste Poetique/Politique, edited by Laurent Mailhot. Les Presses de l'Universite de Montreal
The Measure, by Patrick Lane. Black Moss Press (1980).
Mid-River, by Dale Zieroth. Anansi.
More Than a Labour of Love, by Meg Luxton. The Women's Press (1980).
The Mountain Road, by George Woodcock. Fiddlehead (1980).
Net Work, by Daphne Marlatt, Talonbooks (1980).
The New Drinkers (Second Edition), by Reginald G. Smart. Addiction Research Foundation (1980).
Nude on the Dartmouth Ferry, by Elizabeth Jones. Black Moss Press (1980).
The Parent Communication Project, by Martin Shain *et al.* Addiction Research Foundation (1980).
Particular Accidents, by George Bowering. Talonbooks (1980).
Playmakers: Adventures in Canadian Drama, edited by T. Binnersley and J. Milner, Steel Rail.
Possibly Not, by Diane McLaren. Peripatetic Press.
Reaction: The National Energy Program, edited by G.C. Watkins and M.A. Walker. The Fraser Institute.
R.L.D.E.: A Final 18-Month Evaluation, by E. Vingilis *et al.* Addiction Research Foundation (1980).
Secret of the Lost Empire, by Elwy Yost. Scholastic-TAB (1980).
75 and Growing: A Collection of Children's Writing and Art to Commemorate Alberta's 75th Anniversary. The Edmonton Public Library (1980).
She Reminds Me of Vermeer, Maureen McCarthy. Harbour Publishing (1980).
Shevchenko and the Critics, edited by George S.N. Luckyj. U of T Press.
Six Poets of British Columbia, edited by Robin Skelton. Sono Nis Press (1980).
Student Oracle: An Anthology of English-Canadian University Writing in 1979, edited by Noel Hudson-Jones and Julian Ross. David Thompson University Centre (1980).
Suns of Darkness, by Filippo Salvatore. Guernica Editions (1980).
Tangled Flames, by Marcia Bell Franken. Fiddlehead (1980).
Theft of Gold, by J. Robert Janes. Scholastic-TAB (1980).
They Will If We Let Them, by M.B. Wansbrough. Image (1980).
Thro' the Vision of the Night, by J.M. Gray. McGill-Queen's University Press (1980).
Town and City, by Alan F.J. Artibise. Canadian Plains Research Centre.
Uncle Willie's Nonsense, by William Angus. Illustrations by Barry Torfolo. The Thistle Press (1980).
Undercurrents, by Shirley A. Serviss. Sidereal Press (1980).
The University of Guelph Art Collection, by Judith M. Nasby. University of Guelph (1980).
The Value of the Informant Method, by Carolyn B. Liban and Reginald G. Smart. Addiction Research Foundation.
The Vivid Air, by Ralph Gustafson. Sono Nis Press (1980).
What can I do this summer? (1981 edition), by Carl L. Bedal. Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
Writing Power 2, by Gillian Bartlet, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.





Next month in *Books in Canada*'s tenth anniversary issue:

- George Woodcock traces the development of Canadian literature through the turbulent '70s.
- Morris Wolfe charts the booms and busts of Canadian publishing in the past decade.
- John Reeves presents a photographic portfolio of literary personalities who dominated the era.
- *Plus:* the best of CanWit; a CanLit acrostic; and more celebratory goodies from our files and fancies.

Pick up the special May issue of *Books in Canada* at your local bookstore — an opportunity like this comes only once every 10 years.

Better still, subscribe now to guarantee receiving a copy of this special issue. The subscription rate is $9.95 a year in North America and $15 overseas. Fill in the form below and send it in today.

Please send me a one-year subscription to *Books in Canada*. I enclose a cheque for $9.95 ☐or $15 ☐. Bill me ☐.

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Postal Code _____

Please make cheques payable to:
Canadian Review of Books Ltd.
366 Adelaide St. East
Toronto, M5A 1N4 Canada

Please send me a one-year subscription to *Books in Canada*. I enclose a cheque for $9.95 ☐or $15 ☐. Bill me ☐.

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Postal Code _____

Please make cheques payable to:
Canadian Review of Books Ltd.
366 Adelaide St. East
Toronto, M5A 1N4 Canada

SPRING 1981

McClelland & Stewart
The Canadian Publishers

At Good Bookstores Everywhere

To receive your copy of
our spring 1981 catalogue
please write to:

Catalogues:
McClelland & Stewart
25 Hollinger Rd.
Toronto M4B 3G2

DREADLOCK
Lew Anthony
Meet Mike Shuter—an earthy, irreverent ex-cop in hot pursuit of a beautiful Canadian tourist gone missing in Jamaica. The suspense thriller of the year. *$16.95*

CANADA LOST/CANADA FOUND
Peter Desbarats
A respected journalist, broadcaster and author sounds the harsh warning the country is hurtling toward destruction. A powerful and disturbing book *$9.95*

ZERO ENERGY GROWTH FOR CANADA
David B. Brooks
A pipedream... or this country's only choice? A nationally recognized energy expert offers innovative solutions to the spiralling energy crisis. *$19.95*

FLOWERS OF DARKNESS
Matt Cohen
From the talented author of *The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone*—a powerful story of passion and revenge in a small town *$14.95*

THE TENT PEG
Aritha Van Herk
From the winner of the $50,000 Seal First Novel Award for *Judith*—a wickedly funny, sensational new novel! *$14.95*

LUNATIC VILLAS
Marian Engel
The celebrated author of *Bear* and *The Glassy Sea* has written a dizzy, delightful comedy with a mad cast of characters. *$14.95*

EXPEDITIONS TO NOWHERE
Paddy Sherman
An exhilarating journey to the top of the world... Sherman combines the challenges of mountaineering with a celebration of life. *$16.95*

THE STONE BIRD
Al Purdy
The shining capstone of Purdy's career! *"His poems are better medicine than booze."* —Queen's Quarterly *$8.95 (pa.)*

GLENDINNING
Pamela Ferguson
A big, brawling, dynastic novel... the story of the young Greek immigrant who built the world's greatest liquor empire. *$16.95*

TWELVE CANADIANS: CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN PHOTOGRAPHY
Edited by Jane Corkin
$12.95 (pa.)

McGRUBER'S FOLLY
Max Braithwaite
From one of Canada's most beloved humorists—a comical romp about a retired cop who embraces a life of fearless crime. *$14.95*

THE FALLACY OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
John A. Livingston
One of North America's most respected naturalists sounds a warning that can't be ignored... a brilliant, disturbing new work. *$14.95*

THE MASTER AND HIS FISH
Roderick Haig-Brown
Haig-Brown lures the reader wader-deep into a world of pleasure and excitement with this magnificent collection of stories and writings about angling. *$14.95*

BLACK AROUND THE EYES
Jeremy Akerman
An astonishingly gifted new novelist travels back through time to a strike-torn Cape Breton mining town in the Twenties. *$14.95*

CHINA NURSE 1932-1939
Jean Ewen
A young Canadian nurse accompanies Norman Bethune to China... and becomes an eye-witness to history. *$16.95*

EUROPE AND OTHER BAD NEWS
Irving Layton
Layton's fortieth volume of collected poems is a powerful achievement, a tribute to the poet's fiery and undiminished eloquence. *$8.95 (pa.)*

NOBODY DANCED WITH MISS RODEO
Sid Marty
From the author of *Men From The Mountains*... his long-awaited second collection of verse. Humorous, passionate poetry. *$8.95 (pa)*

TERRY FOX/HIS STORY
Leslie Scrivener
The portrait of a hero—Terry Fox's authorized story, based on extensive personal interviews. A powerful and moving reading experience. *$14.95*

THE CONSUMER'S HANDBOOK REVISED EDITION
Lynne Gordon
$9.95 (pa.)

CHINA'S CRAFTS
Roberta Helmer Stalberg & Ruth Nesi
$21.50 (cl) $12.95 (pa.)

THE WELL-TEMPERED CRITIC: ONE MAN'S VIEW OF THEATRE AND LETTERS IN CANADA
Robertson Davies
Edited by Judith Skelton Grant
$18.95

THE CATCH COLT
Mary O'Hara
From the author of *My Friend Flicka*, a heartwarming love story.. superb fiction for readers of all ages. *$9.95*

THE TEMPTATIONS OF EILEEN HUGHES
Brian Moore
A novel that inhabits the mind of one woman with searing candour—Moore's most brilliant fiction yet. *$14.95*

CANADA'S ECONOMIC STRATEGY
James Laxer
What's *really* gone wrong with our economy? A hard-hitting analytical look at who's responsible for a country in danger of collapse. *$12.95 (pa.)*

A READER'S GUIDE TO THE CANADIAN NOVEL
John Moss
Lively, highly readable commentary on over 200 of the most significant Canadian novels ..indispensable for anyone seriously interested in Canadian writing. *$12.95 (pa.)*

THE CANADIAN WRITER'S MARKET SIXTH EDITION REVISED
Eileen Goodman
Newly revised and greatly expanded... the bestseller recognized as every writer's indispensable aid to getting published. *$9.95 (pa.)*

JOHN LENNON THE LIFE & LEGEND
The London Sunday Times
With twenty pages of full-colour photographs, the full story of John Lennon's life, supplemented by a complete chronology, discography & Avedon poster. An irreplaceable memento. *$3.95 (pa.)*

CANOE ROUTES OF ONTARIO
THE MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES, GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO
With detailed coloured maps, an invaluable compendium of information about location, length, features and hazards of more than 100 canoe routes & 21 canoe areas in Ontario. *$8.95 (pa.)*

QUEBEC
Mia & Klans
More than 200 brilliant, hand-varnished, full colour prints marked by the creative spirit of two of Canada's best photographers. Printed on European stock, hand-bound... truly a masterpiece. *$50.00*

LADDERS TO HEAVEN
Oscar White Muscarella
A magnificent testimony to the art treasures of the Ancient World... an unprecedented collection of Biblical artistry, with 24 pages of glowing colour photographs. *$40.00*