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An epistolary
look at the evil
in Waugh

BOOKS IN CANADA



WHAT ESCAPES: from mysteries to fantasy

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

BOOKS IN CANADA

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Why do Canadian thriller-writers bring their spies in from the cold? Why aren't more sleuths from St. Catharines? Follow our investigative critic as he ponders the case of

THE MALTESE BEAVER

by Jack Bat&en

AS A DISTINCTIVE literary genre, Canadian crime fiction is heavy on curious idiosyncrasies and tacky **secret** agents and shy on inventive private eyes and, alas, on literary distinction. First come the curious idiosyncrasies from which all else seems to follow. They are these:

One. Canadian **crime** writers, especially in recent years when their number has multiplied **astonishingly**, have concentrated on the espionage thriller almost to the exclusion of that more ancient, difficult, and **satisfying form**, the detective novel.

Two. When it comes to locale, the most accomplished Canadian thriller writers steer purposefully away from home territory. The Vatican, the Irish countryside, and deepest **Soho** win out every time over Rideau Hall, exotic **Westmount**, and Vancouver's waterfront.

Three. The best Canadian **crime** fiction — the stuff with the finest writing and most identifiably Canadian characters — turns up among the few **writers** who look to the old **North** American masters of the private eye novel, Raymond Chandler, **Dashiell Hammett**, and **Ross Macdonald**, for direction and inspiration.

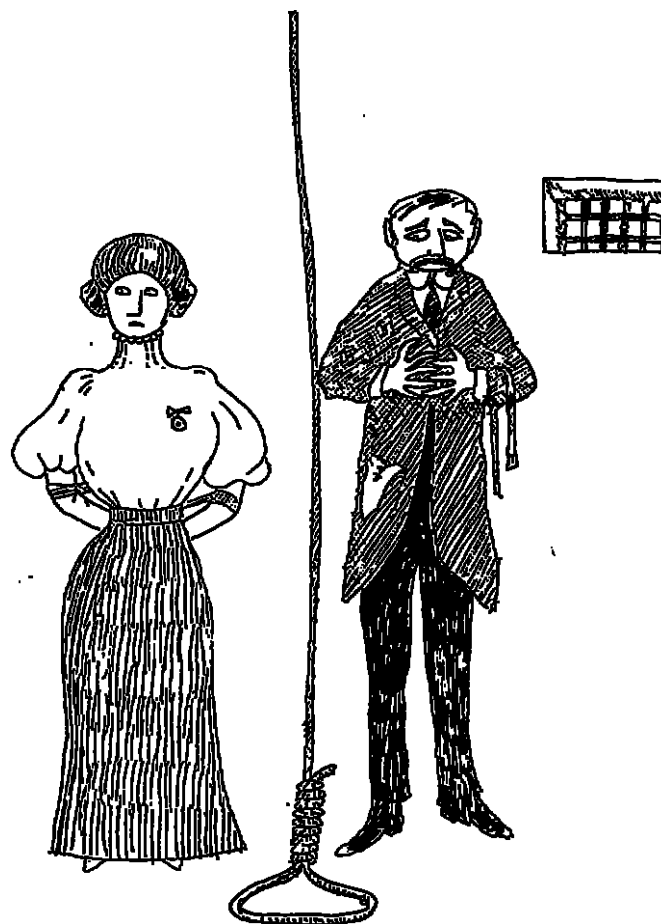
The deluge in crime novels began in the mid-1970s. "By 1977," reckons the *Globe and Mail's* **Derrick Murdoch**, dean of the country's **crime** reviewers. "I was getting more Canadian books in my department in a single year than I had in the previous 13 put together." Some of the books came from fairly predictable sources: Hugh Garner produced three crime novels through the 1970s, all featuring dour **Inspector** **Walter McDumont**. And some appeared from out of left field: a Calgary lawyer named **John Ballem** churned out three thrillers in almost as many years. A few — **Charles Templeton's** *The Kidnapping of the President* and *Chain Reaction* by **Gordon Pape** and **Tony Aspler** are examples — hit the best-seller lists. Some grew out of personal experience: **Ian McLachlan's** *The Seventh Hexagram* for one, and **Neville Frankel's** *The Third Power* for another. A handful flirted with real people and recognizable events, intriguingly so in the case of **Philippe van Rijndt** (*The Tretramachus Collection*, *Blueprint*, and *The Trial of Adolph Hitler*) and disastrously so in the case of **Ian Adams** (*S, Portrait of a Spy*). But whatever the motive or impulse, an astounding range of Canadian writers, everyone from old newspaper types like **Tom Ardies** (three novels starring **Charlie Sparrow**, smartass secret agent) to slumming academics like **Donald Creighton** (*Takeover*) got into the crime act.

If a couple of senses, the sheer volume of books in the field has been deceptive. Too many of them, for one thing, hardly rate serious study as works of literature — or even as pieces of entertainment. How, one wonders, does **John Ballem** get published? And so often? His characters were born with a cliché on their lips, his plots teeter on the absurd, and his prose style makes **Richard Rohmer**, another dud in the genre, read like a nimble stylist. The Canadian crime-fiction shelf groans with writers in the **Ballem-Rohmer** category.

And there are other faults. The **Pape-Aspler** books, for example, are long on research but short on stories that survive the overkill in

information. Indeed, lack of imagination in the plotting department is a problem common in the majority of Canadian thrillers. So is the absence of a memorable central character, an agent with a degree of panache. Perhaps **Pad Fox** sums up the situation. Fox, the employee of "a highly secret branch of Canada's Department of Defence," is the hero of **David R. Mounce's** *Operation Cuttlefish* and *The Shield Project*. He is a solid enough chap in a modest Canadian way, but brains are not his long suit. Violence is, in *Operation Cuttlefish*, he accounts for 12 individual kills plus all hands on board an alien submarine. In the end, **Fox** comes across as a **James Bond** without the dash, without the controlling intelligence of an **M**, without any personal characteristic except all that blood on his hands.

The other sense in which the growing number of thrillers by Canadian authors is misleading lies in the books' locales. The best of them are set outside Canada and have no traffic with Canadian



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events, people, or places. There is, occasionally, an admirable exception. *Copperhead* by James Henderson, written in crisp, snappy prose, evokes Canadian scenes that are immediately recognizable— parts of Toronto and Montreal, a religious rally in a Calgary hockey arena — and boasts a Canadian government security agent named David Sohn who is all things that Paul Fox is not: clever, professional, and agreeably ruthless. But Henderson's setting puts him in the minority among our superior thriller writers. They prefer any scene *except* Canada.

"Canada's missing on the ingredients you need for a spy story," says Chris Scott, whose smooth 1978 thriller, *To Catch a Spy*, worked a variation on the Kim Philby defection. "Who is there to spy on from Canada? Where is the possibility of violence? And where in Canada is the sense of decadence that is rather necessary to the spy form?"

Thus, *Troika*, a novel written by a Vancouver Island house builder named David Gurr and as gripping as any thriller to come out of any country in the 1970s, shuttles between Moscow, Portsmouth, Latvia, and the coast of Sweden. In the same way, *The Third Power*, a first-rate 1980 thriller by Neville Frankel, a Toronto stock broker, skips around the African continent from a gold mine near Pretoria to the mountains of Zimbabwe. And what do we make of Shaun Herron and Tom Ardies? The former is an ex-Winnipeg newspaper man, the latter an ex-Vancouver newspaper man, and between them, they're responsible for concocting the two most attractive and persuasive characters in Canadian thriller writing, Herron's John Mim and Ardies's Charlie Sparrow. The two agents, heroes of three books apiece, are different types — Mim is weary, introspective, disillusioned; Sparrow is flip, cynical, sentimental—but they have one wit in common: neither is Canadian. Sparrow works out of Washington; Mim is an Irishman. Very occasionally they, or their stories, drop in on Canada, but for both characters and for both authors, the Canadian landscape is somehow all wrong as a setting for intrigue.

"In a successful thriller," Paul Gottlieb says, "you need to have your hero working against a universally exciting background." Gottlieb is an advertising man who wrote a master's thesis at Sir George Williams University on "The Moral Significance of the Spy Thriller." And he has answered the implied question— doesn't Canada provide a "universally exciting background?" — by placing his own thriller, *Agency*, not in the Montreal that we all know but in what Gottlieb describes as "an anonymous netherland."

Canadian mystery writers, it's refreshing to report, take a different tack. They are authors who operate in a more difficult branch of crime fiction, a form that calls for baffling murders, tantalizing clues, and ratiocinative sleuths, and they don't mind arranging their tales in settings as peculiarly Canadian as St. Catharines, Ont., or a CBC radio studio. Howard Engel, in *The Suicide Murders*, is the writer who hit on St. Catharines (though he's renamed it Grantham), and it was John Reeves, in *Murder by Microphone*, who staged a homicide in the pleasingly unlikely confines of the old CBC building on Jarvis Street in Toronto. So it goes in Canadian mystery writing. Hugh Gamer's *Inspector McDumont* plods around the Toronto suburbs, and in *A Nice Place to Visit*, Gamer dispatched an amateur sleuth into rural Ontario. Ellen Godfrey's Rebecca Rosenthal, the crusty old heroine of two mysteries, hangs out in Toronto's Annex and other upper-middle-class neighbourhoods, the same general milieu in which Sidney Grant sets things right in John Norman Harris's superb 1963 mystery, *The Weird World of Wes Beattie*.

All of these Canadian writers, and others, work more or less in the tradition of the conventional detective novel, a form that's more demanding than the thriller. It's enough in a thriller that the central characters merely represent points of view rather than offer the personalities of real people. That won't do in a mystery, where much of the action must grow out of the distinctive natures of the sleuth and of his fellow actors in the crime drama. In the same way, thriller writers, especially in the doomsday novels, can get away with mechanical plots: the tension usually arises out of a simple but deadly circumstance — the kidnapping of a president, the threat of nuclear war, the end of the world. Mysteries, on the

other hand, demand by definition intricacy in the plotting, surprise twists, and rational explanations—the eventual certainty, as John Leonard of the New York *Times* has painted out, of “someone to blame and perhaps to forgive.”

And detective novels yield the prospects of even greater rewards. The thriller, for the most part, is the material for an ideal evening or a three-hour plane flight; the mystery can be more memorable. “The urge to read mysteries,” Ross Macdonald says, “has in it the search for meaning in our life. The hunt for a murderer is a quest for saving grace. When we read mysteries, we sit with our back to the future and sort through the strands of the past. The murder story is epic, a story that recreates the fall of man.”

It's nicely liting for Canadian mystery writers that Macdonald is the man who most defines the appeal of the genre in such, universal terms. Macdonald is not just the creator of one of the handful of great fictional detectives, Lew Archer, but was also born and raised a Canadian. Macdonald and his wife, Margaret Millar, equally gifted as a mystery writer, grew up in Kitchener, Ont., and both attribute the literary strength of their books at least partly to the superior education they believe they received in Canadian high schools and at the University of Western Ontario before they moved to California. Macdonald, too, found the recurring theme of the best Archer books in his Ontario background. His father left the family when Macdonald was a boy, and his mother raised him, an only child, on her own. Thus, beginning with *The Galton Case* in 1959, roost of Archer's defective work has turned on the search for a lost parent, a quest that invariably combines mystery and heartbreak. Macdonald himself regards *The Galton Case* as his seminal book, and he chose to set some of the crucial action, significantly enough, in southwestern Ontario.

Macdonald's methods and style have been operative influences on the Canadian author who shows more promise and talent — than any writer for boosting the home-grown detective novel to fresh levels of excellence. The author is Howard Engel, whose *The Suicide Murders* introduces Benny Cooperman, a character who manages to combine unforgettably the elements of sleuth, klutz, and standup comedian. Before Engel began work on *The Suicide*

Murders (he has since completed two more Cooperman books scheduled for publication in the autumns of this year and next), he had absorbed Macdonald as well as such other mystery writers as Rex Stout, Nicholas Freeling, and John D. MacDonald. But the turn-around encounter for Engel came in his job as a CBC-Radio producer when he worked on a documentary dealing with the life and literature of Raymond Chandler.

“I went through Chandler's notebooks,” Engel says, “and I was fascinated with his enormous concern for language. He kept lists of metaphors and similes and slangs. He was meticulous about language. He'd go back to Shakespeare and Middle English to find the right words. And he had a line instinct for inventing slang that wouldn't become dated. His care for language showed me a lot about the literary possibilities in crime fiction.”

Another influence on Engel was *The Weird World of Wes Beattie*. He had arranged to serialize it for radio, and in the process developed an affection and admiration for the book. In it, the late John Norman Harris took mystery writing several leaps ahead in creating a tone and a set of characters that seem congenially Canadian. The book moves at an unpretentious pace, lively in a low-key manner, always on the edge of a laugh. Sidney Grant, the book's young lawyer-sleuth, bears all the identifiable elements of a proper Torontonion. He's civilized and a touch old-fashioned, and moves effortlessly through Rosedale and Bay Street. He has class and brains but manages to cling to a sense of innocence. -

Benny Cooperman, while he's Jewish and small-town, shares many of Sidney Grant's qualities. He may be a gumshoe by profession, but he's too modest to come on all hard-boiled, too gentle to get into any activity as violent as fisticuffs. Cooperman's nosy but hardly pushy. He's not the sort to fall in bed drunk or in the company of the gorgeous blonde in the case. He gets on with the murder at hand and takes time out only to crack a joke, eat a chopped-egg sandwich (on white, toasted), and to study up on the techniques of Philip Marlowe, Sam Spade, and that crowd.

Cooperman is as uniquely Canadian as Van Der Valk is Dutch, Martin Beck is Swedish, Travis McGee is American. That makes him decidedly special, nothing less than the hope and direction of the best of Canadian crime fiction. □

To be continued ...

UNTIL HE SAT down two years ago to write *Blackrobe*, a historical novel set in 18th-century North America, Robert E. Wall had never written a word of fiction. He entered the book in the 1980 Seal first novel competition and while he didn't win the contest, he received ample compensation in Seal's offer to publish not only his first novel but a projected multi-volume series — called *The Canadians* — based on the characters introduced in *Blackrobe*. “I was in a state of shock for a while,” admits Wall, “and I'm not quite sure I'm out of it yet. It's all happened so fast.”

A professional historian specializing in colonial North America, Wall has published historical articles and a book: *Massachusetts Bay*, an analysis of Puritan ethics in the 17th century. But he found that the exclusivity of his field was causing him to lose interest in his profession. “It was getting to the point where historians tended to write for each other. Only a handful of people had any interest in or understanding of what historians were talking about. This was disturbing to me and my ambition was to reach as large an audience as possible and to show them their history is extremely interesting. I thought historical fiction would be a way to approach it.” With an initial printing of more than 600,000 books — more than 100,000 for Canadian distribution — Wall's ambition lo

edify the masses on both sides of the border will not go totally unrealized. Since galleys are now under consideration in England, it does not seem altogether unreasonable for Alun Davies, via-president of Bantam's international division, to speculate that in terms of an international audience, “*The Canadians* will do for Canada what *The Thorn Birds* did for Australia.”

Blackrobe begins in 1730 as young



Robert Wall

Stephen Nowell leaves New England with his family for a frontier settlement. After his father is killed in an Indian ambush, Stephen is adopted by Jesuits in New France. They mire the boy, but for political reasons keep his identity a secret. He eventually becomes a Jesuit missionary and while among the Oneida Indians falls in love with Molly Brant, an Iroquois princess. When he discovers his true identity, Stephen returns to Boston in search of what remains of his family. Suspected of being a spy, he plays a dramatic role in the siege of Louisbourg.

Wall, who is now 40, is already hard at work on the second volume of *The Canadians*, tentatively titled *Bloodbrothers*, which continues the story of Stephen, his wife Katherine, Molly Brant, and their descendants. While the earlier books will examine the struggles between the English and French for control of the continent, Wall will explore in later volumes the conflicts between Canada and the United States and the cultural struggle between English and French Canadians.

With an unspecified number of *The Canadians* before him, Wall is already thinking toward his next series: “It will be on a British theme. I don't want to give it away. It'll be a few yews before I can get to it. I really enjoy writing and I think I'll write for the rest of my life.”

— LINDA M. LEITCH

A knight in rusted armour

Alfred Duggan, who died in 1964, was one of the best known historical novelists of his generation, and yet his 15 books are all but forgotten. It's high time history repeated itself

by I. M. Owen

MOST HISTORICAL FICTION is shoddy stuff, bad fiction and bad history. But when a novelist combines complete mastery of the known facts of a period with strong creative imagination and psychological insight the result can be a formidable work of art. It can also be valuable as history. If I were asked for guidance in learning about certain historical periods I would suggest the novelists first; then, armed with an imaginative conception of the life of the time, formal histories and contemporary documents. Thus, for the Roman transition from republic to autocracy I'd recommend Rex Warner's *The Young Caesar* and *Imperial Caesar*, Alfred Duggan's *Winter Quarters* and *Three's Company*, and of course the two *Claudius* novels of Robert Graves. For Byzantium in the days of Justinian (history's most successful creep) and his outrageous empress Theodora, Graves' *Count Belisarius*; for Byzantium in the 11th century, when the incursions of the Seljuk Turks were starting it on its long decline, Duggan's *The Lady for Ransom*. And for the First Crusade, certainly read Duggan's first and last novels, *Knight with Armour* and *Count Bohemond*, before you tackle the first volume of Runciman's massive *History of the Crusades*.

The name that recurs in such lists is Alfred Duggan, a name that is almost always greeted with blank looks when I mention it. I know few people who have read any of his novels, and only one — and that one a near relation of mine — who has read them all. It's time to try to rectify that, in spite of the handicap that there seems to be no edition on the market in this country at present. The original Faber editions are out of print. Two or three years ago there were New English Library paperbacks in the stores, apparently selling well; but they were suddenly withdrawn presumably because of a rights problem, and whoever now holds the Canadian paperback rights doesn't seem to be exercising them. However, there are libraries and there are second-hand bookstores.

Duggan was born in Buenos Aires in 1903, the same year as his close friend Evelyn Waugh. His father was a wealthy Argentine of Irish descent, his mother the daughter of an American diplomat. Widowed early, she moved with her children to England, where she soon married Lord Curzon. The young Duggan lived a privileged life as the son and stepson of rich men: Waugh recalls that at Oxford he kept a string of hunters and a chauffeur. He left Oxford prematurely at the urgent request of the authorities, and continued to dissipate his inheritance and himself for many years. But all the time he was travelling, especially in the eastern Mediterranean, and acquiring a vast store of historical knowledge, purely for his own pleasure.

He had a brief and nasty military experience in the retreat from Norway in 1940, was invalided out of the army and spent the rest of the war in an aircraft factory. Shortly after the war, when in his mid-40s, Waugh suggested that he might take his mind off drinking and partly restore his shattered fortune by writing a historical novel. *Knight with Armour* was published in 1950. Fourteen years

later Duggan died, having written altogether 15 novels, three biographies; and seven historical books for children. Almost as astonishing as his productivity is his consistency. I can detect no development in his work: his first novel is just as good as his last, and in precisely the same ways. Throughout, the most striking quality of his writing is its immediacy. However remote the scene in time, it's hard not to believe that the author was present at it. Here is the opening paragraph of *Founding Fathers*:

It was just the place for a stronghold, a steep flat-topped hill on the eastern side of the river which marked the boundary of the Etruscans. Nearby rose other hills, some with slopes too gentle to be defensible, others too acutely pointed for comfort. To the south-east stretched level beech-forest, the tree-tops seen from above making a level floor to the horizon, rarely interrupted by the clearings of other settle-



Alfred Duggan

ments. There was good ploughland to be won from the beech-forest, though the task of clearing it was laborious; if the worst came to the worst, and the foreigners over the river proved to be too warlike and well-armed to be robbed, the men in the stronghold might grow their own barley.

Once you've read it, not only do you know — for certain — how the Seven Hills looked on March 21, 753 B.C., a few moments before Romulus founded Rome; you have seen them through the appraising eyes of one of the brigands who followed him.

Founding Fathers deals with the first 40 years of Rome, ending with the selection of Numa Pompilius as its second king. All Duggan's other novels are told strictly from a single point of view. Here he copes with the long span of time by using four successive protagonists: Marcus, one of the original Latin settlers; Publius, one of the Sabines who moved to Rome as part of the peace settlement after the war that resulted from the stupendous gang-rape by which the first Romans acquired their wives; Perperna, an Etruscan from the north, trained in augury, whose city was destroyed by marauding Gauls; and Macro, a Greek from southern Italy who comes looking for a king to cleanse him of the pollution of fratricide — King Romulus, a fratricide himself, finds it quite easy to devise an appropriate and impressive ritual.

Through the lives of these four representatives of the different strains that made Rome cosmopolitan from the beginning, we watch the future taking shape as the dominant themes of Roman history appear. And through each disgraceful act of aggression and treachery the observers notice the uncanny way everything turns out undeservedly right for Rome. They come to believe implicitly in Fortuna, the Luck of Rome.

It is possible to read Duggan's novels without realizing that he was, like Waugh, a devout Roman Catholic; but underneath his sardonic observation of human misbehaviour lies a firm though never explicit statement that there really is a divine purpose at work. Nowhere is this clearer than in this tale of the eighth century before Christ: the Luck of Rome does exist, and it's the Christian God, preparing Rome for a special destiny.

Eleven centuries later, in *The Little Emperors*, the divine purpose seems to be taking a rest. Here we see the secular power of Rome crumbling away at last in the remote province of Britannia Prima. Duggan is the only novelist I know who deals with Roman Britain and its collapse according to the facts. Even the superb Rosemary Sutcliffe can't quite rid herself of the notion that the withdrawal of Rome from Britain was something like the British leaving India. It wasn't in the least. History records that in the year 406, after Gaul had been overrun by German tribes, the troops in Britain proclaimed as Emperor three men in rapid succession: the third one took the entire professional army across the Channel in order to fight his way to Italy and get the Emperor Honorius to recognize him as a colleague. The attempt failed, and in 410 Honorius sent a message to the cities of Britain that they were on their own until further notice.

The very scantiness of these facts gives ample scope to Duggan's imagination, armed as it is with his detailed knowledge of the late Roman administrative system. He makes of this material a story that is sardonic, horrifying, and pathetic in equal parts. Felix, a middle-aged African who comes of a long line of civil servants, is civil governor of Britannia Prima, the province centred in London. We watch him desperately struggling to keep functioning in a system that is inexorably grinding to a halt, tangled in a hopeless web of unenforceable regulations. He has tried to secure his position by marrying the daughter of the richest citizen of the province, a corrupt financier named Gratianus. Maria is half Felix's age and gets her kicks from flogging her slaves, until she discovers by experiment that murder and torture are even more fun. When the first of the local emperors tries to seduce her she kills him, and her father becomes the next emperor. Felix's position is now even more awkward, and when Gratianus is overthrown it becomes impossible; Felix escapes to the wild west and ends his days as court historian to a barbaric king.

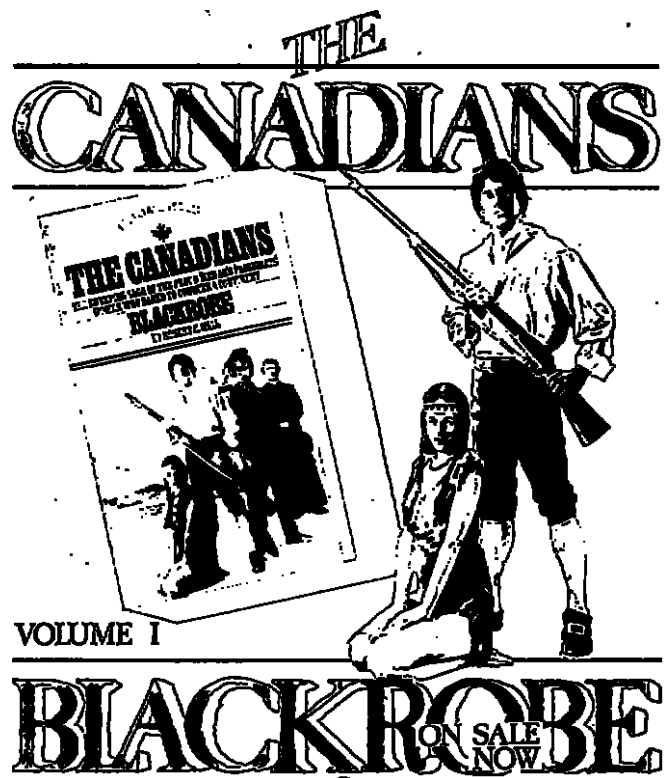
Nearly seven centuries further on, *Knight with Armour* is a touching tale of an innocent caught up in forces he doesn't understand. Roger de Bodeham is a very young knight from Sussex, not outstandingly brave nor very competent in the knightly skills, but

devoutly believing in the purpose of the Crusade and in the sacredness of oaths. He gets into terrible troubles, including a marriage to a young widow who is too clever for him, and when he dies just inside the wall of Jerusalem with the cry, "Ville gagnée" on his lips the triumph is real: he has achieved his quest in the only way possible for him—he was both too good and too stupid to cope with the world the ferocious and greedy crusaders are clearly going to build.

The immediacy of Duggan's writing is never more startling than in this first book. It's simply impossible to doubt that he was there, that he rode in the charges and sweated out the long hungry months before Antioch. Anyone can conjecture, and write, that riding in the Middle Eastern summer while dressed in armour designed for northwestern Europe was uncomfortable. Duggan knows, and tells, the exact details of the discomfort:

The thick leather of his mail shirt was airtight, and the thinner backing of his hauberk was stinking with old sweat and clammy with new. Below the waist, the padded cloth of his riding-chausses brought runnels of sweat which collected behind his knees, and made them yet more tender for the saddle. The two straps, for sword and shield, pressed his moist clothes against his body, and caused twinges of rheumatism in his sword-arm. The burnished helm, crammed firmly on the hood of the hauberk, glowed from the reflected rays of the sun, and a regular succession of drops fell from his nose-guard to the saddlehorn. A blinding cloud of dust enveloped the column.

These novels are wonderfully good as novels: dramatic, penetrating, and wildly funny in a severely deadpan manner. But they are also, perhaps even primarily, substantial works of history. What Duggan did (I am indebted for this and other insights to the near relation who reads him too) was to go back from the scientific history of today to the method of earliest historians — Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon. They too felt free to invent speeches for their characters and attribute thoughts to them; their function as they saw it was not just to report but to re-create the past. Duggan goes further, in inventing some of his characters as well. But his aim is similar and his achievement is comparable to theirs. □



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Bitter lozenges, bitter pill

by Ben Jones

Towers at the Edge of a World: Tales of a Medieval Town. by Virgil Burnett, Nelson/Canada, 208 pages. \$14.50 cloth (ISBN 0 17 601459 4).

GOOD FANTASY writing is a rare commodity. It is not accomplished by the translation of day-dream, even premeditated and edited day-dream, into prose, although that procedure seems to be the formula for many items on the market these days. *Towers at the Edge of a World* may have some appeal for readers who need a text available for occasional stimulation. The American poet James Merrill, quoted on the jacket, calls the tales "bitter lozenges." end invites the reader to "eat and dream." One supposes that Harlequin Romances are not "bitter lozenges." but the promotional phraseology is about the same.

Virgil Burnett presents the chronicle of Montamis, a "high town in some fantasy France." not far, perhaps, from Asterix's Gaulish village. Montamis is described in the Introduction in clear, succinct, travel-page prose, setting out the locale for the unlayering of a fancied past. The tales, in chronological order, expose persons and events, but there are no expectations of historical, archaeological, or even imaginative authenticity: instead, only day-dreams running their usual course from the trivial to the tedious.

First we learn about one Gundegar, the area's first legendary hero. Even as a child he had a fixation for spears and swords. He fought a dragon there in the old days, but when victory seemed just at hand the mutilated dragon swallowed up poor Gundegar and then disappeared. With its concluding "shower of gore," the story provides the first ingredient of the reties. The gore is, unfortunately, unredeemed by total absurdity reminiscent of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, although the expectation is raised that there will be much silliness in this hook. This expectation is not totally satisfied in the 14 tales that follow.

The next, that of Hugues, bold hunter turned penitent and religious convert, continues the visceral theme, and to it is added a new element: male masochism. Hugues, at the end of a celebration after a particularly vigorous hunt, thrusts himself on the relics of other hunts hung as trophies in his great hall. "antlers, horns, claws, fangs, and tusks." By now the references to pointed objects have become obsessive. Thence,

Hugues is off to the cellar and total humiliation, ending, as the story goes, with a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where he is harnessed "like a plow between two horses" and driven through the city shooting gnomic phrases to his new-found Lord.

Next tale, next ingredient: the submissive female, one Aleth, "short and sturdy, hut richly proportioned and handsome despite her middle years." We overhear her pledging allegiance to the god of the witches. She wears a "curious turban," with a bird's beak and a cover somewhat resembling a toque (a drawing accompanies the text). She also indulges in body-painting, with "walnut brew." Mask and paint provide new motifs, variants of which we find in later tales, establishing a sense of masquerade



which, of course, is what the stories are all about, covering as they do a paucity of imaginative power.

As a counter to Aleth's submissiveness, there is in a later tale the muscular and inventive Djaa: "Hers was a tribe of women, Amazons, as they were called." The narrative, the characterization, and the various scenarios owe something — perhaps unconsciously — to Conan the Barbarian, mixed with the Gor cycle, and the adventures of a variety of dominant-female types. In this, Burnett's tales differ from Harlequin Romances.

It will not be useful to continue the description: enough to say that more layers are exposed, a few more themes added, a few motifs developed, an inordinate amount of pain, the usual stupidities as-

sociated with the characters of Gothic and mystery fiction. the expected number of hardy women described in the expected way. To an excessive degree, it is the same dull mund of things.

In Burnett's tales, action end characterization serve the needs of fetish. This is different even from the simplest fairy tale, in which the fable — the carrying out of an integrated action — prevails over the obsession with objects and tricks. "Characterization" is perhaps not an appropriate term here: then are no characters, only caricatures, and therefore then is no level of feeling, no possibilities of emotional response. An obsession with the paraphernalia and hardware of victimization and submission is not adequate for the making of literature, even for fantasy literature. As for taking the excesses as part of an intended spoof of the c-t mania for Gothic debris, it is true that a laugh can be recuperative, and there are some laughable moments, but one must question the price one pays to laugh at these tales. Anyway, spoof literature depends on cleverness.

But amongst the 15 tales there is one that does hew, merit. It's the tale of Gerardus, a writer, albeit a copier of manuscripts, who survives the plague. There is here a completeness of narrative evolving from the personal commitments, from the identity, of the main character that is not found in the other tales. The setting of the monastery is well managed, the different characters are appropriately delineated, and the gruesome onslaught of the plague is described with considerable effect. The imagery of horror can be put to good use. Setting, delineation, and special effects are subordinated to the concern for Gerardus, who sticks to his business. He survives both the plague and its particular side-effect, the inducement under stress to indulge one's fantasies. So while Brothers Gallus, Hilarius, Rou, and Prudentius succumb, undone by fantasy, Gerardus attends to "his work, his books and his responsibilities." Perhaps there's a message here.

Marian Engel, also quoted on the jacket, notes that Burnett offers "literary archaeology of an elegant sort." The book has a kind of spiffiness, but of elegance-if the word is to be taken seriously — there is none. As for "literary archaeology," whatever that might be, we will not find that either. Archaeology depends on the accumulation end assessment of objects for the purpose of authenticating the presence of life in a given place at a given time. There is little sense of such authentication here. But ought we to expect authentication in works of fantasy? The answer is yes, and the examples are many and various: the moral and imaginative integrity of the great fairy tales, the intricacy and depth of mental experience in Mervyn Peake, the precise re-creations of epoch in Tolkien, or Frank Herbert (sometimes), or Ursula LeGuin. With the exception of "Gerardus" — and it is an important exception — *Towers at the Edge of a World* offers no such integrity, no intricacy and depth, no such precision. □

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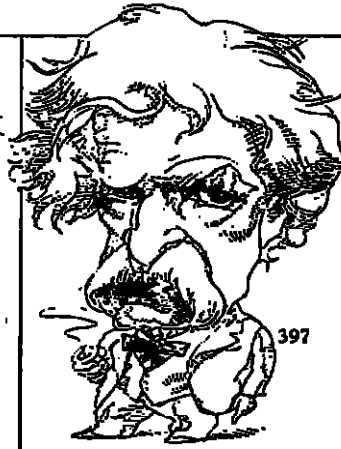


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An evasive vision of truth and beauty

by Ian Young

John Cowper Powys and the *Magical Quest*. by Morine Krissdottir. Nelson Foster & Scott, 218 pages. \$33.90 cloth (ISBN 0354 044923).

JOHN COWPER POWYS, who died in 1963, is one of the giants of 20th-century literature. His extensive body of work encompasses 15 novels, a remarkable autobiography (considered by Henry Miller, among others, to be "the most magnificent of all autobiographies"), and many volumes of essays, poetry, stories, and criticism, including studies of writers as diverse as Rabelais, Dostoevski, and Dorothy Richardson.

The Powyses were the most remarkable literary family since the Brontës. Of the 11 children of the vicar of Montacute, seven became writers. Theodore wrote meditations on God and death in the form of haunting, Gothic fables of village life. Llewelyn was best known for his superior travel books and sunny, life-loving rationalistic essays. But John Cowper, the eldest, was the most gifted of all, and he was gifted with genius. At least three of his novels (*Glastonbury Romance*, *Wolf Solent*, and *Owen Glendower*) are among the greatest of this century. Yet he has been curiously, outrageously, neglected, partly because of the pervasive influence of F.R. Leavis, who felt it necessary to denigrate Powys in order to advance the reputation of his own candidate for top spot, D.H. Lawrence. And as George Steiner has put it, Powys "eludes placing", his greatness "escapes historical location".

Many of his works are, or have been until recently, out of print, and even those that are not are not always easy to find. But Powys has been fortunate in one respect — the calibre of the critics and fellow novelists who have written about his work. In addition to Miller and Steiner, Angus Wilson, J.B. Priestley, Kenneth Hopkins, Cl. Wilson Knight, Belinda Humfrey, Glen Cavaliero, and Colin Wilson have all championed Powys and written intelligently and passionately about him and his books. There is now a Powys Society (and a *Powys Review*) devoted to the writings of all the members of the family.

In recent years, a number of John Cowper's out-of-print works have been reissued and some previously unpublished books and several volumes of letters have been made available. Equally important, there now are a number of fine critical studies. The most recent of these is by

Morine Krissdottir, a Canadian who teaches at the University of Guelph.

In her foreword, Krissdottir expresses her feeling that in spite of the growing body of critical work on Powys, "what has been lacking... is a detailed examination of Powys's mythology in relation to his novels". She believes that "any assessment of his novels will remain incomplete or inaccurate without a thorough knowledge of John Cowper's far-ranging and somewhat curious philosophical system".

Krissdottir finds the central quest and dilemma of Powys's mythos in a quote from *The Complex Vision*, one of his most neglected works:

Is that objective vision of truth, beauty, and goodness of which our individual subjective visions are only imperfect representations, the real vision of actual living "gods" or only the projection, upon the evasive medium which holds all human souls together, of such beauty and such truth and such goodness as these souls find that they possess in common?

From this question, Powys's creative novelistic powers and awesome erudition fanned out to structure the vivid worlds of his novels, and to connect those worlds with the ancient legends and complex spiritual metaphors of human life and endeavour.

Krissdottir analyzes all of Powys's important fiction, with impressively illuminating results. In her chapter on *A Glastonbury Romance*, perhaps Powys's greatest book, she explores what other writers have only tentatively suggested: that the magnificent story, is, among many other things, a modern reworking of the Grail legend.

Her longest chapter deals with *Porius*, the haunting tale of fifth-century Wales that Powys called "the chief work of my lifetime". When this was published in 1951, it was in a "cut" version, the text reduced by one-third by the publishers. Krissdottir has consulted the original manuscript at Colgate University and concludes that it is "Powys's masterpiece — a 20th-



century *Mabinogion*", and a modern alchemical text. And she shows for the first time how much of Powys's intention was lost when his publishers insisted on truncating his work.

The dust-jacket note on Morine Krissdottir says that "she has worked intermittently at this book over a period of 15 years". It is easy to believe, as the scholarship and insight displayed are obviously the result of long, careful, and painstaking devotion. The resulting study is a weighty and often difficult one. Those unfamiliar with Powys should probably look elsewhere for an introduction. This is a work for the lover and scholar of John Cowper Powys, and as such it is a fascinating and important text, a landmark in Powys studies.

The book's only error seems to be in its first sentence, where the author alludes to the 11 Powys children, "three of whom became writers". She forgets Littleton, Philippa, Albert, and Marian, all of whom published books. □

Have ganja, will travel

Dreadlock, by Lew Anthony. McClelland and Stewart, 325 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 7710 07566).

By BARRY DICKIE

THERE ARE SOME rare birds in this book. One of them, Rev. Thomas Jefferson, is a charlatan who lords over a small congregation in rural Jamaica. Prior to preaching the gospel he had been a Detroit heroin dealer. As he says, "Now I push Jesus, 'stead of junk. It don't pay quite as good, but it ain't half bad." Very lucid. Reverend, as are most lines in *Dreadlock*. The novel is a lively one, and if not original, at least it's daringly corny.

The hero is an ex-Mountie named Mike Shuter, a disillusioned lawman who hung up his phone-tap to become vice-president of a charter airline based in Toronto (Holiday at Yonge and Bloor, indeed a good come to get away from). Shuter gets to show off his Mountie grit when he visits Jamaica in search of a missing passenger who happens to be the ravishing daughter of an honourable MP. She's run away with a black man, which is a romantic and racially-enlightened thing to do except for one detail: her ebony prince is a psychotic who has perverted their love affair into a master-prisoner relationship, lies the Reverend's kid brother, a creep called Cudjoe who, like his brother, is blessed with the entrepreneurial panache of an American businessman. His gang controls the Jamaican marijuana trade and is threatening to control the Jamaican government by killing unwary tourists and

thereby placing the tourist industry in jeopardy. How does Cudjoe feel about kidnapping the daughter of a prominent Canadian politician? "She es happy es a Motown hooker on a GM payday. and gettin' almost es much action. Don't you worry none about her."

Shuter, our all-Canadian hem, does worry about her. He also drives a Bricklin, doer pushups, follows hockey, charms women, cares about Canadian art, and worries about creeping socialism. He's es homegrown as Libby's corn. As a narrator he fertilizes the story with his curiosity about the endless phenomena that permeate real life: politics, music, history, art, cars, booze, Jamaican food, and especially people. His one sour personality trait is his arrogance: an executive who earns \$80,000 a year shouldn't gripe about the excesses of social security — it might offend the poor reader who spends his pogeey cheque on a mystery novel. Otherwise Shuter is okay, a convincing character who doesn't take himself too seriously, despite being a Canadian.

None of Lew Anthony's characters lack personality. Their presence is fleeting and hardly sublime, but they're alive and they're great talkers. Shuter's neighbour in Rosedale runs the news show on a national television network; he's glib, as media types apparently are, yet he's also an expert on the madness of news. Or Susan Quill, the saucy reporter who follows Shuter to Jamaica hoping to scoop, the kidnapping story — the same Susan who wanted to be writer before she sold her soul to television. What happens to an artist's sensitivity after it has been dragged through the gutters of journalism? According to Shuter, Susan's scope is somewhat narrower, though she still has articulate bed manners.

Jamaica — island of beauty and squalor, political turmoil, and bountiful ganja, es marijuana is locally known. Shuter scours the island in search of Cudjoe, going everywhere and doing everything not included in Holidair's package tour. Riding in the front seat of Becky, for example, a 50-year-old taxi with all her original teeth. Or riding a horse into battle against Cudjoe's cowboys, their machetes versus his speargun. Or simply swapping philosophical uncertainties with Rss Daniel, the thoughtful reggae musician who loves his country and tries to reconcile the inherent goodness of marijuana with the violence and greed it has wrought in the hands of Cudjoe. Does marijuana induce lethargy, as Shuter suggests? Or, es Ras Daniel claims, does it open the door to spiritual delight? And finally — after the machine guns have calmed down and Cudjoe's corpse is pulled from the marijuana patch, after the dead bodies are counted and the wounded bandaged, after the ravishing daughter is free to enter the House of Commons and hug her dd, after all of this end much more — was it worth the effort?

Yes, if only because it is often funny. There is, of course, much wrong with the book: it has a contrived plot, it is maudlin, it

is shallow, the author relies on information rather than insight, and the characters are locked in a hard shell-like people on TV. Yet the writing itself is quite clever: Lew Anthony has a nice style, sharp and crisp, and he has a sense of humour. At times the writing so exceeds the format, the book seems to be parody of itself. For example, when Shuter was a Mountie he never contravened the Official Secrets Act: is there a subliminal message here? Does it mean that Lew Anthony is a square writer who will never contravene the rules of commercial writing? Also, Shuter's office is at Yonze and Bloor, the core of Crass Canada. Is the author likewise writing from the heart of banality? Is *Dreadlock* a satire on the current execaive-as-hem theme? Judging from the acknowledgements at the front of the book, apparently not: Anthony has chosen to imitate life rather than express it. What could have been an original comedy is instead a corny suspense story told with candour. Like TV at its best, the book is fast, informative, and often entertaining. □

Old spice in New France

A *King's Ransom*, by Victor Suthren, Collins. 217 pages, \$13.95 cloth (ISBN 0 00222031 8).

By DORIS COWAN

THIS NOVEL has all the elements of a successful piece of romantic escapist fiction of the adventure-at-sea variety: a nimble hero — the improbably young commander of a graceful ship; wild, bold buccaneers — bed ones on their side, good ones on ours: a plotting, fiendish mastermind of a villain; an Indian maiden who is both heroic and sexy. But it takes a long time to get going, and it has a lot of junky, clunky writing: "The din of musketry and the mar of the guns were indescribable." Suthren seems to feel that many things are indescribable, but he has an enthusiastic, workmanlike go at them anyway, using plenty of adjectives and their reinforcements — "incredible," "terrific," "awesome," "unbelievable," "tremendous," and the like — as well es torrents of nautical jargon: "Mainsail, haul! Trim her all sharp! . . . Another poll on the fore t' gallant lee brace . . . Tops there! Give fire!"

Suthren is a professional historian and an officer in the Canadian Naval Reserve, and presumably all this stuff is historically and technically accurate, but sometimes you get the feeling that he's showing off how much he knows rather than using it selectively. He'll describe what a character is wearing, from head to fool, in such detail that the narrative slows right down to a dead stop, and you can almost see the museum display

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COLLINS

Read it yet?

case and the title card at the foot of the suddenly motionless figure.

I had a little trouble at the beginning deciding whether I liked the hem, too, and that can be fatal to this kind of story. He is an Acadian, Paul Gallant, commanding officer of the *Echo*, a corvette in the French navy. It seemed for a while as if he might not have the right kind of simple moral authority. Along with incredibly good judgement in all situations, such a hero must have a quixotic purity of heart, but one that allows him to kill with great efficiency, because he only kills very bad people. The first sea battle made me feel a little uneasy: he seemed to be killing as a soldier kills, on orders from his king, and the enemy, the English, had not been clearly demonstrated to be very bad. Because the romantic motivations had not been established, the battle was too real, too bloody and porn-lessly destructive — just French bullies quarrelling with English bullies over loot originally stolen by the Spaniards anyway. Later on the pirates emerge as the real enemy, and the ambiguity is dispelled. The pirates are very bad people, and from now on the story picks up romantic momentum, unimpeded by any concern for the feelings of Gallant's adversaries. Suthren gets in some effective, suspenseful plot developments before the end of the book.

It's good to see the history of the French-English battle for possession of New France used as the backdrop for this kind of historical fiction. It's a rich vein that

should be mined, and if Suthren goes on writing Paul Gallant tales he may well establish a new literary genre: the soldiers-end-Indians Eastern: □

Whodunit? Who cares?

The Agatha Christie 'Who's Who', by Randall Toye, Collins, 264 pages, \$13.95 cloth (ISBN 0 00 216616 X).

By DuBARRY CAMPAU

MY FASCINATION with the mysteries of Agatha Christie was inherited from my parents, and I have passed it on to my son: Her two finest sleuths, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, are like members of our family too — to be proud of when they bring off their inevitable coops and to laugh at indulgently for their quirks and foibles. Naturally, therefore, *The Agatha Christie Who's Who* by Randall Toye seemed, in anticipation, to be truly a treasure. In reality, through no fault of Mr. Toye's, it is not — because unhappily it really doesn't matter, except for her detectives, who is who in Miss Christie's books.

The detectives matter a great deal — especially their peculiar personalities and infallible, and quite different, ways of solving the mysteries. The settings matter (Miss Christie is very good at those), whether they are the upper reaches of the Nile, the *wagons lits* of the Orient Express, or the stately homes and specious vicarages of England. But her, people are almost totally forgettable. Even the most villainous of murderers are hard to recall, and the inevitably falsely suspected innocents simply vanish from the mind. And here, with infinite meticulousness and patient effort, Mr. Toye has catalogued every one of those shadowy characters and placed them in the proper volume with a description of the part they play in its plot.

It is admirable scholarship, and the bibliography and appendix, which list her mysteries and short stories, and locale Poirot, Miss Marple, and Ariadne Oliver in the various mysteries they unravel, are valuable; even to the casual reader of her work. But even in going through the hems in the book it is hard to recall Lord Altamont, Archdeacon Brabazon, Adele Marchmont, Mr. Fleetwood, or most of the hundreds of other men or women so painstakingly pinpointed as to their roles and the novels in which they appear.

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O X F O R D

by several writers — but Conan Doyle had a knack for creating vivid personalities even in minor roles, a knack that Miss Christie either lacked or simply didn't choose to use. She emphasized instead the intricacies of her plots and the ingenuity of her detectives.

Mr. Toye's book is more an academic novelty than an adjunct to the enjoyment of Miss Christie's work, but he deserves praise for conceiving it and carrying it out. □

Punishment without crime

Inspector **Therrien**, by André Major, translated from the French by Mark Czarnecki, Press Porcépic, 191 pages, 59.95 paper (ISBN 0 88878 186 5).

By JULIE BEDDOES

ALTHOUGH ITS TITLE makes this book sound like a whodunit, it's really a who-done-what. Inspector **Therrien** is leaving behind his sleuthing in Montreal at the opening to retire to a village in the Laurentians. It's fall, and most of the cottagers have left St. Emmanuel. **Therrien's** house is close to a hotel kept by his friends **Émérance** and **Jerome**. **Émérance** and **Therrien** have been in love for 20 years, but the policeman has always been too shy to declare himself, and **Émérance** long ago married the more aggressive **Jerome**.

Most of the book is taken up with the developing relationships between **Therrien**, **Émérance** and **Jerome**. The lady goes for long buggy rides with the inspector, with the complicity of **Jerome**, who has long ago retreated from his wife's coldness to his den furnished with guns and girlie magazines. The climax comes on **Émérance's** birthday, when **Therrien** gives her a present of some photographs he has taken of her in the nude. He does it so clumsily that **Jerome** sees them — was it intentional? — and the cosy triangle is first bent then squared off by **Therrien's** unexpected and impulsive marriage to **Émérance's** sister, **Julienne**.

The central mystery of the book is **Therrien** himself. He's the character with whom we spend most time, and it is typical of the book's true-to-life feeling that the more we see of him the more complicated and mysterious he becomes. We know of his long adoration of **Émérance**, his chaste bachelor life, his fondness for taking photographs of nude women (how he pursued this hobby over the years is not clear). His life is empty and meaningless, especially since his retirement, and he finds all too soon that **Julienne** can neither share nor comprehend this feeling. By Christmas both sisters have left their husbands. **Jerome** is inconsolable; **Therrien** shrugs.

However, a lot more goes on in St.

Emmanuel than these menopausal romances. Village life is passionate and eventful in literary Quebec. Conflagration, suicide, an escaped murderer, and a man-hunt enliven the Christmas season in the interwoven subplots. Characters are not introduced; allusions are made to people and events we know nothing about. (Perhaps we are meant to have read *Scarecrows of St. Emmanuel*, the first book of the trilogy called *Tales of Deserters*: it's an account of village boy **Momo's** career in petty crime and his eventual arrest for murder. **Therrien** was the policeman on the case.)

The sections of this book that deal with the middle-aged lovers are slower moving and less crammed with action than those about the villagers, but the themes are the same: unrequited love and the power that love gives the desired one over the suitor. Frequent but joyless sex is always an instrument of this power. **Émérance** has never loved **Jerome** and has submitted to his sexual demands without pleasure for many years. But then, enraged by **Therrien's** ineffectualness, she makes demands on him and he? exerts the power the more-loved one always has. She leaves him after making out with the mayor on the front seat of his car, thereby discovering the power she has always had.

Things don't go much better in the villagers' love lives. **Gros-Jos**, rejected by **Palma**, loses his cabin and eventually hangs himself. **Phil** the butcher is spurned by **Marie-Rose**, who remains faithful to jailbird **Momo**, the only case of a man ruining a woman's life. In revenge, **Phil** tries to organize a village vigilante force to track down **Momo**, without success. **Momo** is eventually sheltered by **Therrien**, the man responsible for his arrest. Another way to till the emptiness.

We never discover what becomes of **Momo**, whether **Jerome** recovers, whether the inspector finds a new way to fill his emptiness. All for volume three, one presumes. But this very unfinished quality makes the book very satisfying; it gives the book a flavour of the gossip and storytelling of old friends or family one has been out of touch with for years, who assume one remembers whose brother they're talking about. The strange events of the novel arc like stories from local newspapers or things done by third cousins. One can almost hear an aunt saying, "And then he married the sister!" True stories only have middles; their beginnings and endings are the middles of other stories. **Inspector Therrien** is true to life in its incompleteness, realistic in its form as much as in its style and content.

This is a much less handsome book than Press Porcépic's usual fare. Mark Czarnecki's translation is mostly unobtrusive and effective, although he could have broken down more of the long French sentences. The fact that it makes one want to read books one and three of the trilogy is a measure of book two's success. □

Runway best-seller?

Seconds to Disaster, by Doug Hall. Nelson/Canada, 173 pages. \$12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 17 601439 X).

By BARRY DICKIE

THIS BOOK IS like an airplane ride that doesn't quite leave the ground. It just zooms down the runway, fakes a few liftoffs, and comes to a safe halt. Of course, some people prefer it that way.

Eli does not prefer it that way. Eli is the fellow who hi&s a bomb inside the nose-wheel of a DC-10 called *The Viking Prince*. He is a nice boy, actually: an engineering student in Copenhagen, a hard-working, clean-living Danish Jew who hasn't been himself ever since his brother was murdered by Palestinian terrorists. As you may have guessed, there are many Arabs on board *The Viking Prince*. Eli wants the plane to get off the ground so that it'll have to land again, trigger the bomb, and balance the scales of justice.

Can it be done? Once *The Viking Prince* has become airborne, can it ever again touch the earth without exploding into a million pieces of twisted metal and human flesh? Will it be forced to stay airborne till the fuel runs out and then plummet headlong into oblivion? Or is there a chance, . . .

Yes, by God, there is a chance. If (and this is a big if) *The Viking Prince* can somehow land within a remarkably short distance, say within 2,000 revolutions of the nosewheel, then Eli's bomb won't go off. But it won't be easy. Trying to land a DC-10 within 2,000 nosewheel-revs is like trying to catch Niagara Falls in a paper cup. It'll be tricky. (Get the foam-machines ready, men.) And what about the pilot? Imagine how he must feel. Fortunately, we have a good man in the pilot's seat. Captain **John Neilsen** is one of Skan-East Airlines's most experienced pilots. He is an American of Danish extract; a war veteran who possesses both Yankee know-how and Scandinavian cool. If anyone can bring 'em home alive, it is Captain **John Neilsen**.

Seconds to Disaster is not a very original story, or a very ambitious one. It is designed for the kind of reader who fancies mild, inoffensive suspense. The book doesn't insult the intelligence, but neither does it touch the imagination.

The plot is too mechanical for my tastes. It unfolds too predictably, hums along too efficiently, and is wrapped up too neatly. There are not enough holes in the plot for a genuine story to emerge; all of the author's energy is spent resolving a stressful situation, rather than creating dramatic sus-

pend. It is the difference between falling free and being locked inside a flight simulator.

Which is rather sad because the author, Doug Hull, sometimes displays sufficient writing ability to step outside the narrow plot. His characters are well-drawn and fairly interesting. Unfortunately, they are strapped inside a plane that might soon blow up. In literary terms, this is the safest place in the world: all they have to do is react to the situation and hang on until page 173.

Not surprisingly, the best writing occurs away from the main action, where the author is not preoccupied with piecing together his cliff-hanger. There's no reason

why a suspense novel has to follow a straight line. Raymond Chandler would often seed Marlowe on a half a dozen wild goose chases before getting him on track — just for the fun of it. Some of Doug Hull's characters are too alive for this dumb plot: a pathetic drunk named Brisbois, a noble Palestinian widow, and an eccentric linguistics professor — they all suggest that Doug Hull has no reason to play it so safe.

Well, maybe there is a reason. A simple plot with no painful surprises is easier to write and much easier to package. I found the book to be a rather blond, predictable affair. But I must repeat, some people prefer it that way. □

closer brotherhood with these people than in France or Dursley or Boston.

Letters to his cronies and to the half-dozen high-born women (including Mitford) with whom he maintained life-long friendships will provide more than enough fresh gossip for those who relish the doings of the English aristocracy and literary world. Connoisseurs of his sadistic friendship with Cyril Connolly will find a number of new gems. And here end there are a few references to incidents that eventually appeared in his novels, most notably the hallucinations he suffered in 1954 and later described in *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*. On February 8, under the delusion that his bout of madness had passed, he wrote to his wife from Cairn:

... I was semi-delirious most of the time so disregard whatever I wrote except my deep love... Hand is steady today and the malevolent telepathy broken for the first time — perhaps permanently. Please don't be alarmed about the references to telepathy. I know it sounds like acute persecution mania but it is real and true. A trick the existentialists invented — half mesmerism — which is most alarming when applied without warning or explanation to a sick mm.

And four days later:

It is rather difficult to write to you because everything I say or think or read is read aloud by the group of psychologists whom I met in the ship. I hoped that they would lose this art after I went ashore but the artful creatures can communicate from many hundreds of miles away. Please don't think this is balmy. I should certainly have thought so three weeks ago, but it is a fact & doesn't worry me particularly

It has been assumed that *Pinfold* is nothing more than a bit of novelized autobiography. True, the book is almost a day-by-day account of his temporary madness, but I believe Waugh chose to write about it not because it was simply an interesting, marketable experience, but because he saw his recovery as a personal triumph over the chaos and insanity that he believed to be at the heart of most modern art. All of which I mention to suggest another reason why his official stature as a novelist has been clouded: he didn't tell people what his books were about or why he wrote them, and he wrote them so well that the seems don't show. He transformed his experience into art without using self-conscious, obvious symbols or anything else that might inspire co academic claques to laced pecks of students on search-and-destroy missions through his work.

The great value of this collection is that it shows the wide range of experience he chose *not* to write about. His dedication to his craft and his faith was total. It was also immensely private, and it is only indirectly that we are given an idea of what he was up to as an artist. Here's some advice he gave to Nancy Mitford:

I am sorry you have not been able to rewrite the unsatisfactory section of your book [*The Pursuit of Love*] in time for the first

Home-thoughts from a balmy solitude

by Phil Surguy

The Letters of Evelyn Waugh, edited by Mark Amory. McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 664 pages. 929.95 cloth (ISBN 0 297 77657 6).

EVELYN WAUGH'S reputation as a vicious eccentric, gossip about the star-studded social whirl he lived in the early part of his life, and his extremely unfashionable, arch-tory political views have clouded his achievement as a novelist. He now is often thought of only as the writer of a few pre-war comic novels. *Brideshead Revisited*, for example (his biggest American success), and *The Loved One*. Although his true literary worth is slowly being re-appreciated, a surprising number of widely read people still don't know his work as a whole and have no, even bothered to look at his *Sword of Honour* trilogy, which has to be the finest English fiction to come out of the Second World War and some of the best written in our time.

Some commentators have linked the current rise in the popularity of Waugh's novels to the rise of "the new right." It is a ridiculous notion. He might have joined their bitching about income taxes, but he would have had no sympathy for them either as people or thinkers. Note this letter to his friend Tom Driberg, an MP, author, journalist, homosexual, and chairman of the Labour Party:

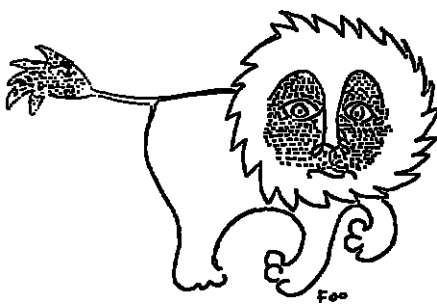
I read with great interest your article on the new Buchamanism [Moral Re-
armament]. . . Can you tell me: Did you in your researches come across the name of Wm. F. Buckley Jr. editor of a New York neo-McCarthy magazine named *The National Review*? He has been showing me great & unsought attention lately & your article made me curious. Has he been supernaturally 'guided' to bore me? It would explain him.

Waugh loathed the age he lived in. But while many of his artistic and intellectual contemporaries flirted with various forms of Marxism and fascism, he found consolation in the pursuit of his craft, and refuge and strength in the Roman Catholic Church. His faith was deep but fiercely idiosyncratic. For instance, his friend Nancy Mitford once arranged a lunch for him to meet a young French intellectual who admired his work. Almost predictably Waugh's withering rudeness and sarcasm soon had the fellow in tears. Mitford angrily turned on him, demanding to know how he, a professed Christian, a meticulous Catholic, could be so deliberately cruel. Waugh answered, "You have no idea how much nastier I would be if I was not a Catholic. Without supernatural aid I would hardly be a human being."

Mark Amory's rich and fascinating collection of Waugh's letters reveals that he was in fact much more human than such stories indicate. His letters to his wife Laura and their children show that he wasn't wholly the flint-hearted husband and father certain legends and his diaries would suggest. But he wasn't quite the typical middle-class paterfamilias, either. For example, he always tried to be out of England and away from his family at Christmas. On Boxing Day 1952 he wrote from Goa:

Darling Laura and darling chi I dren.

Thank you for your telegram of Christmas greetings which reached me at midday. I see that it was the sloth of the pan-offices that delayed it. I had begun to fear that your cold hearts were quite frozen to death... Midnight mass at Old Goa Cathedral was a moving occasion, the great building crowded to suffocation with pilgrims from all over India and Ceylon. No mistletoe or holly or yule logs or Teutonic nonsense. Simple oriental fervour instead. I feel far



edition. Start rewriting it now for the Penguins. It is the difference (one of 1,000 differences) between a real writer & a journalist that she cares to go on improving after the reviews are out & her friends have read it & there is nothing whatever to be gained by the extra work.

And, to a friend who'd asked whether a letter he wrote to the Times attacking a Picasso exhibition was a hoax, he replied:

One must distinguish between uses of "new." There is the Easter sense in which all things are made new in the risen Christ. A tiny gleam of this is reflected in all true art. Every work of art is thus something new..

Picasso and his kind are attempting something new in the sense, of something different in kind. Titian might have thought Frith intolerably common but he would have recognized that he was practising the same art as himself. He could not think the, of Picasso. Chaucer, Henry James and, very humbly, myself are pncdsing the same art. Miss Stein is not. She is outside the world order in which words have a precise and ascertainable meaning and sentences a logical structure. She is aesthetically in the same position as, theologically, a mortal sinner who has put himself outside the world order of God's mercy.

With completion of *The Sword of Honour* in 1961 he had written all he had to write. Also, the Church had begun, to change in directions he despised. He no longer had any reason for wishing to stay alive, and his drinking and general disregard for his health took on a self-destructiveness that one usually associates with American artists. His last letter, to Lady Diana Mosley, was written on March 30, 1966. He dropped dead 11 days later. It was Easter Sunday. □

Pale face, pale rider

White Lies and Other Fictions, by Sean Virgo. Exile Editions. 150 pages. 98.95 paper (ISBN 0 920428 36 3).

By WAYNE GRADY

THE TEN STORIES in this first collection of Virgo's work can be roughly divided into three groups. The first three stories — "Bandits," "Ipoh," and "Arkendale" —

are so tightly linked that together they form a kind of novella of interconnected stories much as Joyce Cary's African stories do. Virgo's group gives the career of Malcolm Palmer, a young British soldier in Malaya who, in "Bandits," participates in a scouting foray into the jungle to eliminate a camp of guerillas; in "Ipoh" Palmer is wounded and, delirious, is nursed back to health by a native family before being transferred to Cyprus, another corner of the fading Empire. In "Arkendale" the demobbed Palmer returns to his own village in a remote part of England that seems unchanged since the days of Thomas Hardy, though it is now weirdly unfamiliar to Palmer.

These are excellent stories, controlled, well paced, and sure. The comparison with Joyce Cary is not fortuitous; Virgo shares with Cary a sense of the significance of soldiering in an imperial order (or disorder), and an ear for depicting that significance without glorifying the dull and absurd routine that is its usual manifestation. Stylistically, the two writers are uncannily alike. Compare these opening sentences from Virgo's "Bandits":

Number Two section stumbled onto the bandit amp. They were up ahead, just three minutes out of the swamp. Malcolm was tagging the lieutenant, eyes down, when the shooting began. A sustained burst of sten gun fire. Then an isolated shot. The two men found each other's eyes like schoolboys startled. The dreadful grainy mud streaked the lieutenant's young face and clogged the light bristles below his mouth.

with the beginning of Cary's "Umaru," written in 1950:

I, had been raining for two days, the drizzling mountain rain of the Cameroons. The detachment, on special duty behind the German lines, was under strict orders not to be noticed. That was its duty as well as its only security. Fires could not be lit except in brightest day. No tents were carried. But the subaltern in charge, young Corner, had brought a tent-fly with him: and old fly looted from some German camp.

Both writers owe a debt to Conrad (especially "Heart of Darkness"), and both have expanded on the original.

The last three stories in Virgo's book form another, probably earlier group. They have similar themes, but there is less scope in them: while it is the duty of a short story to be specific, this should not be a limiting quality but a sharper focus that increases the reader's depth of field. This group, which may be termed Virgo's "Canadian" pieces, take place on the West Coast (on and off the Queen Charlotte Islands, where Virgo lived for several years before moving to Newfoundland; he now lives in England). "Les Rites," which won last year's CBC short story competition, is the best of this lot. It is also about a soldier, this time a French Canadian named Raoul Forrester, in an unfamiliar and hostile environment, and his transition from man of peace to hunter (a Deer Hunter, in fact).

The title story, "White Lies," also

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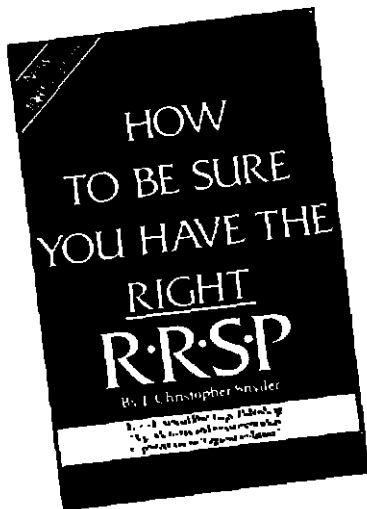
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belongs in this group. David Stone, a young Haida sent to a white boarding school on the mainland, resists the blanching process administered by his teachers and dreams of his warrior heritage—again, he's a soldier in a hostile land—and his personal myths. Back in his village for summer vacations, David takes part in the tribe's initiation ritual ("Les Rites"), and during the fire dance sees his familiar neighbours transported from ordinary men, blanket Indians, into reincarnations of the proud people who had been their ancestors. The dance had meaning, "and the people had meaning too, released in this house from their year-long disguises. From this the old dreamer on his rotting porch, the fat drunk weaving off the highway from the city, got the dignity that defied the White lies. Their privacy."

The middle stories don't form such a cohesive group, but are a miscellany contained by and thematically linked to the beginning and end of the book. Chief among them is the flawed, ironic story, "Guess Who I Saw in Paris?" a brooding, Lowry-esque tracing of the final descent of a burnt-out colonial. Peter Ingram, who like Lowry's Geoffrey Firmin has run the course of a wasted, lonely life in a foreign country and must now prepare for his end. The story's weak conclusion is to "ambiguous to be a resolution, however. It's plain that Ingram himself lacks the will or the strength to go through with his intended suicide, but what he does instead places the weakness on the story rather than on the character.

The common thread that unites the ten stories is the alienation of each central character from his natural environment and from his new one as well. There is a special kind of isolation, that of confused, basically strong characters in situations that should be familiar to them but somehow aren't. Things suddenly and inexplicably go awry, creating a dream-like unreality that is always more disorienting than simply being dropped into a totally new and often refreshingly uncharted labyrinth. At least in the labyrinth one has one's past, one's self, to rely on and to draw open: in Virgo's world the past has been "erased, often brutally, and the reverberating shock erases the self. This is primitive man; it is also modern man." □



The agony and the ecstasy

Atlante, by Robert Marteau, translated from the French by Barry Callaghan, Exile Editions, 80 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 920428 16 9).

The Agonized Life, by Gaston Mim", translated from the French by Marc Plourde, Torchy Wharf Press, 80 pages, \$4.00 paper (ISBN 0 919021 00 X).

By ALBERT MORITZ

ROBERT MARTEAU's *Atlante* is one of those poems that, although difficult in its details, communicates as a whole with the direct impact of its freshness, fullness, and energy. Born in rural France in 1925 and acknowledged as one of France's leading contemporary poets, Marteau moved some years ago to Quebec, where he was "re-discovering my origins . . . and, as a poet, passionately learning to know my homeland — this mother tongue which . . . is constantly haggled over and threatened." *Atlante* consists of 106 brief stanzas that are linked by a complex network of repeated and developed motifs drawn from history, art, nature, and current issues. They include such apparently disparate elements as railroads, steel mills, industrial pollution, cattle slaughters, the Virgin, the crucifixion, the Gorgon, a bewildering array of flowers, cities, artists, stars, occult and alchemical emblems, and many other things.

Atlante, Marteau's first book published in Canada (it originally appeared in 1976 from Hexagone and was followed in 1978 by *Treatise on White and the Tinctures*, Editions Erta, 1978), is a meditation growing directly out of the savage indictment of modern society that he developed in his earlier *Sybilles* (Paris, 1971). In that book, he sees the whole of modern life, from which all sense of awe and the divine has been banished, as summed up in the senseless death of a young girl struck by a car. The world, he concludes, "is only a heap of miscellaneous news . . . the poor have no more tears/ because we govern in their name/ they go off/ deprived of speech/ absent from all prayer/ persuaded they are nothing but what they are."

The landscape of *Atlante* is the New World: vast wheat and cattle-raising plains, crossed by railroads and marred by industrialism. The human masses seem like cattle led to tie slaughter.. Mim "vomits his industrial output" like animals under the axe: the poet contemplates prairie flowers and combines against a "horizon of steel mills" and comments, "where there's flame, there are petrochemicals, gas, filtering equipment, sulphur. . . ." He is threatened with a basic loss of confidence in

life. because not only nature but even the deepest truths seem to have been polluted: "Lord, so many armies have taken you for their emblem that now even the softest bird is suspect to me."

Gradually, secretly, Marteau traces a personal recovery from this plight, a recovery based on the idea that spiritual powers are continually available to the individual. Transcendence is always possible, even in the face of our sorrows, which are but harsher examples of the continually re-incarnated problems and failings of nature and humanity.

The movement toward this resolution is not simply progressive. Marteau allows despair and bitterness to re-emerge at many points. Hope or affirmation will appear, only to resolve itself into enigma and then into pain. Nevertheless, the poem achieves, finally, a rebirth of joy in the vision of "untiring apocalypse in a castle of high celebration" and the possibility of setting out on a voyage guided by new stars.

Gaston Miron is the patriarch of today's politically and socially engaged Quebec literature. A political organizer, publisher, and teacher, and a prolific writer, Miron founded the Hexagone publishing house in 1953 (when he was 25), helped found *Liberté* magazine in 1959, and since 1955 has been active in a variety of Independentist and Quebec socialist groups and movements.

Though his own commitment to Quebec as a nation seems to date from the 1950s, Miron identifies 1960 as a decisive year for national self-awareness, and its flowering in himself and his writing. "The Agonized Life," a poem sequence that is the centerpiece of Marc Plourde's selection and translation of Miron's work, is a sequence that was published in *Liberté* in 1963, though the poems, Miron testifies, were written from 1954 to 1959.

Their basic subject is a society robbed of its identity and attempting to achieve self-consciousness: "Sad and scattered among the fallen stars/ you are an immense phantom. livid, silent, nowhere. . ."

The poet, previously removed from his country's plight in his individualistic aestheticism, seeks to identify with the nation:

*now I go down toward the seedy districts
squatting and breathing in their mould
rambling back streets I drift along
here is my true life - built like a shed -
History's dump - and I reclaim it
I'll not accept a personal salvation
my life starts from the humiliated man's
condition*

Thus, nationalism merges with a spiritual and moral rebirth, a rebirth to human sympathy.

For Miron, this rebirth is profoundly concerned with the freeing of Quebec French from colonial intrusions and functions: he must purify the tribal words. Currently, the "Québécois" cringes, "walled up inside my cranium/ with my language and kinship deposited." For Miron and the writers who cooperated with

him or, in younger generations, follow him, the problems of independence and literature are one, and merge with the problem of being itself: "we have allowed the Word's splendour to be debased."

For such reasons, the publication of this English version of "The Agonized Life" sequence along with 11 other poems, the manifesto "A Further Lesson in Commitment," and a 1972 interview, is an important literary event. While acknowledging the impact and honest fervour of Miron's stance, however, English Canadian readers will also see the weakness of the poetry qua poetry, outside its native context of ideological struggle. Often "poetic" and grandiloquent, it fails to control tone to such an extent that it seems self-dramatizing even when speaking on behalf of the mystical body of Quebec:

*Never have I shut my eyes
despite the sweet giddiness of euphoria. . . .*

*On my very worst day
I'll come through all of despair's
thunder . . .*

*seeing nothing I'll continue I'll
go toward my death crowded with rumours
and debris. . . .*

Perhaps the accomplishment here is best summed up in Miron's own words from "A Further Lesson in Commitment": "Here in these poems, I strived to hold myself at an equal distance from regionalism and abstract universalism, those two poles of disembodiment, that double curse which has forever burdened our literature. Whether I succeeded or not is another matter. I point out the way." □

Alcatraz without the ache

On the Rock, by Alvin Karpis as told to Robert Livesey, Musson, 306 pages. \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7737 0047 1).

By BARRY DICKIE

THERE IS A reason why Alvin Karpis spent 25 years in Alcatraz, and it has nothing to do with kidnapping, bank robbery, or murder. The reason will be found in this book, *On the Rock*, in a photograph of Karpis taken in 1936. He is handcuffed, surrounded by FBI agents: he looks calm, smarter than the cops, more together — the way a legend should look. But there's something else about him, a quality that set him apart from such other public enemies as Dillinger, 'Baby Face' Nelson, and Pretty Boy Floyd. It's his eyes: they're burning with pride; not arrogance, just simple indestructible pride. Karpis spent 25 years in Alcatraz because he was too proud to bargain for an early parole, too proud to inform on his friends or co-operate with the authorities. He chose to wait it out. Karpis knew he could handle the Rock. He knew someday he would walk away from that nightmare and urinate on the grave of the man who had put him there, that contemptible lawman J. Edgar Hoover.

Ethel Wilson, 1890-1980

A.J.M. SMITH ONCE called her Canada's finest woman novelist, and others have described her as the matriarch and sibyl of Canadian fiction, but after a long illness Ethel Wilson died December 22, 1980, at a Vancouver nursing home in relative obscurity.

The daughter of a Methodist missionary, Ethel Davis (Bryant) Wilson was born in 1890 in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. After spending her early childhood in England, she came to live with relatives in Vancouver at the age of eight upon the death of her parents. She completed her education in England and Vancouver and taught school until 1920, when she married Dr. Wallace Wilson, a distinguished physician.

Ethel Wilson did not begin to write until 1937, when she contributed a story to the *New Statesman and Nation*. Ten years later, with the publication of her first novel, *Hetty Dorval*, her career as a writer was firmly established. It was followed by a series of novels and short stories that remain unique in Canadian literature: *The Innocent Traveller*

(1949), *The Equations of Love: Tuesday and Wednesday and Lily's Story* (1952), *Swamp Angel* (1954), *Love and Salt Water* (1956) and *Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories* (1961).

Mrs. Wilson received the Canada Council Medal, the Lorne Pierce Medal, and the Order of Canada Medal of Service. Perhaps the greatest honour, however, lies in the influence she has had, as a writer and an individual, on such writers as Margaret Lawrence, Alice Munro, and Mordecai Richler. As Robert Weaver, executive producer at CBC-Radio, who published several of Wilson's stories in *Tamarack Review* and in his anthologies, recalls, "I think of her as a civilizing force in Canadian writing, although she was tough-minded too." While Ethel Wilson's influence may have waned in recent years, the decision — made before her death — to hold a symposium on her work at the University of Ottawa this spring indicates that she is not, after all, forgotten.

— "NM M. LEITCH

This is the second book written about Alvin Karpis. The first was called *Public Enemy Number One* (as told to Bill Trent, 1971), the story of Karpis's bank-robbing career, ending with his capture in 1936. It portrayed Karpis as an intelligent man, quiet and patient, a man of dry humour and immense pride. I was expecting *On the Rock* to be a rewarding sequel, a story of pride locked in a cage for 25 years. I was sadly disappointed.

The book has no heart. Karpis is reduced to a hollow narrator who swears too often and puts quotation marks around the sort of "inside" jargon the lay reader might not understand. He always talks in the present tense, as if 25 years of lonely suffering might be condensed into a quick, action-packed novel. The prisoners are always busy, talking or fighting, as if prisoners have no time to be alone, to think, to reflect, to invite the reader into their aching souls. The Alcatraz described in this book is about as tragic as a Toronto Maple Leaf dressing-room after a bad game.

Sure the book has its bright spots, some brutal tight scenes, funny anecdotes: and — in the case of Al Capone — at least a hint of human tenderness. But it should have been much, much more.

Because Karpis was a legend. At one time he was wanted in 14 states on nearly 20 counts of murder. J. Edgar Hoover built his reputation on Karpis's arrest, and Karpis loathed him ever since. Yes, Karpis did

outlive Hoover: he survived for a quarter of a century in America's cruelest prison, and he came out of it folly sane, without sacrificing one ounce of pride. Who is this man? What does he feel? What happens when he sees a woman for the first time in 19 years? According to this book, he just waves. No thought, no stirring of the heart. What happens when Karpis meets his 23-year-old son for the first time? According to this book, he just complains because a guard is present. Who cares about the guard? What did Karpis feel?

In 1962 Karpis was transferred from Alcatraz to McNeil Island Penitentiary where he stayed until his release in 1969. Then he came home to Canada, and he died last year. Yes, he was a bad man and he paid dearly for it. His life, with all of its drama, violence, and heartache should inspire only the highest quality of writing. *On the Rock* is not what it should be, and the fault lies with Robert Livesey, the man whom the story was told to. Livesey may agree that Alvin Karpis was a boring man in real life, that he didn't feel much of anything. If so, then he shouldn't have written this book. But that's beside the point. The important story is the one which Alvin Karpis did not tell to Robert Livesey, the unspoken story that always waits to be touched by an artist. Maybe Livesey wasn't listening closely enough to hear this story. And if he was, then he didn't pain himself to write it down. □

introspective navel-gazing — Kostash is far too professional and accomplished to be that self-indulgent — but personal in the sense of being sympathetic and sometimes selective about her subject matter: The book is heavy with facts, statistics, and quotations; yet through all that comes a picture of agony, struggle, and commitment that is profoundly moving at times. Like many people who missed being 1960s kids I have been increasingly aware over the last decade of the effect on my life of the speaking up and searching for change that people 10 years my junior did as they grew up.

This book serves to emphasize the awareness or perhaps reveal it for anyone who somehow managed to avoid newspapers, television, magazines, Yorkville, Kitsilano, marches, sit-ins, FLQ, SUPA and/or the New Left until now. Not to mention Red Power, SDS, napalm, women's liberation, CYC, free schools, mck festivals, and marijuana.

Much of what happened in Canada during the years 1965 to 1970 was an extension of movements in the United States, but Kostash makes very clear the difference in emphasis that occurred once Canadian youth realized that their causes were not the same and that therefore the solutions would have to be different too. She points out, for example, the Canadian background and immigration that made discussion of Marxist politics a commonplace in the lives of many members of the 1960s generation.

Anecdotes are few, but always relevant. Kostash tells of Abbie Hoffman at the University of Alberta in 1970 beginning a speech in his usual fashion with a variation to suit the location. He yelled, "Fuck Canada!" "Stunned, shocked, resentful, the crowd shifted gears and began booing and hissing," reports Kostash. That crowd learned, as did all those who got involved in the 1960s, that Canada wasn't and didn't have to be the same as America. They couldn't apply American revolutionary philosophy to the Canadian situation, partly because the Canadian revolution was against American imperialism; just as the Quebec revolution they also supported was against English-Canadian imperialism.

A generation questioned, fought, considered, demonstrated and has now gone on in many cases to live lives not unlike those of their parents. But their parents' lives are now different for what those offspring did and their children are no doubt going to be a little more thoughtful, a little more aware than even the children of the 1960s. It is too soon to tell, of course, but then so many Canadianly conservative people would say it's too soon to write about the 1960s; that there hasn't been enough time for history to pass judgement on the importance of events of less than a decade. That may be the case, but in *Long Way from Home* we have an admirable, readable account of that period that will be a valuable record whenever history decides to assess the 1960s.

In *The Big Generation*, futurist John Kettle takes over approximately where Kostash ends. This is a study of the seven

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Woodstock and after

Long Way from Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada, by Myrna Kostash. James Lorimer & Co., 300 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88862380 1).

The Bii Generation, by John Kettle. McClelland & Stewart, 264 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 4517 4).

By VALERIE HAIG-BROWN

IN THE NOTE introducing the bibliography to *Long Way from Home*, Myrna Kostash says: "Unlike the Americans, Canadian writers and publishers have not exhibited the capacity to be endlessly fascinated with the recent history of their own society, not even with the period known as 'the Sixties' — the most turbulent period since the Thirties. American material on this period has been produced in an unbroken stream ... Canadian material on the other hand is patchy."

Long Way from Home goes a fair distance toward filling the gap — not that it can be done by one book alone. Because Kostash is herself a product of the 1960s, this is necessarily a somewhat personal account. Not personal in the sense of

million Canadians born from 1951 to 1966 (which makes them slightly younger than the people who created the climate of the 1960s). But their numbers, and the attitudes they learned from their immediate predecessors, make this group just as significant—perhaps more so, if we are to accept Kettle's predictions.

Kettle, after examining in some detail how these teenagers and young adults are, what their numbers did to the education system, and what that system in turn did to them in its attempts to cope with the overwhelming onslaught, goes on to trace (heir probable effects on the future of Canada. He begins conservatively by assuming these hordes will want the same things as their parents and discusses various ways (such as limiting immigration and encouraging continued economic growth by government stimulus) by which a sort of *status quo* could be maintained. Fortunately, he then goes on to consider the distinct possibility that these people may not want a house, a car, and some decimally expressed number of children, but may instead be more interested in less (part-time) work in service industries, eschew marriage and children and derive satisfaction from having time to enjoy creative or recreational desires. He concludes on a depressing note of a Canada Pension Plan fund exhausted by the turn of the century and The Bii Generation, facing the prospect of no pension for itself, unwilling to raise taxes enough to pay pensions to its parents.

The dust-jacket description of Kettle reports him as having "written close to a million words" on the future. He is mentioned elsewhere as having three children. It would seem that with this much experience and offspring who will presumably be strongly affected by The Big Generation if they are not actually part of it, Kettle might be more involved in his subject than he is. As a lofty examiner of the unknown he is entitled to maintain some distance, but Kettle's distance is such that the book seems to be only a parade of facts (rather weighted in favour of Ontario) and then theory; and, in spite of the drastic changes it predicts for any reader's future, it evokes no strong reactions.

As one who finds the prospect of a radically changed society more interesting than depressing, I would be far more interested in predictions about how the inevitability of change caused by the rising generation might be turned into a positive move rather than a gloomy threat to life-as-we-know-it-now. This is perhaps not the domain of futurists, not is the space of one book enough for all possible speculation even if it is kept within the realm of practical possibility (I am not a science-fiction fan), but surely the future need not be as much of a downer as Kettle predicts. The energy and imagination and anger that caused so much change in the 1960s has, if nothing else, shown us something of what can be accomplished when there is a strong desire for change in even a small segment of the population. □

Labour pains

Working People, by Desmond Morton with Terry Copp, Deneau & Greenberg, illustrated, 349 pages. \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 88879 040 6).

Common Sense for Hard Times, by Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello. Black Rose Books, 277 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 91968199 X).

By MICHAEL DRACHE

WITHIN THE last 10 years, Canadians have been busy rediscovering their own history. It's part of a history that was never lost — just simply ignored. The new history is a history of workers and unions.

Working People, the latest contribution to this new or revised history, covers much ground (perhaps too much), beginning with Canada in the early 19th century and ending with the contemporary Canada of the 1970s. The book is divided into 28 short chronological chapters with 156 illustrations, including many rare and interesting photographs from the Public Archives. Working conditions, wage rates, and living conditions of the 19th-century Canadian worker are all carefully documented.

The earliest unions in Canada appeared on the docks of Halifax and St. John's during the War of 1812, when labour shortages enabled the men to obtain higher wages. Such actions were considered dangerous and unlawful, but war profiteers were convinced that their trade was too important to be disrupted through enforcement. Many of the early craft unions, such as the carpenters, engineers, shoemakers, and printers, were regarded by the government as being semi-legal, conspiratorial, unfair labour combinations that hindered the natural flow of commerce.

Toward the end of the 19th century American unions began to filter into Canada, starting an irreversible process that left the Canadian working people with little or no control over large sections of their own trade-union movement. Consequently much of the labour history of Canada consisted of the Knights of Labour and what they did in Canada, the AFL and what they did in Canada, the IWW and what they did in Canada, the CIO and what they did in Canada, and so forth. A further illustration of the problems incurred was revealed when the Trades and Labour Congress met in Berlin (Kitchener) in 1902. Incredibly, Canadian workers agreed that when an American union existed no Canadian union would ever be recognized. There were still, however, many important national unions, chiefly those in Quebec. They were isolated by language, and would later form the CNTU.

Working People faithfully records many of the strikes, struggles, lock-outs, and wildcats that occurred in Canadian labour history. As a reference work or factual guide, the book is quite good. In describing labour's role in parliamentary politics the same high standards are also apparent, but when dealing with the question of socialism in the trade-union movement the authors' calm objectivity is replaced by a more strident tone. *Working People* deserves to be read and studied. It is a complete account of the evolution of the trade-union movement in Canada and should provide important information on what were relatively uncharted areas on the Canadian historical map.

If we are to believe Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, things may get a lot worse before they get better. Pollution, unemployment, and inflation are the most visible symptoms of economic decline and social decay. The unequal distribution of wealth, otherwise known as capitalism, has led us into a new era of hard times. Inflation and recession dominated the last decade and show no sign of abating, while rising prices, falling wages, and high unemployment have tended to create problems for the workers and increased profits for the owners.

As times get tougher, Brecher and Costello suggest we must either submit or resist. Their ultimate vision is some sort of worker utopia where, after wresting control from the rich, we can all be free from the drudgery of wage labour. In the interim, workers can resist through strikes, sabotage, occupations, and social disruptions.

The tactic is direct action and the ideology is anarcho-syndicalism. Bureaucracy and organization corrupt the people who run them, and only through the spontaneous struggles of the working class will a new order emerge. When the rank and file resist the demands of the trade-union leadership, then political struggle of the highest order is effected. The system must be changed but this change must come from the people rather than leaders, parties, or organizations.

If people, and more specifically working people, are looking for information and analysis, *Common Sense for Hard Times* does provide interesting glimpses into the history of work in America, though I doubt if very many workers would ever buy it, much less read it. The book also explores the nature of work and the profound sense of alienation that many feel toward their jobs. The interviews and profiles of working-class men and women are undoubtedly the strongest features of this particular study. However, when the authors, Jeremy Brecher, a professor at Yale, and Tim Costello, a truck driver, suggest alternatives to the present system, it all seems rather tenuous and insubstantial.

In Chapter Seven, they state:

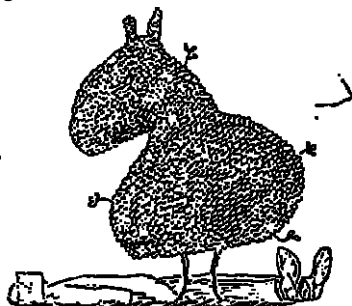
The only way working people can protect themselves from the worst effects of depression is through concerted mass resistance to every encroachment on their condi-

tions of life. Wherever people face a common problem, they will have to take immediate direct action to combat it.

And again, in the final chapter, they proclaim:

Those who control American society today are bound to continue trying to solve their problems by taking a larger share of what workers produce. . . . The key to resisting their attempts is to make strikes, blockades, street actions, and other tactics already in use, the tools of a concerned social movement in which all the various actions of working people to meet their needs are recognized as part of a common struggle.

As a study of the American working class in the work environment, Brecher and Costello have produced an interesting and insightful document. The problems of industrial capitalism are indeed complex. are the solutions. Taken with that caveat, this book should complement and further enhance other studies of the American working class. □



Minding their Q's and A's

For Openers: Conversations with 24 Canadian Writers, by Allan Twigg, Harbour Publishing, 271 pages. \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 920080 07 3).

By MICHAEL DRACHE

BOOKS ABOUT BOOKS, or rather books about writers who write books, generally have no middle ground: they are either terribly good or terribly poor. Unfortunately *For Openers*, a collection of 24 conversations with Canadian writers by Allan Twigg, falls in the latter category. Writers are an elusive, complicated, and difficult group of artists, and it takes a special sort of insight to capture their presence. The redoubtable Mr. Twigg seems to have been left standing on the duck when the boat sailed, though, it would seem that all the writers had a fine time discussing their lives and their works.

Readers, on the other hand, are more likely to be bored, puzzled, and baffled at the host of inept questions that proliferate the pages. Al Purdy is asked what his

ambitions were as a kid. Was he good in school? Did he ever write a novel? Was he bum with a talent for writing? In a successful interview these things are revealed through the course of events. This type of sophomoric interrogation is downright embarrassing and, for people who seek to know the minds of the real men and women behind their characters, positively frustrating. Lane Rule is asked whether it is important to keep in touch with other writers! Leonard Cohen is asked whether he votes. Hugh MacLennan is questioned about bilingualism. Dennis Lee is queried about the value of *Sesame Street*. In fairness to Twigg, there are good questions posed in his book but there are far too few of them. The intrigue of what lies behind the mask and forms the literary persona is never effectively challenged.

For Openers also attempts to deal with 24 writers, an impossible task for a book of its limited size. This lack of space has given the book a superficial quality. The choice of authors is also questionable: neither Earle Bimey nor Morley Callaghan is included. And, astonishingly there is no bibliography for any of the authors presented. Twigg has decided that recommending books to readers is not within his jurisdiction.

Twigg (or "T" as he constantly refers to himself throughout his book) says: "here . . . is a book I wish I had been given when I was in high school and university in the '60s or discovering Canadian literature in the '70s." One wonders whether this type of

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sentiment is widely held. It's appalling to believe that people can't approach literature without a roadmap in their hands. However, given the condition of literary art in Canada, its accessibility will ultimately rest on its excellence, which will continue to attract an audience with or without the help of promoters. □

From ragtime to mood indigo

Loon Lake, by E. L. Doctorow, Random House. 258 pages, \$15.50 cloth (ISBN 0 39450691 X).

By DOUGLAS HILL

E. L. DOCTOROW seems preoccupied, to his good fortune and ours, with one dominant subject: the expansion of personality from the constrictions of self out into the turbulence of family, community, society, history. The novels he's produced, from *Welcome to Hard Times* and *The Book of Daniel to Ragtime* and the present work, have been thoroughly absorbing fictions, provocative social documents, and challenging stylistic inventions.

The plot of *Loon Lake* is intricate but intriguing. A young man from Paterson, New Jersey, known only as Joe until the final page of the novel, leaves the dreary poverty of his home for the uncertainties of the mad. It's the 1930s, the height of the Depression: Joe is by turns delivery-boy, tramp, carnival roustabout, kept man (briefly), and tramp again. Lost one night somewhere in the Adirondacks, wailing to jump a train on a spur line, he sees a splendid private railway car roll by, at one window wealthy men and women drinking and talking, at another a blonde girl, naked, holding a white dress before a mirror. Joe chooses this vision over despair and self-destruction, and in the morning walks down the single track. He comes to Loon Lake, the magnificent estate of the millionaire industrialist F. W. Bennett. It's "the wilderness as luxury" in the Adirondacks grand style: compare J.C. Oates, *Bellefleur*.

Joe finds casual employment at Loon



Lake, and meets and becomes involved with an assortment of the characters who come there—gamblers and mobsters, the estate's poet-in-residence, Bennett's aviatrix wife, the blonde girl. He leaves—escapes, really—and ultimately returns. The story unfolds in richly textured patterns. There are wonderful surprises, twists and turns of plot, revelations of identity, recurring images. The narrative doubles and redoubles; information is given, snatched away, the? approached pages later from a different angle, h's demanding reading, but never tiresomely so.

Doctorow employs two main narrators—Joe and the poet, Warren Penfield. (There are also several interchapters of Penfield's poetry, including his magnum opus, *Loon Lake*.) Joe's voice comes first and stays longest. Stylized and often elliptical, it's energetic to the point of violence, self-dramatizing, anguished, and it pitches the reader headlong into events. It's a voice for action, for documentary, and for some unexpectedly poignant lyrical flashes. If there are occasionally echoes of the American bardic visionaries, of Whitman and Woody Guthrie and Dylan, it's because Doctorow is self-consciously a fictional

on the racks

by Paul Stuewe

Of islands and myths: from Hodgins's Vancouver to Mowat's Newfoundland

WHAT IS OR ISN'T "magic realism" is a question that seems to be preoccupying academics these days, since the concept's origins in the murky world of an criticism and superficially paradoxical conjunction of "magic" and "realism" can hardly fail to attract the upscale intellectual. What is abundantly clear is the resonance magical events—perhaps less mystifyingly defined as phenomena that are not understood at the time of occurrence—add to the real worlds constructed by Jack Hodgins, whose *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne (Signet, \$2.95)* is an engaging addition to a promising body of work. The magic here isn't always as spontaneous and subtly portentous as it is in the fiction of the South American masters of the form, and Hodgins often opts for playing it cute when something closet to dramatic tension would better serve the narrative, but the convincing West Coast settings, colourful humay canvas, and robust humour of his books make them all worth reading. Unlike those literati whose work derives from the criticism of Northrop Frye, Hodgins understands that human experience generates myth rather than via versa, and as a result his fiction has an intrinsic vitality that sharply distinguishes it from the efforts of the myth-into-life mob.

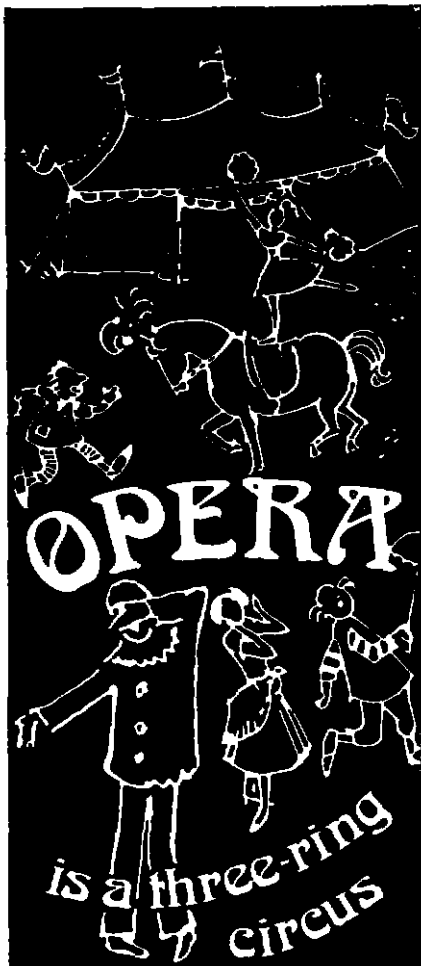
populist, a celebrator of the people, a singer of their songs.

What's striking about *Loon Lake* is its concern with composition. Forms of that word itself occur often, and words the author associates with it: *compute, comrade, commingle, come*, and so on. Doctorow has "composed" his story; he's put the parts of it together with an eye to rhythm, balance, and proportion. And the lives themselves compose, experience composes, a principle of composition informs the novel's vision. For example: "I have in my life just three times seen faces in dark light, at dusk or at dawn, or against a white pillow, in which the fear of life was so profoundly accurate, like an animal's perfect apprehension, that it encompassed its opposite and became the gallantry to break your heart." There are numerous instances of scenes and images composed this way.

Loon Lake is better than *Ragtime*, as good as *The Book of Daniel*. It evokes myth and history with controlled force; it tries to compose our culture and our lives, as Wallace Stevens does, around perceptions. "The cry of loons once heard," one bit of a Penfield poem ends, "is not forgotten." Moments in *Loon Lake* are like that. □

This is precisely the problem that renders C. W. Nicol's *The White Shaman (Seal, \$2.50)* less successful than it might be, since the author's literary skills are otherwise impressive and the Arctic backgrounds are vividly sketched. But the sense that the plot has been imposed rather than apprehended reduces the book to the level of a very artificial allegory indeed, and also robs its human context of the credibility essential to effective fictional creation. There's nothing at all allegorical about the late Judy La Marsh's *A Right Honourable Lady (Seal, \$2.75)*, a tale of inside-Ottawa shenanigans that is pretty awful if taken as a novel and moderately interesting if taken as political sociology, and has the undeniable appeal of high-class gossip masquerading as low-rent fiction. Also providing a modicum of entertainment is Jack MacLeod's *Zinger & Me (PaperJacks, \$2.95)*, an offbeat epistolary opus wherein some amusing limericks periodically enliven a less than engrossing exchange of views on the more serious—and decidedly less magical—issues of the day.

Thriller-wise it's a positively pedestrian period, with the partial exceptions of Charles Templeton's *The Kidnapping of the President (Seal, \$2.50)*, a professional if gratuitously reactionary piece of work.



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and Ian Adams's **End Game in Paris** (PaperJacks, \$2.75), a pretentious but imaginatively constructed **suspenser** that could have been outstanding with a bit more attention to **avoiding** stereotypical **detail**. **More representative of** the general **run** of domestic disasters in this **area** are Frank Smith's **Corpse In Handcuffs** (PaperJacks, \$2.50) and James Grant's **The Ransom Commando** (PaperJacks, \$2.50), two **excruciatingly predictable** kidnap capers mucking about with the **procedural and** hardboiled schools of the genre, **respectively**.

Ben, Wicks' **Book of Losers** (Seal, \$2.50) is a mildly **entertaining** compilation of media **messages** and Wicks's drawings that should do for a **once-over-lightly** at the cottage. **Losers also figure** as the perpetrators of the notable Canadian **robberies** described in Fred McClement's **Heist** (PaperJacks, 52.95), and **are** here sketched with quickness and **dispatch** if perhaps excessive glibness in the **adjective** department. Both losers and winners **necessarily** people the pages of Jim. **Proudfoot's Pm Hockey NHL 80/81** (PaperJacks, \$5.95), the usual everything you wanted to know and a lot you didn't guide to shooting and scoring. while the resident chef in **my household** advises that Madame **Benoit Cooks at Home** (PaperJacks, \$3.95) deserves a gold medal in the culinary depart-

ment. The most winning thing **about William Sclater's Haida** (PaperJacks, 55.95), is **Grant Macdonald's illustrations**: they're wretchedly **reproduced**, but still a **valuable** complement to a text that **can most** charitably be described as **functional**.

The best non-fiction news on the **racks** is a mind-boggling multiplicity of **Mowats or**, if you will, a line **fardel of Farleys**, which **highlight** three among the several areas of expertise of one of our **most** accomplished authors. And **No Birds Sang** (Seal, 92.95), the only one making its first **softcover** appearance, is an extremely **powerful** and superbly written reminiscence of the **Second World War**; **The Boat Who Wouldn't Float** (Seal, \$2.75) **narrates** some amusing misadventures with a mischievous schooner on the Newfoundland **coast**; and **The Desperate People** (Seal, 52.75) is a sequel to **People of the Deer**, and like it speaks with articulate **passion** about the plight of a native **culture** on the edge of extinction. In **their different** ways they **all have something** important to say about what we should be doing **with** this muddled **mélange of a** country, and they do it in such an enjoyable **fashion** that I'm constantly struck by how excellence and entertainment **can** be combined in the work of a skilled writer. In any went, more **Mowats please**. Mr. Seal, and **easy on the predigested pap** that never really **pleases anyone for very long**. □

first impressions

by Douglas Hill

Exercises in style: self-indulgent fluff in Montreal and high craft in, uh, where?

MY REACTION to Naughts and C- by Ron **Graham** (Canton Press, 157 pages, 58.95 paper), is mixed, **but** mostly bad. At times I could apprehend wit, **erudition**, and **fine** writing in the author's **attempts** to invent and sustain topical farce. **More** often I was put off by the novel's pretentious and supercilious self-indulgence.

The plot is political allegory, son of. Set in October, 1970, in and **around Montreal**, it begins **with** the death by crucifixion of **Laura Alpo**, Canada's wealthiest woman, **the same day a diplomat named Cross** (get it?) is **kidnapped**. **There's** a Rime **Mover** at the country's controls, and a terrorist conspiracy (the **Fluke**) terrifying him. **There's also** Laura's bizarre household (a **sloth**, incestuous twins named Motorola and Hubcap, a blue butler, and so **forth**) and a **policeman named Herman Newt**. **Depend-**in8 upon your mood and taste, I suppose, this all might be **uproarious**.

Stylistically, too, the novel is a **mixed** bag. I **admired** some of the jokes and word-play, some of the **turns of phrase** and lunatic conceits. **But a lot of it is just fluff; it seems** to advance only the author's unselective **fancies** and his typewriter ribbon.

Perhaps we're to take all the flaws of **superficiality** and imprecision and sophomoric cuteness **as** belonging to the narrator, a film-maker **named Armadeus Hawk**; **we're to** take the whole thing, that is, as tongue-&-cheek. I find this hard to **do**, **since** such a **reading** would undercut the considerable structure of political and social niticism Graham seems **to** be trying to **raise**.

Technique without a **core** — that's my verdict. The **talent's here**, moving in **several** directions **at** once. But the form-subject, plot, formula, whatever- that **would** allow Graham's **efforts** to cohere into something instructive or Funny or moving is lacking. **Naughts and Crosses** leaves the impression of an exercise in self-satisfied shallowness. I didn't like the book.

* * *

I **DID LIKE** Fat Woman, by Leon **Rooke** (Oberon, 174 pages, \$15.00 cloth, \$6.95 paper), though it's **not**, as the jacket claims, "simply told, with a minimum of **decora-**tion." **It may appear this way, but the novel has the simplicity of high craft and a stylistic**

integrity that comes from careful and densely figured language.

Ella Mae Hopkins is indeed fat. She has a husband, Edward, two awful children, and a compulsion to stuff her face. Edward loves her but worries, her sons tease her cruelly, her poisonous next-door neighbor one-ups her. For some reason Edward, an aimlessly energetic handyman, has boarded up their bed&win&w. This incident precipitates a crisis in Ella Mae and focuses the plot of the novel.

We have Ella Mae's consciousness throughout, and Rooke, a world-class short-story writer, has a sure touch with it. For example:

She had the feeling sometimes, had it now, that when God slept — or if He got out of stubbornness just up and turned His back on the human race — the sky was left looking this way: cold and remote and so chillingly placid that all of it went inside you and made you want to cry or beat your head against the wall out of plain hopelessness.

Ella Mae and company are, in Flannery O'Connor's phrase, "good country people." Where in the country they're located is a bit puzzling. It feels and sounds definitely American, like Georgia or South Carolina. But nothing is specified, and there are references to the Blue Jays and the Halifax bus, so maybe it's rural Canada. The ambiguity doesn't really matter except that it's mildly disorienting, and if Rooke had chosen to indicate where the story is set, a reader might more easily comprehend its sensibility, which seems Bible Belt all the way.

Rooke has produced a *tour de force* of voice, character, and place that's both funny and moving. It's arguable that his story — the personal, moral, or social meanings Ella Mae's life reflects — isn't substantial enough to deserve all the style. I think it is, but others may feel that *Fat Woman*, with all its virtues, is a shon story

grown big. Compare it with W. D. Valgardson's Gentle *Sinners*, another recent first novel by a master of short fiction, and see what you think.

* * *

I'LL OFFER ONLY a brief comment here about *Blackrobe*, by Robert E. Wall (Seal Books, 359 pages, \$2.95 paper; Personal Library, \$16.95 cloth), since the author and his project are described and the novel's plot summarized elsewhere in this issue (see page five).

As fiction, *Blackrobe* is no better and no worse than competent. The story is fast-moving and panoramic, with stereotyped characters and the sort of obligatory scenes

— torture, rape, masturbation, epidemic, flagellation — one enjoys probing for, like raisins in the pudding. Still and all, it's pretty bland stuff, though after some of the excesses we've recently been visited with in the name of historical fiction, that may not be a fault.

As popularized romantic history, the book seems unexceptionable. I presume it's all accurate, in detail and scope, but I don't imagine the intended readership will worry much about that. They should worry more about the alarming number of coincidences in the plot or the pitch of tragic nobility at which everyone regularly speaks. But after the fanfare of the flyleaf — "Intrigue and Indians, politicians and priests!" — what can one expect? □

a thousand words

by Christopher Hume

Trick photography, past and present: from the 'vamp in Atwood to the imp in Maynard

MY COFFEE TABLE and I have come through a lot together (there have been moments when we both thought we'd be crushed under the weight of all these books), but this time it was something altogether different. I had never seen anything quite like it.

It — a book entitled *Women of Canada* (Van Nostrand Reinhold/RotoVision, 203 pages, \$55.00 cloth) — is the work of George Abbott, makeup artist, and Gordon Hay, fashion photographer. The notes on the inside cover tell us that "Both believe that within every woman there is a fantasy." Sounds pretty corny, but the results, not the idea behind them, are what make this book so extraordinary. All they have done is take 100 Canadian women — from Sharon Acker to Judy Wong — and photograph them made up by Abbott. Many of those included — Barbara Frum, Karen Kain, Joyce Davidson, for example — are well known (although certainly not necessarily either for being beautiful or glamorous). Others are not. In addition to the portrait by Hall we get what might be called a "before" shot, plus a short text on each woman.

For once I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that the book must be seen to be believed. What these two men can do to a woman's appearance is incredible. The most dramatic change in the whole collection is the one undergone by Margaret Atwood. First we look at the familiar Atwood face: the hair needs combing and the smile seems tight, but the effect is pleasant enough. "The life of a writer," the blurb begins, "is not outwardly glamorous at all. . . ." We've read it before and don't believe a word of it. Then we turn to the Abbott/Hall version of At&D. This photograph alone justifies the price. She is magnificent, overwhelming, beautiful

enough to be frightening. Margaret Atwood transformed into Helen of Troy. The photograph is a masterpiece. I could go on, but won't.

Rick Butler's *Vanishing Canada* (Clarke Irwin, 210 pages, \$19.95 cloth) offers a collection of 213 photographs, all taken between 1852 and 1914. Butler searched the country high and low for them. His major concern was that they not be posed. He chose well and his book provides a unique record of Canada during the first decades of its existence.

At this same time in Victoria, B.C., there lived a rather strange woman, a photographer, who spent a lot of energy shooting some bizarre snaps. Her name was Hannah Maynard and until Claire Weissman Wilks happened across her work while "sifting through prints and glass plates in the Provincial Archives in Victoria" she had been all but completely forgotten. Wilks gathered enough of Maynard's photographs (along with some by Hannah's husband, Richard) to put together *The Magic Box: The Eccentric Genius of Hannah Maynard* (Exile, 149 pages, \$24.95 cloth). Much of Miss Maynard's work consisted of conventional family portraiture and pictures of babies, but in her more creative moments Hannah got photographically weird. In one shot she pours her double a cup of tea while a third Miss Maynard, leaning out from a frame above the seated Hannahs, pours tea onto one of their heads. Aside from her technical mastery of her medium, I think that what gives Miss Maynard's photography its appeal is her sense of humour. Hannah the imp mocks Hannah the proper Victorian. She shows she has a keen awareness of the ridiculous. And in an age stuffed to bursting with righteousness and pomposity, Maynard's little jokes —



eccentric and surreal as they were — must have provided her with no small degree of relief.

The West Coast continues to be celebrated. James Lorimer & Co. and the National Museum of Man have produced the third in their History of Canadian Cities Series. **Vancouver: An Illustrated History** (190 pages, \$24.95 cloth) by Patricia E. Roy. No one could accuse the book of not being thorough and well illustrated. It is clearly the work of an unashamed Vancouver lover. George Woodcock's **A Picture History of British Columbia** (Hurtig, 240 pages, \$18.95 cloth) struck me as the more interesting of the two. But then, I like looking at pictures. And because these are so well chosen the reader (viewer?) comes away with a good idea of what life was like during the different periods of B.C.'s development. Woodcock's text, which is always quick and readable, completes a production that could serve as a model for others of the sun.

Sacred Places: British Columbia's Early Churches (Douglas & McIntyre, 175 pages, \$29.95 cloth), says its author, Barry Downs, "is the result of a few romantic notions I have as an architect about historic structures, their frailty and the interesting characters who put them together and used them." For the last 10 years Downs has been travelling throughout B.C. indulging his love for old buildings. He decided on churches because, he says, "I realized it was the church that best represented the

cultural values of the period and that remained the best preserved in its original form." Whether or not one agrees, **Sacred Places** is a very handsome, warm and colourful book.

The last word belongs to Philip T. Young's **The Look of Music** (Douglas & McIntyre, 240 pages, \$16.95 paper and \$29.95 cloth), which, as Young points out, is actually the catalogue of a "exhibition at

the Centennial Museum in Vancouver until April, 1981. The show consists of hundreds of musical instruments dating from 1500 to 1900. Included are violins by Stradivari, many early pianos, harpsichords, and rackett as well as Adolphe Sax's wonderful multi-bell cornet. (It worked fine but was just too heavy and awkward to use.) Young's text never fails to be informative and delightful. □

interview

by Alan Pearson

When lawyer Richard Rohmer pleads a case in his novels, the message is the medium

RICHARD ROHMER is a lawyer, Brigadier General, former chairman of the Ontario Royal Commission on Book Publishing, and best-selling novelist. His thrillers (*Ultimatum*, *Exxoneration*, *Balls*, and most recently, *Periscope Red*) are written with an insider's knowledge of the energy industry and the military, and narrated with apostolic fervour. Bum in Hamilton, Ont., in 1924, and a graduate of the University of Western Ontario and Osgoode Hall, Rohmer is a man of compact height who consistently presents to the world a conservatively business-suited image. He recently spoke to Alan Pearson in his little-used, unmodern, uncanny office in the Bay and King Streets district of Toronto:

Books in Canada: Why do you write? Aren't the law and the military enough?

Rohmer: The military and the law are enough. I write because there are things I want to say.

BiC: Do ideas interest you more than people?

Rohmer: Oh indeed. And that's one of the things that literary people across the country can't comprehend. I'm more interested in ideas than I am in portraying people. That is clearly seen in most of my books. However, I think that in *Periscope Red*, I'm achieving a bit more of a balance. But what I'm trying to do when I write a novel is communicate a message, or a series of messages. That's the essential part of my writing.

BiC: Are people more interested in the ideas in books than in the nuances of personal relationships?

Rohmer: It depends on what segment of the reading market one is talking about. There's a tendency to talk about the reading market as a broad general one, but that's not the way it is. There's a substantial market for people who write the way I write; obviously. Just as there is for the kind of thing Atwood writes, or Richler writes. Quite often they don't overlap.

BiC: What are your book sales in Canada?

Rohmer: They range from 25,000 to 30,000 in hardcover; and in paperback

anything from 50,000 to 100,000.

BiC: Most people who write seek longevity for their work. Ideas are the most perishable part of a novel. They're apt to make books obsolescent.

Rohmer: I don't seek longevity. I'm addressing myself to current problems. Most of my fiction is concerned with the short-term future.

BiC: Which contemporary author do you particularly admire?

Rohmer: Frederick Forsyth. He researches extremely well and has a direct, "no-nonsense" prose style I admire. I like to write along the same lines myself.

BiC: Do you read much fiction?

Rohmer: Not a great deal. I haven't time.

BiC: How do you write your books? Do you prepare a detailed outline of each chapter?

Rohmer: No. I don't. I know what I want to write. I decide first on the basic concept, or message. Then I research it in terms of how to develop the plot in the most effective way. The, when I have my research ready....



Richard Rohmer

BE: Do you do your own research?

Rohmer: Yes. I do 98 per cent of it. Then, when I'm ready to write I leave the country, I go away. I have so much going on here that I just can't...

BiC: Where do you go?



DUNCTON WOOD, a novel by William Horwood, is the story of a society that has lost its spirit and of the remarkable struggle to restore it. A mystical adventure with a message for all humankind.

\$3.95



BALLANTINE BOOKS

Rohmer: Barbados or Florida. While I'm there for several weeks I break the back of what I want to get done, though of course I don't finish it all. At least, I get a first good shot at it.

BiC: *What methods of writing do you use?*

Rohmer: It's combination of longhand and dictation. The dictation takes me just 'as long to do as handwriting. I use a Philips dictaphone and to fill a half-hour tape takes me between five and six hours. I stop, think, and go on. Then I backtrack and correct. It's a long, hard process.

BiC: *What is your strength and your weakness as a writer?*

Rohmer: My strength is that the fiction I write is based on fact, and the kind of facts I'm dealing with are of fundamental importance to people generally. My readers can relate very much to the issues I raise. As for my weakness, well, I wouldn't describe it as such. It's simply that there's no one in the country writing in the way I do. Consequently it's quite removed from the "literary" style and this makes me an anomaly, and therefore difficult for the literary elite and critics to deal with. I'm quite deliberately not trying to write a conventional literary novel. I wish critics would judge me according to what I'm trying to do, rather than what they think I should be trying to do.

BiC: *What percentage of your income is derived from books?*

Rohmer: Probably 50 per cent by now.

BiC: *Would you like to be a full-time writer?*

Rohmer: No. There are too many other things to do in life. I have other careers that are going well. I wouldn't want the life of a full-time writer.

BiC: *How do you divide your time between the law, the military, and writing.*

Rohmer: The military takes up roughly 110 days per year.

BiC: *Do you get paid for that?*

Rohmer: Yes. But in terms of what I could make as a lawyer it doesn't even begin to compare. I suppose writing takes up 20 per cent of my time and the law another 20 per cent. □

Notes and comments

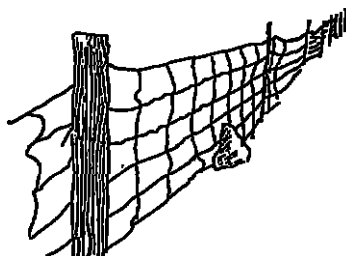
WE HAVE USUALLY tried to avoid the self-indulgent habit of drawing our readers' attention to changes among the editorial staff of *Books in Canada* beyond, perhaps, a line or two in our regular contributors column. But some changes are so significant that it would be even less graceful not to acknowledge them. The case at hand is the departure of Douglas Marshall from the office of editor of this magazine.

Marshall was one of the founding editors

of *Books in Canada* — the only founding editor to stay with the magazine throughout its 10-year history. As such, his voice and personality have consistently dominated its contents. Though he sewed originally as associate editor (he became editor, somewhat reluctantly, in 1973 upon the resignation of Val Clery), his mark was on the magazine from the beginning, because of the wealth of expertise he brought from service as a reporter and correspondent for the *Canadian Press* and as writer, editor, and critic for *Maclean's* in the years before it became a news magazine. His tenure spanned a particularly turbulent decade, both for the magazine and book-publishing businesses. Without Marshall's talents during this period, *Books in Canada* almost certainly would have ceased to exist.

Marshall's relationship with the publishing community has not always been entirely & dial, largely because of the standards that he, through *Books in Canada*, demanded from them. Yet, despite this stress — and perhaps in recognition of those standards — he always managed to maintain the support of the book industry, upon which the magazine necessarily depends. Often his standard-bearers have been well-established critics and some of the country's best-known professional journalists, many of whom are his friends. But Marshall also viewed the magazine as a proving ground for a large number of young, untried writers, some of whom now are enjoying the rewards of full-time writing and editing careers. Among the many telephone calls that came to his office were frequent requests from other editors for him to recommend the services of talented new journalists he had discovered and befriended. It was probably inevitable that someday one of those calls would toll for him — as it turned out, an offer to become editor of *Good Age*, an ambitious new magazine for older people — and that he should leave *Books in Canada*.

Around the magazine's offices and in the nearby pubs and restaurants, where he was often to be found, Marshall's outlook tended to seem gloomy — a reflection, in part, of the calamitous financial pressures that plague the publishing industry. Yet, underneath, he is a ceaseless optimist. Neat deadlines, when the rest of the staff were close to despair (a not-uncommon predicament), Marshall was always sure that the next morning's mail would miraculously bring the thoughtful feature article or well-turned review that would become the centrepiece for that month's issue. As press time loomed, he had a knack for making such wishful thinking come true, usually at



the last minute. It is no coincidence that the first two Fiona Mee awards for literary journalism went to entrants who had written important profiles (of Mavis Gallant and Robert Weaver) for this magazine. Of course, both were articles in which Marshall had actively participated.

Though he has often proclaimed himself a liberated, modern man, Marshall cherishes an old-fashioned code of loyalty and honour that demands unquestioning fidelity to his friends. Such generosity is difficult not to reciprocate. We wish him well. His editorial pencil will be missed, but he will remain this magazine's godfather. □

Letters to the Editor

WEINBERGER'S WIT

Sir:

Thanks for David Weinberger's exceedingly clever (most of it obvious to me) "A reviewer's glossary" in October. Implicitly (falling to make his real meaning clear), Weinberger chastens reviewers for trite phrasing (I could do better) and cautious judgements (it seems to me). May we all heed his words (and plagiarize them frequently)! Keep the good stuff coming (at last).

Ron Miles
Kamloops, B.C.

WELCOME TO THE '80s

Sir:

In your all-too-glib and sarcastic reply to Barbara Halpern Martineau's letter (December), you neglected two rather important issues. Wonder Woman is not a "Lady," just as the comic is not called "Supergentleman." Wonder Woman is also, largely, a patriarchal creation. Secondly, you concede, "Ms. Martineau may have a point if she is talking about 1980." Sir, may I inform you that it has been 1980 for an entire year now. It has not been 1893 or 1924 for quite some time. Lost in that great sleep of patriarchal, linguistic washover, you have, doubtless, not noticed.

D. Anger
Toronto

CanWit No. 60

WE REGRET THAT, in the book-review business, few critics are satisfied with one word when a dozen will do. Though there are precedents for abbreviated film reviews — such as Paul Gottlieb's "Equus: Un-stable boy" and Tim Hopkin's "8-1/2: Nein!" — few literary mini-reviews come to mind, beyond Val Clery's pithy comment on a novel by Marian Engel, "Bear, I just couldn't." Aspiring miniaturists are invited to submit one-line reviews of any Canadian

bock. The winner will receive \$25. Address: CanWit No. 60, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 1N4. The deadline is March 1.

RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 58

IT ISN'T surprising that most of the responses to our request for re-fabricated nursery rhymes dealing with the constitution debates were distinguishable by their region of origin: those from the East were apathetic, while those from the West were downright antagonistic. Some dealt with Western separation, others were about Grit policies in general. The winner, submitted by W. P. Kinsella from Calgary, dealt (as many of his short stories do) with all the issues all at once:

"Oh Fuddle Duddle, the hell with the muddle,
I'm singing a patriate tune,
Close off the debate. let the West separate,
You'll all be speaking French soon."

Honourable mentions:

Old Pierre was a miserly old negotiator
And a miserly old negotiator was he;
He called for provincial resources.
And he called for his oil taxes,
And he called for his ministers three.

Every minister, he had a constitutional amendment

And a very fine amendment had he;
Fuddle duddle, fuddle duddle, went the ministers.

Oh, there's none so rare,
As can compare
With Pierre and his ministers three!

— Albert Stray, London, Ont.

Prairie, Prairie
Quite contrary,

Scorns the cards you've dealt,
And though we'd hate
To separate

We know how Margaret felt!
— P. Colleen Archer, Omamee, Oa.

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 1 N4. Phone: (416) 363-5426.

OLD AND RARE BOOKS. Canadiana catalogues. Heritage Books, 3436 6 St. S.W., Calgary, Alberta T2S 2M4.

OUT OF PRINT BOOKS. Canadian, historical and literary. Catalogues free on request. Huronia-Canadiana Books, Box 685, Alliston, Ont. L0M 1A0.

WEE GIANT. a literary magazine is seeking manuscripts of poetry, fiction (under 2,600 words) and art from new and established writers. Subscriptions 3 issues \$4.00. Sample copy \$1.00. Address: Margaret Saunders, Editor, 176 Bond St. N., Hamilton, Ontario L8S 3W6.

Rock-a-bye baby, Canadian tot:
You've no constitution, believe it or not,
Politicians wrangle. Sleep if you can.
If you're lucky you'll have one by the time you're
a mm.

All around old parliament hill
The politicians are frantic
Debating whether to bring the act
To this side of the Atlantic.
But we don't have a weasel.
Our symbol's an achiever.
We'll have our BNA swam back
In the front teeth of our beaver.

— Carol Maylon, Willowdale, Or.

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

80: Best Canadian Stories, edited by Clark Blaise and John Metcalf. Oberon. New stories by Mavis Gallant, Alice Munro, and Leon Rooke stand out in Oberon's annual collection. Some newer writers to watch: Terence Byrnes, Linda Svendsen, and Guy Vanderhaeghe.

Seahorse, by Graham Petrie, Academic Press. A fine first novel set in an isolated seaside village, whose strange folk and mysterious happenings are expertly handled.

NON-FICTION

The Passionate Observer, by Donald Creighton. McClelland & Stewart. A posthumous collection of the historian's reviews, addresses, articles, and comments on his friends and colleagues. Creighton writes as always with the skill and care of a novelist, whether he is eulogizing Harold Innis or sticking pins in Mackenzie King. Great fun from a great thinker.

POETRY

Yarrow, by Robert Currie. Oberon. A finer focus on the themes and images of Currie's first book, *Diving into Fire*: boyhood traumas that gain a kind of painful clarity through instant searing recollection.

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:

Amanda the Gorilla, by Judy Ross, D.C. Heath.
And No Birds Sang, by Farley Mowat, Seal Books.
Blackrobe, by Robert Wall, Seal.

The Boat Who Wouldn't Float, by Farley Mowat, Seal Books.

The Buffalo Hunt, by Donald and Eleanor Swanson, illustrated by James Tugham, PMA.

Bull of the Woods, by Gordon Gibson with Carol Rentson, Douglas & McIntyre.

Castor the Beaver, by Judy Ross, D.C. Heath.

Chuck Davis' Vancouver Appointment Book, New Star Books.

A Citizen's Guide to the Constitutional Question, by Richard Simeon, Gage Publishing.

Dear Sam: Advice to the Working Woman, by Sam Ion, Personal Library.

Education for Development or Underdevelopment?, by M. K. Bacchus, Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

For Openers: Conversations with 24 Canadian Writers, by Alan Twigg, Harbour Publishing.

Gastown Stories, by Mary Drew, illustrated by Norman Drew, NC Press.

Getting Organized: Building a Union, by Mary Cornish and Laurel Ritchie, The Women's Press.

Grant MacEwan's Illustrated History of Western Canadian Agriculture, Western Producer Prairie Books.

The Great Building Bee, by Jacques Hébert and Maurice F. Strong, General.

Great Expectations: The European Vision in Nova Scotia 1749-1848, by Mary Sparling, Art Gallery, Mount Saint Vincent University.

The Hawrylyk Process, by Robert Allen, The Porcupine's Quill.

Helix: Famous Canadian Robberies, by Fred McClelland, PaperJacks.

Heart Bourassa, by A. Roy Petrie, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

Hidden in the Household, edited by Bonnie Fox, The Women's Press.

The Immortals, by Ed Kleiman, NeWest Press.

Jerry Potts, by D. Bruce Sealy, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

Landwash Days, by Tom Dave, Newfoundland Book Publishers.

Letitia Hargrave and Life in the Fur Trade, by Barbara and Michael Angel, The Book Society of Canada.

The Life and Art of Jackson Beardy, by Kenneth Hughes, James Lorimer.

Little Paradise, by Gottlieb Leibbrandt, Allprint.

Madame Benoit Cooks At Home, by Jehane Benoit, PaperJacks.

La Maison des Pionniers, by Rosemary Neering and Stan Garrod, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

Mama Never Cooked Like This, by Susan Mendelson, Tolonbooks.

Mastering Effective English (4th edition), by Margaret H. Larock, et al. Copp Clark Pitman.

Matthew Bullie Begbie, by David Ricardo Williams, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

Medical Habits, by David F. Horrobin, Eden Press.

Michif's New Year, by Shelley Tsuzika, illustrated by Ron Berg, PMA.

The Montreal Canadiens, by Claude Mouton, Van Nostrand Reinhold.

My Island Pictures, by A. L. Morrison, Ragweed Press.

Native Land Claims, by Ben Swankey, Communist Party of Canada.

The Nootka Connection, by Derek Pethick, Douglas & McIntyre.

Nothing, Someone & You, by Robin Woodsworth Carlsén, The Soowanna Press.

Paper Boy, by Stuart Keite, Clarke Irwin.

Passionate Spirits, by Rebecca Sisler, Clarke Irwin.

Paul Bunyan, by John D. Robins, edited by Edith Fowke, NC Press.

People of the Ice, by Heather Smith Siska, Douglas & McIntyre.

Physical Science, by Janet E. Garden and Marion J. Gadsby, Wiley.

Pioneers and Gentlewomen of British North America, 1713-1867, edited by Beth Light and Alison Frenchie, New Hogtown Press.

Place Names of Manitoba, by Penny Ham, Western Producer Prairie Books.

The Poets of Prince Edward Island, edited by Wayne Wright, Ragweed Press.

A Pour of Rain, by Helena Meilleur, Sono Nis Press.

The Pulp Mill, by Barry McKinnon, Repository Press.

Punk Shots, by Billi H. King, Fiddlehead.

Reading the Bible as History, by Theodore Plantinga, G.R. Welch.

The Runrunners: A Prohibition Scrapbook, by C. H. Gervais, Firefly Books.

Salish Weaving, by Paula Gustafson, Douglas & McIntyre.

Shandy, by David S. Williamson, Queenston House.

Sign Language, by Ken Belford, Repository/Gorse Press.

Softwords Complete Guide to Punctuation, Press Forcepic.

Son of the Salmon People, by Hubert Evans, Harbour Publishing.

Sons of the Arctic, by Doug Wilkinson, Clarke Irwin.

Stone Soup, edited by Carol Pastanek and Allen Sutherland, illustrated by Heidi Campbell, The Women's Press.

Studies in Robertson Davies Deptford Trilogy, edited by Robert G. Lawrence and Samuel L. Macey, English Literary Series.

Stundogs: Stories from Saskatchewan, edited by Robert Kruech, Coteau Books.

Terry Fox, by Jeremy Brown and Gail Harvey, General Publishing.

The tha, (fragments), by Barry McKinnon, Repository/Gorse Press.

They Call It the Cariboo, by Robin Skelton, Sono Nis Press.

Thomas Caribee Wilson, by Carole Precious, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

Tonto the Fur Seal, by Judy Ross, D.C. Heath.

Trainer, by Peter Taylor, The Faget Press.

Le Travail des Pionniers, by Stan Garrod and Rosemary Neering, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

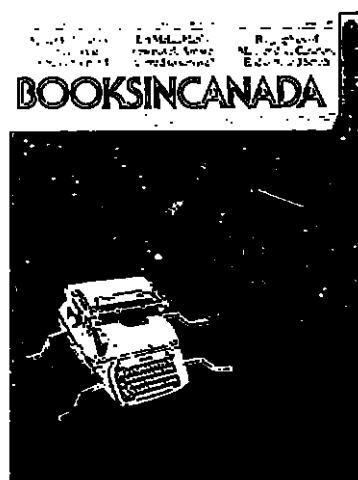
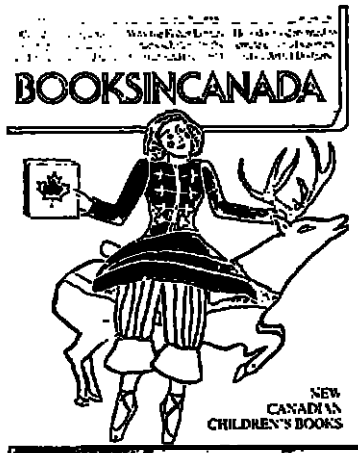
Turk the Moose, by Judy Ross, D.C. Heath.

Two Blades of Grass, by John Spinks, Western Producer Prairie Books.

Whar's Wrong with High School English?, by Priscilla Galowsky, OISE.

You Can Live With Your Money, by Ron Hembree, G.R. Welch.

Yukon Places and Names, by R. Couss, Gray's Publishing.



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