Volume 10, Number 3 A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS March, 1981

The private war of Mordecai Richler — plus a few words from his mother
Focus on Quebec: Montreal's young Anglos; Elizabeth Spencer's stories
Poetry by Margaret Atwood o Fiction by Aritha van Herk

BOOKSINCANADA

The dark side of MATT COHEN

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE:

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

BOOKS IN CANADA

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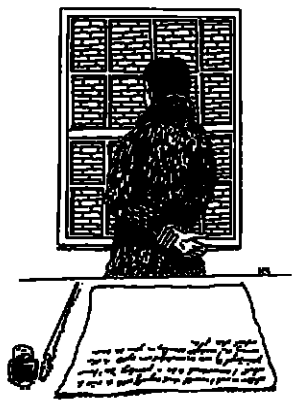

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Books In Canada is published 10 times a year, with the assistance of the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council, by the Canadian Review of Books Ltd., 366 Adelaide Street East, Suite 432, Toronto, Ont. M5A 1N4. Telephone: (416) 363-5426. Available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

Contents © 1981.

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

INSULT AND INJURY

Mordecai Richler wages a personal war against phonies. Perhaps he's making up for some big battles he missed

by Sandra Martin

LAST SEPTEMBER, three months after publication of his eighth novel, *Joshua Then and Now*, Mordecai Richler addressed a seminar on the future of the Canadian film industry at the annual Festival of Festivals in Toronto. Although he is himself the author of several screenplays and had recently accepted a $75,000 advance from Warner Brothers to write an original screenplay (with a promise of an additional $150,000 should a film be made), Richler charged that Canadian film-makers largely conducted themselves with "unbelievably bad taste larded with greed." He went on to complain that "with a few honourable exceptions, most of what we've produced here is embarrassing even in its intentions. If *Meatballs* made money last year, so did Hamburger Helper and Kleenex."

It was a typical two-ton jab from the maliciously acerbic Richler, and it provoked Toronto film producer William Marshall to snarl, "I love his book. I buy it every time he writes it." Marshall's response was petulant, extraneous, and not even original. The complaint that Richler recycles his work — both fictional and factual — has been a frequent criticism. Only a couple of months before, in *The New York Times Book Review*, the American novelist and critic George Stade had written in a negative notice of *Joshua Then and Now:* "It's as if a rich and unusual body of fictional material had become a kind of prison for a writer who is condemned to repeat himself ever more vehemently and inflexibly."

Marshall and Stade are wrong. Richler doesn't write the same book over and over again. Certainly it's true that in *Son of a Smaller Hero, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, St. Urbain's Horseman*, and *Joshua Then and Now* Richler has written about a ghetto-raised Jewish Montrealer struggling to succeed artistically, morally, and financially in a Wasp world. But every time the perspective is different. What Richler has really produced is not fiction but autobiography; his novels are not so much works of the imagination as journals or diaries. They are in fact the charts of a very complex man.

Each novel is a biting analysis of Richler's current milieu and an empathetic but nevertheless critical assessment of his psychical progress. Read in series the novels provide not only an extensive and savage commentary on Western society in the last half of the 20th century, but a highly personal and often moving odyssey of one tortured man's struggle to harmonize his psyche with his environment. Unlike most angry young men of his generation, who long ago subsided into complacency, Richler is still seething.

So it is in *Joshua Then and Now* that Richler, back in Montreal after living for 20 years in England, is still taking swipes at sexual fads and practices, Canadian nationalism, swinging London, Wasp pretensions, and Jewish ostentation. As well he's added some new targets. Among them are gay rights, Mackenzie King, feminism, Cancult archivists, and government-sponsored film-makers. But what is truly different is that finally in *Joshua* a middle-aged Richler appears to have vented his rage about the Spanish Civil War and exorcized the humiliation and shame of having been too young for the great test.

At 50, Richler is probably the closest thing we have to a compleat writer. He writes novels, essays, journalism, criticism, screenplays, and children's stories — and he does each superbly. He has twice been a writer-in-residence — at Sir George Williams (now Concordia) University and at Carleton — but he can't, as a former student complained bitterly in *Weekend Magazine* (in what well may have been the young man's only published venture into magazine journalism) teach people how to write. Richler agrees, condemning teaching as a "crushing business," one that makes him rude and sullen.

Indeed, aside from his current lucrative position as a judge for the Book of the Month Club, all Richler has done since he published his first novel, *The Acrobats*, when he was 24, is write. Although the British satirical magazine *Private Eye* once dubbed him "Morgetai Richer," it is both a bonus and a liability that Richler has always been able to survive — barely in the early years, comfortably in the latter ones — on his writing. Because he has never had to cancel cheques in a bank or sell used cars, when it comes right down to it he has no other career to write about than writing. That is why journalism holds a perennial appeal: it exposes Richler to new worlds. And that is crucial in a writer as dependent on observed life as Mordecai Richler.

Mordecai Richler

For someone whose own eye is so vigilant and so photographic, Richler hates being observed. He is a lousy interview, as countless television, radio, and print journalists can attest. To say Richler submits to questions is the wildest euphemism. He *endures* them, fixing his interrogator with the baleful stare of a recalcitrant bull, wearily steaming up to defend his turf. I interviewed him a while ago at his summer home in Magog in the Eastern Townships where

he was holed up finishing *Joshua Then and Now*. It was awful.

In person he was not, as he frequently appears on television, arrogant and rude. Rather he was shy, uncomfortable, polite, and taciturn. He struck me as a highly intelligent man with invisible yet ultra sophisticated antennae absorbing every nuance, every sound, for later processing. And it quickly became obvious that Richler does not indulge in idle chatter. Nor does he feel any compunction to fill silences. "Dense" is how old friend and film director Ted Kotcheff once described Richler's silences to a *Maclean's* reporter. As my questions perforce became longer and more convoluted and his answers proportionally terser, I was reminded of something writer-broadcaster Peter Gzowski had said to me before I left Toronto: "Sometimes he makes me feel so dumb."

Curiously for someone as private and retiring as Richler, he is a celebrity. He rarely goes to flash parties, he is not a television personality, he almost never lectures or gives seminars, yet his opinions are solicited on any number of topics, and his prose anxiously anticipated and then rigorously scrutinized. The reasons are simple: he is outrageous and he writes superbly. He hates phonies, idiots, and snobs and he has the wit *and the gall* to prick their pretensions and their platitudes. His choice of targets is often erratic, but in one respect he is unwaveringly consistent: he never apologizes.

And he never forgets. He has long admired Morley Callaghan's work, particularly his short stories, and in the 1950s he wrote and told him so. The letters went unanswered. Ten years ago when Richler edited the anthology *Canadian Writing Today*, he dedicated it to Callaghan, but he neglected to include a single piece of Callaghan's prose, settling instead for a critical appreciation by George Woodcock, a writer for whom Richler has a well known if unwarranted contempt.

That is the public Richler, abrasive and abrupt, seeking and finding insult often where none was intended. For example at the Montreal premiere of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* he responded to Mrs. Sam Bronfman's gauche compliment, "Well, you've come a long way for a St. Urbain Street boy," with the blistering remark, "Well, you've come a long way for a bootlegger's wife."

The private Richler is warm, funny, compassionate, and loyal. His close friends are few in number and scattered among London, New York, Toronto, and Montreal. All are steadfast in their devotion and their affection. They have good reason, for as *Saturday Night* editor Robert Fulford says, "he gives good value." As a companion Richler is witty, charming, and intelligent. As a friend he worries and cares like the proverbial mother hen.

Back in the mid-1950s Robert Weaver bought stories from the then unknown Richler for the CBC-Radio program *Anthology* and commissioned Nathan Cohen to interview him for the prestigious *Tamarack Review*. Richler and Weaver have been friends ever since. When Weaver fell victim, a few years ago, to the Machiavellian politics of CBC-Radio, it was Richler who came racing in from Montreal with a solution: Weaver should quit the CBC and become a senior editor at McClelland & Stewart. The job was not one that Weaver had solicited or even particularly coveted, but it was a measure of Richler's friendship that he not only devised the scheme, but persuaded Jack McClelland to offer Weaver the job. It was declined and Weaver remained at the CBC as an executive producer of literary projects.

Peter Gzowski credits Richler with influencing him in two major career decisions. In the early 1960s Gzowski was being courted by both *Esquire* and *Playboy*, and it was Richler who persuaded Gzowski that he should stay in Canada. Later when Gzowski was floundering as editor of *Maclean's* in that revolving-door era when editors changed almost as frequently as magazine covers on the news stands, it was Richler who helped him clarify what was wrong with the magazine and with him as its editor.

He is as good a friend as he is an enemy. But it is not only to his friends that Richler is generous. He has stated publicly that he admires Robertson Davies, Margaret Atwood, Brian Moore, and Alice Munro — all of them very different writers from himself. And it was Richler who suggested in 1961 that the Canada Council give a special gold medal to the late novelist Ethel Wilson. More than once he has shored up sick and broke fellow writers and he routinely rings his buddies to plug young writers he considers promising. Typically, it is one of Richler's idiosyncracies that his good deeds must be kept private even while his loutishness is proclaimed. The one provides good camouflage for the other.

Since Richler won't talk about himself and his friends are too loyal, almost everything we know about him — his background, his philosophy, his interests — comes from his writing, especially his novels, but also his journalism. There has been plenty of each. Richler published his first novel, *The Acrobats*, in 1954. It was followed in 1955 by *Son of a Smaller Hero*, in 1957 by *A Choice of Enemies*, in 1959 by *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, in 1963 by *The Incomparable Atuk*, in 1968 by *Cocksure*, in 1971 by *St. Urbain's Horseman*, and in 1980 by *Joshua Then and Now*. He has also published two collections of essays, *Hunting Tigers Under Glass* (1968) and *Shovelling Trouble* (1972); a volume of autobiographical sketches, *The Street* (1969); and the anthology *Canadian Writing Today* (1970). He has written countless magazine articles, reviews, essays, and short stories, a number of screenplays including *Room at the Top*, *Life at the Top*, *The Looking Glass War*, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, and finally, a children's story, *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*.

About five years ago McClelland & Stewart commissioned him to write the text for a picture book on Spain by photographer Peter Christopher. It seemed a good idea at the time. But Spain, which Richler hadn't seen for 25 years, and which he had used as the setting for his first novel, "evoked a whole thing for me." Instead of the 10,000 to 15,000 word travel essay he was supposed to deliver, he wrote about 50,000 words of very personal prose that was "arguing to become a novel." His wife Florence told him he was crazy to waste that text in a book of photographs, and Jack McClelland agreed. So Richler retrieved his manuscript and then

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sat down to toss off the picture book without wasting any of the material he now was saving for the novel. "It was agony, agony," he says. It shows. As Richler agrees, the text reads more like a brochure than a travel essay, devoid of all the confessions and acerbic insights typical of his work.

The retrieved manuscript grew into *Joshua Then and Now*, a huge multi-faceted novel that operates in three different styles and as many time-frames. First, written in a Borscht-circuit schtick that is often hilarious, is the familiar tale of the Montreal Jew who escapes from the ghetto and from Canada, achieves success abroad, and returns home to be affronted by the pretensions and accommodations of his boyhood cronies. Then there is the romantic, almost saccharine, story of Joshua's 18-year marriage to the Senator's beautiful daughter, Pauline Hornby, and finally there is the wrenching *Angst* of a middle-aged man, a man who over the years has made his own accommodations and compromises, reaching into his past to confront the callow coward he believes lurks there.

"Once," Joshua laments, "when he could readily have agreed that thirty was old, it had been his life's ambition to write something that would last. A page. A paragraph. A sentence, even... His new ambition, as serious as the earlier one, was to be so flat of stomach come his forty-eighth birthday that he would be able to look down in the morning and see it [his penis]."

It is an unnatural novel, this book that began as a travel essay, and the narrative weaves back and forth in time and style like a drunk on a sidewalk. That it works at all is a credit to Richler's skill, that it works so well is an indication of his talent.

> I fervently believe that all a writer should send into the marketplace to be judged is his own work, the rest should remain private. I deplore the writer as personality, however large and undoubted the talent....
>
> — "Why I Write"

RICHLER NOT ONLY believes that, he lives it. He is extremely close to his wife Florence and his five children, Daniel, Noah, Emma, Martha, and Jacob, as anybody reading about their fictional counterparts in *Joshua Then and Now* would have to agree. So close is Richler's family life, in fact, that people marvel. Jack McClelland, a friend for more than 20 years, is "stunned" by Richler's home life. "He is an incredible family man." Strangely, friends like McClelland or Robert Fulford claim to know little if anything about Richler's parents and seem to be only vaguely aware of an older brother who is an optometrist in Newfoundland and a first wife who lives in southwestern Ontario. Richler draws boundaries, and his friends know better than to cross them. Reporters who don't are answered with a polite but firm, "I'm sorry, but I don't want to talk about that."

> Young too late, old too soon, was, as Jake had come to understand it, the plaintive story of his North American generation. Conceived in the depression, but never to taste its bitterness firsthand, they had actually contrived to sail through the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the holocaust, Hiroshima, the Israeli War of Independence, McCarthyism, Korea, and, latterly, Vietnam and the drug culture, with impunity. Always the wrong age. Ever observers, never participants. The whirlwind elsewhere.
>
> — *St. Urbain's Horesman*

HIS GRANDFATHER, escaping from the pogroms following the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, had come steerage to Canada in 1904 from a Galician *Shtetl*. An orthodox Jew, he raised his children to worship as he did and to better themselves by getting out of the ghetto, those five working class streets north of Ste. Catherine that are bounded by Park Avenue in the west, St. Lawrence Boulevard (The Main) in the east, and Outremont to the north.

It was on one of those streets, St. Urbain, that Mordecai Richler was born in January, 1931. His grandfather had been a pedlar, his father operated a junk yard — his mother called him a metal merchant — and Mordecai, moving further up the social scale, was expected to be a rabbi or, failing that, a doctor. He went to parochial school and in the evening to *cheder*. He studied the Talmud and modern Hebrew, but he broke with his religious training when he was about 13, the traditional time of Bar Mitzvah. At about the same time his parents were divorced. (Richler's mother stopped speaking to him after he drew a portrait of a mother who was a meddling, humourless *yenta* in *St. Urbain's Horseman*. It was typically Richler to retaliate in *Joshua* by depicting the mother as an amateur prostitute who entertains at her son's Bar Mitzvah by dancing a strip-tease and who then graduates to porno films and massage parlours.)

At Baron Byng High School (Fletcher's Field in his satires and

Richler's mother stopped speaking to him after he drew a portrait of a mother who was a meddling, humourless *yenta* in *St. Urbain's Horseman*. It was typical Richler to retaliate in *Joshua* by depicting the mother as an amateur prostitute. . . .

novels) Richler and his friends tormented their mainly Wasp teachers, hung around poolrooms, and studied as little as possible — much as Duddy and his friends do in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. The war was on, but Richler was too young to fight. "Even as the bombs fell and the ships went down, always elsewhere, our country was bursting out of a depression into a period of hitherto unknown prosperity," he wrote in *The Street*. "For my generation the war was hearing of death and sacrifice but seeing in our own eyes the departure from cold-water flats to apartments in Outremont, duplexes and split-levels in the suburbs."

This sense of alienation, of never being part of the action, of always being out of step with people and events, is a principal theme in his work. A couple of years ago he wrote an article for *Weekend* in which he described a trip to Germany. Thirty-five years after the war ended, Richler, the Jew, couldn't trust or even forgive Germans over 50. This rage must be built, at least in part, on impotence and frustration. While others were fighting the Hun, Richler and his pals were still in high school, stealing bats and softballs from Eaton's.

The Spanish Civil War was, of course, even earlier. It was a time for heroic action and Richler missed it. In each of his serious novels Richler has drawn a battered survivor of the war, a living if wounded symbol of what it meant to commit oneself to The Cause. In *St. Urbain's Horseman* Jake Hersh is obsessed with his cousin Joey, to our eyes a slimy and malevolent character, but to Jake a hero, a man who fought in Spain, the Second World War, the Israeli War of Independence, and a dogged hunter of that arch anti-Semite, Doctor Mengele. By contrast Jake is nearing 40, as painfully aware of his limitations as his hemorrhoids, alienated and oppressed, part of a generation "unjustly squeezed between two raging carnivorous ones. The old establishment and the young hipsters. The shits and the shitheads."

The exception is *Joshua Then and Now*. Here Joshua has only himself "now" against whom to measure the scared young man of "then" who ran from the detestable Nazi doctor, Dr. Dr. Mueller, in the process abandoning the Jewish Freibergs to God knows what fate. For 25 years Joshua has plotted revenge and with it his own redemption as an honourable man, but when he finally returns to Spain (unwittingly deserting his beloved Pauline on the edge of a nervous breakdown) he finds the Freibergs were never victims and the villain Dr. Dr. Mueller (in reality a writer of cheap westerns with a predilection for dressing in drag) has been dead for five years. Joshua laments: "If not for your unnecessary return to Spain — that stupid, self-indulgent trip that was to settle nothing, absolutely nothing — she wouldn't be lying in the hospital now.... You should have stayed home during her hour of need. Instead, you took off for bloody Ibiza, proving yourself an idiot twice."

> To be a Jew and a Canadian is to emerge from the ghetto twice....
>
> — *Hunting Tigers Under Glass*

BACK IN THE 1950s, before equal opportunities and basic income units replaced grades as the criteria for university entrance,

Richler's high-school transcript was found wanting by McGill University. He went instead to Sir George Williams, enrolling as an English major. He quit in his second year because the only students he found entertaining and rewarding were the veterans, and they had all graduated by then. He cashed in an insurance policy his mother had been keeping for him and went to Paris to write. He described it in "A Sense of the Ridiculous":

> I was only a callow kid of nineteen when I arrived in Paris in 1951, and so it was, in the truest sense, my university. St. Germain des Prés was my campus, Montparnasse my frat house, and my two years there are a sweetness I retain, as others do wistful memories of McGill or Oxford.

It was in Paris that he made friends with Terry Southern, Mavis Gallant, James Baldwin, Mason Hoffenberg, Christopher Logue, and other expatriates, young men and women anxious to soak up

In 1962 Richler went to Israel and wrote about it in *Maclean's*. When he arrived he was so thrilled he couldn't sleep. By the time he left his attitude had changed: what he found in the new nation was intolerance, prejudice, and selfishness.

whatever remained of that earlier, more famous generation of expatriate writers. They lounged on the terrace of the Dôme or the Select in the afternoon and wrote all night in rat-infested rooms as they churned out hundreds of stories and manuscripts to be sent boomerang fashion to magazines and publishers in the United States.

After two years, broke, but with a draft of *The Acrobats*, Richler returned to Montreal. He worked for a diaper salesman, and then in the newsroom of CBC-Radio International while he rewrote *The Acrobats*. André Deutsch published it in London in 1954. Richler doesn't like the book now — "it's too wild, the attitudes aren't real. . .," he once told Nathan Cohen. Now it is out of print in Canada not because, as Jack McClelland explains, it wouldn't sell, but because Richler doesn't want it reissued.

It was extremely important for Richler to have his first novel published in England, to make his mark against international competition. It is this same insecurity that compels Noah Adler in *Son of a Smaller Hero* to break away from his family, his neighbourhood, and finally from Montreal itself. Like Richler, he goes to Europe even though it means abandoning his widowed mother, a mother who insists she will be dead by the time he returns. For Duddy Kravitz the need is to escape from the city and to find a refuge in the country. By a series of ruthless moves he finally acquires a lake in the Laurentians, land on which he dreams of building a grotesque holiday village, a resort that will rival the restricted (against Jews) horrors erected by the *goyim*. And in *St. Urbain's Horseman*, Jake Hersh needs to prove himself as a director outside Canada:

> After the party, Jake and Luke drank in the dawn together, embarrassed to be waiting for the reviews. For if they were bad, it would be humiliating, and if they were good, it wouldn't be satisfying either, because this was merely Toronto. So when the reporters started to phone, Luke was withering and Jake did his utmost to give offense.

To be appreciated in Canada was not good enough simply because Richler had very little respect for Canadian standards. But to live in England — and Richler spent 20 years there, years in which he made his name both critically and commercially — was never to be English, always to be a foreigner. Finally Richler returned to Montreal, because that was his source. When all was said and done, he was, after all, a Canadian.

> I'm beginning to see for the first time that the argument was not one of principle but of power.
>
> — *A Choice of Enemies*

IN THE LATE 1960s novelist Austin C. Clarke was the subject of a profile in *The Canadian* titled "Canada's Angriest Black Man." In the piece Clarke complained that in his 13 years residency here he had never received the recognition, either financial or critical, that was his due. He said he couldn't afford the luxury of white friends and that he had been exploited by white publishers (McClelland & Stewart and Macmillan), the CBC, and the Immigration Department. Moreover, he had never been invited to appear on *Front Page Challenge*. All this was too much for Richler who responded with a spleenfully satirical column in *Saturday Night* in which he pointed out that not only had he, Richler, not been a guest on *Front Page Challenge*, but he had never been profiled in *The Canadian*. A couple of days after *Saturday Night* appeared on the stands, an old friend of Richler's telephoned him and said, "Mordecai, I just ran into Austin Clarke and he says to send you his best." Richler shot back, "Oh good, Florence has been trying to reach him. She wants him to wait on table tonight."

This series of incidents reveals several things about Richler: his viciousness in dealing with people he finds contemptible; his irreverent and clever satire; and his unerring ability to detect self-serving bullshit. Whether blacklisted expatriate film-makers, Quebec separatists, Jews, blacks, or Canadian nationalists, to Richler each group is contemptible if the power it seeks, the freedom it espouses, is not true liberation but merely a sanction to discriminate against others. In this attitude he has probably been harder on Jews and Canadians than on anybody else.

That's why professional Jews and strident nationalists have always found him so scurrilous, so lacking in human decency. In 1962 Richler went to Israel and wrote about it for *Maclean's*. When he arrived he was "so thrilled" he couldn't sleep. By the time he left his attitude had changed because what he found in the new nation was intolerance, prejudice, and selfishness as he pointed out in this exchange with an Israeli lawyer:

> "But surely," I said, "if the Jews are entitled to come 'home' after two thousand years then the son of an Arab refugee is a Palestinian too?"
>
> "All right. Conditions in their camps are deplorable. However, the conditions I lived under in Dachau were worse."

Richler's most famous attack on cultural nationalism was his satirical novel, *The Incomparable Atuk*. It is dated now, but in its time it leveled well-aimed pokes at the Canadian pop culture industry and such oracles as Nathan Cohen and Pierre Berton. And it gave the world the ultimate nationalist put down: " 'I'm world famous,' Dr. Parks said, 'all over Canada.' "

He hasn't written an essay on the state of the nation, cultural or otherwise, since "Oh! Canada! Lament for a Divided Country" appeared in *The Atlantic* in December, 1977. And he probably won't write anything else on the subject because "I'm bored with the nationalist thing myself." That's what he says, but cultural nationalists should take small comfort in the remark. Richler is a reactive writer, erupting in response to stimuli that provoke and enrage him. Just ask Austin Clarke.

RICHLER WRITES so well that sometimes I think his prose should be licensed — the way a boxer's hands might be registered as lethal weapons. Consider the battering he gave Roland Michener in the spring of 1969. That was the year Richler won a Governor-General's Award for his novel *Cocksure* (a marvellously outrageous spoof of the movie industry and the values it inculcates) and his collection of essays, *Hunting Tigers Under Glass*. It was a twitchy period. Half the time G-G winners refused to accept their awards and if they did accept there was always the chance that they would launch into a denunciation of federalism, the monarchy, and anything else to hand.

For some crazy reason, perhaps because he was unnerved by the political reverberations, then Governor-General Roland Michener handed Richler his prize and blurted, *"Etes-vous Canadien?"* A startled Richler responded, *"Oui,"* but his true retort came in an article published in the *New Statesman* (and subsequently reprinted in *Shovelling Trouble)* in which he referred to Michener as "the Queen's very own second floor maid." Richler went on to describe him as having "the manner of the *maître d'hôtel* in a palm court restaurant." Then he had another go at poor Roly in a *Saturday Night* column in which he wrote, "Obviously, Canada is

no longer a British country though, for old time's sake, the Queen still keeps (and we pay for) the uniform-crazy Governor-General, who is good for opening highways, launching destroyers, making state visits to islands in the sun, and generally occupying himself with trivia the rest of us adults are too busy to bother ourselves with." Surely Michener didn't deserve all that.

He is, however, always powerful. Indeed, there is a great danger in Richler's work that the technique and his seemingly irrepressible urge to make a crack will overpower the content. He has said that he wants to "write one novel that will last, something that will make me remembered after death." It's a common enough goal, and one that Richler hasn't realized yet. *St. Urbain's Horseman*, his most intellectual novel, and *Joshua Then and Now*, his most ambitious one, are both rich and often glorious books, but ultimately neither can rise above the author's private, middle-aged *Angst*. It is *Duddy Kravitz*, written back in 1959, that has come closest to harnessing Richler's multifarious talents and realizing his intentions. Nevertheless, *Joshua Then and Now* is a pivotal book, for it is in this novel that Richler has finally cleared the typewriter and finished up the business he started more than 25 years ago with *The Acrobats*. At 50, he could be ready to start fresh. Mordecai here and now — doesn't that sound exciting? □

REPORT

Toward a new élan

Not everyone is disturbed by the rise of the new Quebec. Some young Anglos are creating their own cultural revival

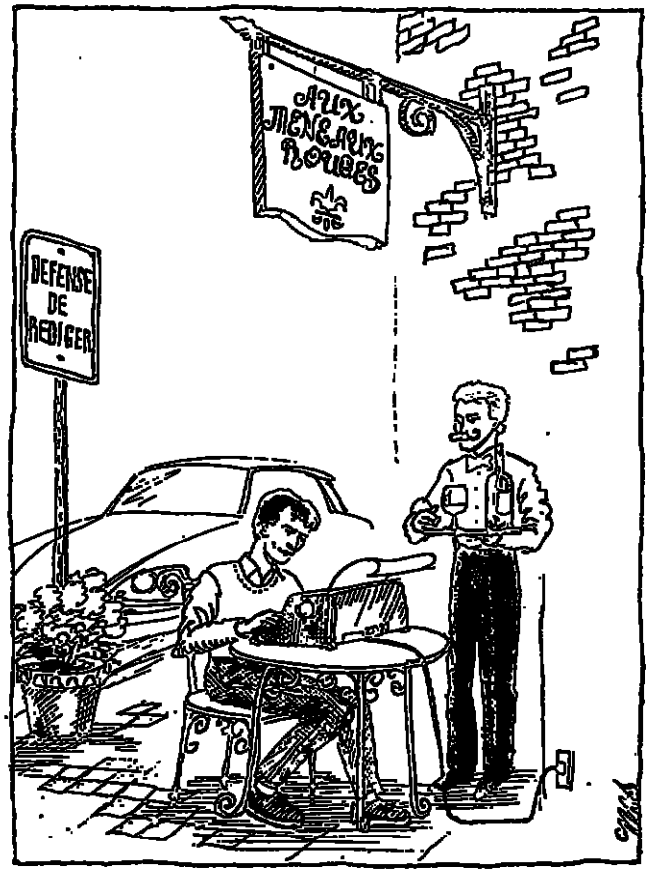
by David Winch

MAVIS GALLANT would be surprised at how Montreal has changed since she left it in 1950. For in the Montreal she knew, "French was of no commercial use to anyone ... not even to French Canadians; one might as well have been fluent in Pushtu." Today, French has grown to be markedly more important than Pushtu in Montreal's economic life.

This cultural sea change has left some social actors gasping for breath. In particular, the Montreal English press has shown signs of chronic vertigo, perhaps understandably. After all, what would happen if *any* middle-brow English-Canadian newspaper found itself adrift in a tempest of Latin political ebullience? Imagine the Winnipeg *Free Press* suddenly set down in a European industrial state, with its common fronts, general strikes, and high-stakes political drama.

That's roughly the situation the Montreal *Star* and *Gazette* found themselves in throughout the 1970s. Although the period of shrill doomsaying and unrelenting partisanship is probably behind us, one still has to choke down each morning's *Gazette* with its lumpy editorial *potage*, its mix of resistance and indignation, and its somewhat clumsy good will.

Fortunately, there is emerging a new generation of Anglo writers, poets, publishers, and journalists in Montreal who are at ease with the evolution of modern Quebec, and who view its cultural possibilities as exciting. With them, English Montreal's rich literary tradition is being given a new élan for the '80s.



A NEW MAGAZINE, the *Montreal Review*, appeared in The Word and other book stores in the McGill student ghetto in 1979. Its maiden editorial proclaimed its vigorous rootedness, an interest in the Centaur Theatre, Layton's latest bit of bombast, *les caisses populaires*, Véhicule Press, CEGEPs, and Schwartz's delicatessen. The *Review*'s clean and striking graphics were matched by the contents: a critical look at Gallant's work in *The New Yorker*, a short story "The Lovers" by Sheldon Currie, an interview with "Mr. Bebop" — jazz commentator Len Dobbin — a look around the quartier St. Louis of central Montreal, and a piece of political analysis giving qualified support to sovereignty-association. Most encouraging was the magazine's commitment to provoke the English community to "a broader and more fundamental cultural enquiry." The *Review*, clearly, was unlike the principal institutions of Montreal English journalism — the *Gazette*, CFCF-TV, Richler — in not rejecting outright a more flexible tone and style for English Quebec culture. "We felt there was a need to give a content to the concept of 'integration,' " says *Review* co-editor Bryan Campbell, and the magazine has since fought vigorously to

counter that dread affliction, *anglomonolithicity*.

The *Review*'s writers are from backgrounds as varied as the universities of Toronto, Stanford, Columbia, and Cambridge, but are united by a basic optimism about English Quebec culture. So after two issues as a literary/academic review the magazine received a grant from Quebec Cultural Affairs for the development of minority media, which allowed it to make a jump in circulation (from 5,000 to 30,000) and style (to its present glossy, city magazine format). The new *Review* (whose editorial staff I've since joined) has covered areas neglected by other English-language publications — the push to "deconfessionalize" the French Catholic school system, Montreal's explosively-growing electronics industry, and the role of a major multinational, Alcan, in modern Quebec.

But if the *Review*'s editorial positions reflect a greater sympathy with *Le Devoir* than with the *Gazette*, more contentment with the social democratic PQ than with Ryan's Liberals, one influence is primordial: that is, *The English Fact in Quebec* by Dominique Clift and Sheila Arnopolous (McGill-Queen's University Press).

The English Fact in Quebec is in some sense the flip side of *White Niggers of America*. As such, it is the most important social document emerging from Quebec in the last 15 years. Briefly put, Clift and Arnopolous argue that the English community was historically able to mediate its relations with the provincial government through a powerful business establishment. With the westward erosion of this business community and the rise of a modern Quebec bureaucracy, the English community suddenly had to deal directly with an assertive French society. The old social contract rent, the Anglos felt harassed, bereft and abandoned. Clift and Arnopolous put their hope in the emergence of a "new style of anglophone leadership," characterized above all by its bilingualism. The *Montreal Review*, with its commitment to espousing what is at present the minority viewpoint, is an indication that English Montreal culture will be more pluralist, less defensive, and more attached to the Quebec mainstream in the '80s. And that, for Quebec Anglos, is a new style indeed.

THE ENGLISH 18th century seems an odd place to seek out new directions for Anglo-Quebec publishing in the '80s. However, it was then that subscription book-selling was at its apogee. Pope's translation of Homer's *Iliad* was distributed this way, with Swift securing the support of his political friends for the effort. But the subscription method, with its exigency of enlisting enthusiastic, influential subscribers, fell into disuse. Samuel Johnson, whose subscription edition of Shakespeare in mid-century nearly drove the good doctor to distraction, lamented that "He that asks subscriptions soon finds that he has enemies. All who do not encourage him defame him."

Gary Geddes, founder of Quadrant Editions, is willing to risk defamation in order to deliver "the best quality writing available" to his 700 subscribers. Geddes, a professor of English at Concordia, describes himself as "a man for all regions," having lived in the West, Toronto, and the Maritimes before settling down in Montreal in 1979. "Sure, I've had warnings from other small publishers," he says. "You know, letters saying, 'Give up. Small presses just can't make it in this country.' " Today Geddes's Quadrant series has issued seven titles — poetry, novels, and short stories — and the response has exceeded his early hopes. His initial dream of 500 subscribers has been surpassed, and he hopes to attain the 1,000 level.

The most remarked-upon title in the initial Quadrant offering is *Wintering Over*, a series of short stories by Terence Byrnes. Born in Toronto, Byrnes's literary migration to Montreal came through U.S. journalism and the Concordia writing program. His stories reflect his North American wanderings, as well as his adventures in adopted Montreal. (Critics have compared his style and choice of subject matter with both Clark Blaise and Hugh Hood.) *Pilgarlic the Death* by Bernard Epps, on the other hand, deals with life in Stormaway, a mythical Eastern Townships hamlet, which Epps enlivens with his particular brand of raucous black humour.

But Quadrant has national ambitions reaching beyond publishing the best in Engish Quebec. The "best possible writing," says editorial assistant Edeet Ross, certainly involves works by Americans writing here, works in translation, and books by Canadian writers of international stature. Finally, insists Geddes, there will be no sweetheart deals. "I'm not going to publish my own writing with Quadrant, and my friends have been warned to expect no special treatment." Clearly, Geddes may be heading for a bit of defamation. . . .

THE OFFICES OF *Blow up* are wide and airy, offering a view of rising Côte-des-neiges over layout artists' drafting tables. The walls are covered with *Blow up*'s first year's graphics, which are for the most part strikingly well done. Indeed, *Blow up*'s chief claim to fame after 10 issues is its New York/New Wave image.

The tabloid-sized arts and city review made its inauspicious appearance in the trendy boutiques, bars, and clubs of Ste. Catherine West early last year. Although its pages were covered with breezy blow-up and half-tone photos, the magazine's articles were of very uneven quality. And the focus on punk, post-punk, jazz, the clubs, fashion, and film seemed to rule out a wider cultural perspective. Since that time, *Blow up* has consolidated its strength — graphics — and has begun to provide political and cultural criticism in this same urban style. Recent features have dealt with *Les ballets jazz*, the need for art to be revolutionary, Canada's jet-set gossips, the imaginative dystrophy of the Montreal film industry, and of course what's happening in the clubs.

But the emerging *Blow up* style may be a colloquial accounting of urban work styles. Recent articles have given the floor to taxi drivers, Forum bouncers, and errant sports journalists. "We have to reach a basically apolitical readership," contends editor David Lake. Less at home in the political arena than in the Rainbow Bar and Grill, *Blow up* has done only perfunctory pieces on Quebec and Canadian political questions.

The most exciting horizon for *Blow up* will be its push outside Quebec. Having reached a plateau at a circulation of 25,000, *Blow up* has been testing the water, particularly in Toronto, for a wider readership. Lake's dream would be to produce a nationally-distributed, 80- to 100-page arts and politics paper, a sort of *Village Voice* of the North, with regional editions.

If Lake's outward reach is encouraging, there are those who despair of English Montreal's narrow-minded arts scene. For beyond David Fennario's popular recent work, which doesn't have an original bone in its dramatic corpus, other attempts to deal with political and cultural conflict in post-1976 Quebec theatre have often been shot down. Until there is a second English daily again, the *Gazette*'s theatre critic has the final word.

George Szanto, whose recent play *Mixed Marriage* was skewered in the *Gazette*, tried to show conflict as it divided a family in Westmount during the Bill 101 debate. Sarah, whose German-Jewish past stalks her, rejects an offer to return to an editing job on the eve of the passage of *Bill 101*. "No one here writes English any more, no one here reads English any more, and people barely speak English any more," she says, expressing well the anomic bitterness of 1977. Szanto's characters reflect his view that "a variety of stances can be legitimate" in the new Quebec. But, he argues, this kind of examination is often rejected by the community.

On the other hand, the community has given rise to a wide variety of small presses. Véhicule, whose big-name writers include Earle Birney, is the most prominent, with Black Rose coming up on the Left with Noam Chomsky. Eden, a new Westmout-based feminist press, is hoping to appeal to a national readership, while Tundra and Harvest House offer a wide range of Canadian writers, the latter with titles as diverse as *Roman Emperors*, *Modern France*, and *A History of Quebec Education*.

With such a range of emerging literary activities, one almost forgets for a moment the post-1976 works of Leonard Cohen, Mordecai Richler, Hugh MacLennan, and the Véhicule poets. Clearly, people still speak English, still write English, and still read English in the new Quebec, and with this imaginative élan English Montreal will remain our *point de rencontre* with the other solitude, and very close to the heart of Canadian letters. □

Northern belle

Italy and the American South are Elizabeth Spencer's fictional territory, but Quebec provides the perspective

by Fraser Sutherland

The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer, by Elizabeth Spencer, Doubleday, 429 pages, $18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 385 15697 9).

FOR THE PAST 23 years one of the best short story writers of our day has been living unassumingly in Montreal — an American, a Southerner, a stranger. It's not surprising that in myopic Canada Elizabeth Spencer should be little-known, yet even in the United States she hasn't gained that deserved popular and critical plateau that her friends John Cheever and Eudora Welty — who contributes an affectionate, respectful foreword to the stories — securely occupy. This despite Spencer's having published five novels and two novellas (*Knights & Dragons* and her best-known work, *The Light in the Piazza*), as well as *Ship Island and Other Stories*.

I don't know why this should be so, but there are signs of change: *Publisher's Weekly* has enthusiastically reviewed this collection, and *Paris Review* will soon publish an interview with its author. Indeed, the publication of the stories has acquired the status of a literary event. When I recently visited Spencer, her week was crammed with interviewers and photographers.

In the bright downtown studio that Marie-Claire Blais had lent her, I found Spencer temporarily stalled on a new novel set on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. She willingly left the stack of neatly typed pages by the portable typewriter and we set off for lunch, slogging through the slushy sidewalks that Montreal doesn't believe in cleaning. Montreal in winter.

"The sun's my element," she said. "I wasn't made to live in the snow country."

Better than most writers Spencer recognizes her true material, which is to be found in the warm landscapes of Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Italy. The sunny Italian restaurant where we lunched reminded her that she'd first seen Italy in 1949 after travelling in a grey-hued Germany still badly scarred from the war. "I woke up one morning in Milan. The sun was shining, people were laughing, it seemed like paradise. Beautiful-looking people, poor as mice, but they were happy."

Italy gave her *Knights & Dragons*, *The Light in the Piazza*, and some of her best stories. Thematically, Italy and the American South provide her with a form of fictional snakes and ladders: the snake that tempted Eve, the Jacob's ladder that angels ascended and descended. As a fictional locale, Montreal has been less than paradisiacal. Spencer likes Canada and has good friends here, yet she's drawn little fictional impetus from her place of residence — it would not be accurate to call it home. Of 33 stories, only "I; Maureen" and "The Search" are set here, and in my view these may be the only weak — or less-than-strong — tales in the entire collection. She once tried to write a Montreal novel, later transformed into a play, then a film-script. But it didn't work out.

Just the same, living in Quebec has had

Elizabeth Spencer

an oblique impact on her work. She finds that *Vieux Montréal* reminds her of New Orleans, and what may be her best novel, *The Snare*, was largely written in Quebec City. Perhaps expatriation provides the necessary distance for her to reach back into the glowing past.

There's no doubt that even physically Spencer is an anomaly in Montreal. She's a tall graceful woman with a languid Southern accent that delights the consonant-hardened Canadian ear. "Poets is like a rolluh-coastuh ride," she'll drawl. "Makes yuh dizzy." She walks languidly too, or rather floats, her gossamer locomotion unimpelled by anything so mundane as heels in contact with the street. Mentally, however, she's about as languid as a tiger trap. Her personal attributes are also narrative assets: alertness, charity, but also the sprung-steel wrists of the expert knife-thrower. The unwary character strolling through her plots may suddenly find himself tattooed against a wall.

Like Marilee Summerall, the recurring young woman in these stories whom Spencer calls her "alter ego," she's tuning-fork sensitive, and fascinated by change. The paradox of simultaneous change and permanence informs many of the stories. A Mississippi church "has a gilded hand on the steeple, with the finger pointing to Heaven. The hand looks normal size, but it's really as big as a Ford car" (in "A Southern Landscape"). That finger may herald divine or supernatural intervention, for Spencer's people are never far from visions, synchronicities, ghosts ("First Dark"), clairvoyance ("The Finder"); they may themselves be unwitting angels, incompetent demons or — as in "Ship Island" — a self-conscious mermaid. Such peculiar epiphanies, angelic or satanic declarations, are always perfectly plausible. "It's an enormous world," says Marilee Summerall, "bigger than you can imagine, but it's all connected up."

Spencer's people are haunted by paradox. "Let all things proceed in orderly fashion to their final confusion," one of them says. Paradoxes may be another name for miracles, and miracles emerge from the raw materials of life, details of which are inexplicable yet supremely important. As she states in "The Day Before,"

> life is important right down to the last crevice and corner. The tumult of a tree limb against the stormy early morning February sky will tell you forever about the poetry, the tough non-sad, non-guilty struggle of nature. It is important the way ants go one behind the other, hurrying to get there, up and down the white-painted front-porch post. The nasty flash and crack of lightning, striking a tall young tree, is something you have got to see to know about. Nothing can change it; it is just itself.

But the act of perceiving is itself a

transformation. The statue in "The White Azalea" becomes the protagonist, and in "Presents" a tree is both itself and something more:

> The whole day was the quiet colour of the field gate which no one had ever painted, and many hands had worn smooth. Far out in the field, a flight of crows, thick as a black cloud, tilted to rest in a bare pecan tree, so that it seemed suddenly to have grown a treeful of coal-black leaves.

Nature's innate offerings of grace are everywhere to be found, but to receive them one has to stand still and regard them intensely and with profound respect. Which is Spencer's singular accomplishment.

In so large a gathering of stories — 33 of them over a 33-year period — there's a danger that some fine tales will get lost in the book's sheer bulk. The novella *Knights & Dragons* should have been published separately with, say, *The Light in the Piazza*. Both concern American visitors to Italy, yet they contrast admirably: the latter as light and nutritious as a good soufflé, the former a lusher, denser, layered concoction of almost Nabokovian richness. Spencer herself calls them "the light of the moon and the dark of the moon"; they are, in fact, comparable in texture to *Daisy Miller* and Thomas Mann's "Mario the Magician." The weight of *Knights & Dragons* at the centre of the book tends to do both itself and the shorter tales that surround it a disservice, and makes the collection somewhat asymmetrical.

Though Spencer's novelistic gifts, especially in *The Snare* and *No Place for an Angel*, are considerable and ongoing, these short stories may well mark her place in literary history. Certainly, I know of no short story writer in Canada, and few anywhere, who can match the power and subtlety of stories like those already mentioned and "The Girl Who Loved Horses," "Judith Kane," "Prelude to a Parking Lot," and "Indian Summer."

If we can speak of literary permanence at all, these stories place her without absurdity among such masters of the form as D. H. Lawrence, the James Joyce of *Dubliners*, and Hemingway. The fact that her work does not at all resemble theirs is itself a recommendation. If we speak of gifted writers who are women and Southerners, neither is Spencer's like that of McCullers, O'Connor — or even Welty, though Spencer has something of her wit and elegance. As her sister Southerner is careful to remark in the foreword, Spencer's work — and Spencer herself — are *sui generis*. Literature's the better for it. □

A terrible beauty

by David Macfarlane

True Stories, by Margaret Atwood, Oxford, 96 pages, $5.95 paper (ISBN 0 19 540369 X).

MARGARET ATWOOD, it need hardly be said, has long been portrayed as a kind of St. Joan of Canadian letters: unswerving, incorruptible, mysterious, and inspired. Such reputed qualities often rub the more prosaic natures of critics the wrong way; there is always a certain eagerness for pratfall or slip. In this case, however, those among us who dislike any conspicuous success will be greatly disappointed. *True Stories* is a magnificently cohesive and powerful collection of poems. If anything, Margaret Atwood deserves even more attention than she has been getting.

The most obvious and compelling strength of *True Stories* is that, like much of Atwood's verse, it seems to grow naturally and with ease from a personal vision no less articulate for its privacy. Reading Atwood has always been like following a guide's brilliant flashlight through an eerie but not entirely unfamiliar cellar. In *True Stories* the guide has emerged to the light of day only to find the world no less frightening a place. Gestures of love and family and day-to-day life jive in a *danse macabre* with the incomprehensible and chaotic lunges of poverty, torture, and imprisonment. Familiar and foreign become indistinct, and Atwood's remarkable sensibility finds itself the choreographer of two strange partners.

Many of the poems were inspired by Atwood's association with Amnesty International and her 10 years of travelling throughout the Southern Caribbean. In many ways, *True Stories* is a collection of anti-travel poems, dismissing our assumptions of both home and away as facile and ridiculous. "The palm trees on the reverse/ are a delusion," she writes on a postcard,

Margaret Atwood

and one senses that Atwood is bent on decrying a great many delusions, about herself as much as anything else:

> *Of course I'm a teller*
> *of mundane lies, such as: I'll try*
> *never to lie to you.*

For Atwood, even lovers speak in the sanctimonious tones of Jimmy Carter while protecting their guarded securities. Throughout the collection the juxtaposition of false tranquillity and real terror weave irony after bitter irony. Even the most gruesome poems — "Torture," "A Women's Issue," and "Spelling" — possess a grim, sardonic awareness of the cruel and absurd co-existence of love and hate. Poverty and affluence are seen as torturously entangled as the pleasures of sensuality and the pain of rape. The two worlds meet in a place that Atwood maps out in one of the most disturbing and potent poems in the book, "Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written."

> *This is the place*
> *you would rather not know about,*
> *this is the place that will inhabit you,*
> *this is the place you cannot imagine,*
> *this is the place that will finally*
> *defeat you*
>
> *where the word* why *shrivels and empties*
> *itself. This is famine.*

Returned from her travels, Atwood is never very much at ease. In "Small Poems for the Winter Solstice," she asks, "How can I justify/this gentle poem then in the face of sheer/horror?"

If there is not much that is pretty here, there is a great deal that is beautiful. Atwood's language and understanding of the power of language work together in careful harmonies. At times the effect is, like a chant, magical.

> *Ancestress: the burning witch,*
> *her mouth covered by leather*
> *to strangle words.*
>
> *A word after a word*
> *after a word is power.*
>
> *
>
> *At the point where language falls away*
> *from the hot bones, at the point*
> *from the hot bones, at the point*
> *where the rock breaks open and darkness*
> *flows out of it like blood, at*
> *the melting point of granite*
> *when the bones know*
> *they are hollow & the word*
> *splits & doubles & speaks*
> *the truth & the body*
> *itself becomes a mouth.*
>
> *This is a metaphor.*

Margaret Atwood has a level-headed sense of compassion that strips all the potential radical chic and romantic fashionability from the causes she espouses. She does not react to issues so much as create them, finding them within herself. Even the subtle humour she employs is used to keep any nonsense from creeping into her poetry. In her own phrase, these poems are "a few good words that still work." *True Stories* is a remarkable book. □

Shady leaves of destiny

In Matt Cohen's mythical little town of Salem, as in Greek tragedy, life is less real than inevitable

by George Woodcock

Flowers of Darkness, by Matt Cohen, McClelland & Stewart, 251 pages, $14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 2235 2).

APOLLO AND DIONYSUS: the Olympian gods of reason and the chthonian gods of instinct; they strive constantly in the hearts of men, no matter how civilization may mask their conflict. And it is this struggle that is at the heart of Matt Cohen's new novel, *Flowers of Darkness*, whose very title suggests how much it is concerned with what happens under the surface, out of sight.

Flowers of Darkness is the fourth of Cohen's novels to be concerned with the country north of Kingston that centres on the fictional little stone-built town of Salem, to which Theodore Beam returned for refuge when Canada fell apart in the civil strife of Cohen's earlier novel, *The Colours of War*. In the novel Salem is the terminus of a strange journey through the future into the past, and at the end Theodore Beam is hiding in the little stone church on the edge of town, where *Flowers of Darkness* begins with the grocer, George Mandowski, peeping through the window and witnessing the seduction of Nellie Tillson by the evangelical preacher Gordon Finch. From this incident the dark comedy and the eventual Gothic tragedy of the novel take their courses.

Salem, which served as a destination in *The Colours of War*, and as a background to rural erotics in *The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone*, becomes the centre of action in *Flowers of Darkness*. Characters from the earlier novels, like the drunken mechanic Pat Frank and the equally drunken editor of the local paper, Jacob Beam, play walk-on parts, but the main figures of the cast are new: the philandering Reverend Finch and his beautiful arthritis-crippled wife Maureen; George Mandowski; and the Jamiesons — Allen and Annabelle — a young lawyer and his potter wife who have sought refuge in Salem until the memory of legal improprieties on his part can fade away.

The Jamiesons have come to Salem because the neat old stone houses give a sense of order, of a place where one can "leave the scandal behind," where "he could be trusted and grow close to the people in the community while she took advantage of the slower rhythm of life to spend more time on her pottery." But in fact Salem is far from being this place of quiet retreat; Cohen's use of Wilde's saying, "Anyone can be good in the country," is strictly ironic. Below its sleepy surface, Salem seethes with hatred and intrigue. Its appearance of being divided between God's realm (represented by Finch's Church of the New Age) and the Devil's realm (represented by the hotel at the other end of town) is quite deceptive, for the compelling forces of human desire — the roots if not the flowers of darkness — operate equally in both realms.

The same contrast between the conscious yearning after order and the half-conscious acceptance of a necessary disorder exists in the characters, and particularly in the main protagonists, Annabelle and Finch. Annabelle is no ordinary potter, content with plates and pitchers. She sees herself as somewhat like God, who "made Adam out of clay," when she sets about filling with figures representing Salem people a vast mosaic that will depict "the human condition, the agony and the ecstasy, the glorious suffering, wonderful ordeal and history of mankind." And Finch too, as his wife Maureen sees, "had won his monkhood, in his own twisted way he had taken the world around him and squeezed it until it fitted the shape of his soul."

But in each case domination becomes enslavement. Finch, the hypocritical whoremaster, sees his amorous life as something he is condemned to, a sentence of servitude. Annabelle, for all her urban and urbane self-assurance, is caught into the same stream when she becomes Finch's lover. Yet the real pattern of destiny is carried on in the action of characters outside this central passionate relationship, which in the end is wryly revealed as almost irrelevant — the intrusion of a "city woman," as Finch mockingly calls Annabelle, into the turbid currents of rural existence.

It is in fact submissive Nellie Tillson, made pregnant in the old church, who becomes the still centre of the drama, as Mandowski and Finch's other enemies seek to destroy him through a paternity suit. Finch turns the tables by preaching a passionate *mea culpa* begging the town's forgiveness for his transgression, and the congregation responds with hysterical assent — all, that is, except his wife Maureen, whose pride is mortally hurt by the specta-

"Ontario, #768-9," by Robert Bourdeau, from **Twelve Canadians: Contemporary Canadian Photography**, *edited by Jane Corkin, McClelland & Stewart, unpaginated, $12.95 paper.*

cle. She borrows a revolver with mushroom bullets from Mandowski, kills Finch, then Mandowski, and finally herself. Annabelle, the survivor, the city woman whose affair with Finch has affected the main tragedy neither way, is left to discover that the only refuges are "absolutely private and removed," reaching into the individual consciousness.

Almost more than any other Canadian book, *Flowers of Darkness* reminded me of an American novel of the South. There is a special theatrical world with exaggerated lights and shadows (how much Salem seems like a stage set!) such as one encounters in Faulkner and Caldwell; characters like Maureen, with her indoor white beauty, her flaming hair and her passion for horses, and Finch with his beyond-Good-and-Evil rendering of the preacher's role, have a combination of splendour and scruffiness that one encounters often in Yoknapatawpha County. But then, Canadian writing has indulged for a long time in such melodramatic larger-than-lifenesses. Perhaps they merely show how similar forms can develop in similar circumstances of modified colonialism, whether north of the 49th parallel or south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Of course, readers who cling to the demands of standard fiction, with its stress on verisimilitude and under- rather than over-statement of the emotions, are likely to have difficulties with the kind of Greek tragic inevitability with which *Flowers of Darkness* moves to its end. Cohen's characters are in no real sense free spirits. They are shaped to their fates as surely as Annabelle's clay puppets are shaped to take their proper place in the great mosaic. Moreover, there is a combination of intensity and precision about the descriptions of town and country, a kind of super-realist chiaroscuro, all plangent light and palpable darkness. It is all, perhaps, a shade melodramatic. Actuality is never quite like this.

But is the actual always the real? That, perhaps, is the great question the art of

fiction is always set to pose. And the answer lies, surely, in how far we become willing hostages in the country of the mind a novel creates. Certainly, I felt wholly present in *Flowers of Darkness* until the last word — which is in fact "darkness" — completed the circle and released my mind. For it is the consistency of the imaginative construct, rather than its likeness to anything in what we oddly call "real life," that we in fact seek in fiction. And that kind of consistency, it seems to me, Matt Cohen has achieved. □

Cow pies and flying saucers

Sundogs: Stories from Saskatchewan, edited by Robert Kroetsch, Coteau Books, 179 pages, $7.95 paper (ISBN 0 919926 09 6).

By GEOFF HANCOCK

IN HIS BIOGRAPHICAL entry in *Canada Writes*, the Writer's Union of Canada handbook, Robert Kroetsch gives his hobby as "Saskatchewan." Instead of collecting gopher teeth and arrowheads, he's edited *Sundogs*, the first anthology of stories from that rhomboid of the Prairie provinces.

Kroetsch has chosen from the work of 23 authors, most of them in the early stages of their careers, and has balanced this with such well-known writers as Ken Mitchell, Terrence Heath, and Anne Szumigalski. But his intent is clear. Although the publication of the book celebrates Saskatchewan's 75th anniversary as a province, it's not a backward-looking collection. *Sundogs* is a book that breathes with confidence into the future.

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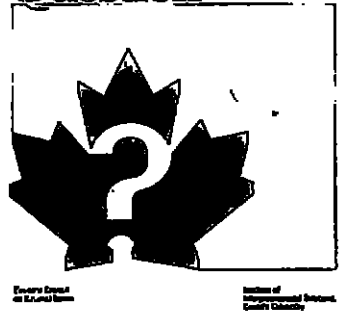

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Nor does it attempt to explain the province. It ignores the CPR and Buffy Sainte-Marie. Scarcely a wheatfield ripples. Potash mines, *Briarpatch Magazine*, Tommy Douglas, regional airlines, and John Diefenbaker are similarly passed by, although a smart-aleck kid spread over the hood of a car does give Dief's name as an alias to an arresting officer. Politics are incidental to this collection. Unlike its fat, subsidized neighbour, *The Alberta Diamond Jubilee Anthology* (edited by John Chalmers for Hurtig), *Sundogs*, its publishers note, "is not a project of the provincial government."

Kroetsch's introduction touches the theme: he is interested in how a story gets told and how it's heard. (I disagree with his assessment that the short story in Canada was a dead form in the early 1970s.) The authors have tightly hinged their stories around the moment when an event turns into something else. As Kroetsch describes it, "the life-long dialectic of innocence and experience is, perhaps, the pattern, or the energy-source, that gives the stories in this book cohesion. On that movement, on that translation, that transformation, from one to the other, the stories often turn."

Significantly, many of the authors attended Fort San in the Qu'Appelle Valley, where Kroetsch often presides over creative writing workshops. *Sundogs* certainly gives the impression that all the paints and canvases were bought at the same store. The palettes all have the same tonal range, and all the pictures are cut to about the same size. Nearly all the authors are aware of the sound of their own voices, and whether they try to seduce the reader by language, incident, scene, or tricky structure, it's the voice of the tellers that creates the strongest reverberations. That ancient story-making impulse, found around any kitchen table (and in any Prairie pub), is the real heart of *Sundogs*.

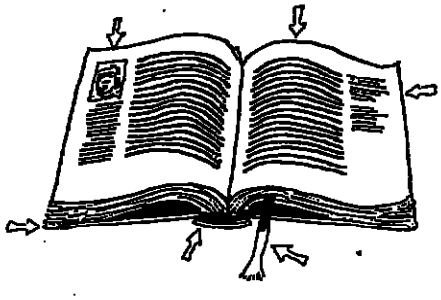
As for the stories themselves, some fall short of intent. They range from the tall tale (the ghost story, the satire) to the social documentary and the ethnic experience. Some rely too heavily on stock characters and overused situations: that dying old man in the hospital, one's first true love, the statistics analyst who kills himself, the proud Indian trapped in a white man's world. Though there may be pleasure in the retelling, I would hope the future holds more originality than this. Some of the stories are little more than extended one-liners, such as W. L. Riley's "Pies," a truly crappy story about a woman who bakes a cow pie (that is, a meadow muffin) for a neighbour whose cow befouls her front lawn.

But a reviewer always goes for the weaklings in the pack. *Sundogs* (the title refers to the icy rings around the winter sun) features some fine fiction. Ken Mitchell's "Loose Ruck" is a raucous story about a rugby team on the loose in Regina. It's Labatt's Blue, burning rubber, and parking-lot chaos when all the guys accidentally stumble into a police stake-out. Pat Krause's "Playboy" is funnier than anything by Wayne and Shuster as the top 10 sales reps for an industrial cleaning product company earn themselves a five-day trip to Jamaica and a disastrous night at the local Playboy Club.

Not that all the stories are funny. Many are self-consciously concerned with their own process. Mick Burr's "Composition in Black and White" is assembled around the rules of making a striking photograph. In this case the form — in six parts — outweighs the content. Byrna Barclay's "Testimony" is cleverly structured around a court reporter's sworn statement about arson in a Hutterite colony. Edna Alford's "Barbed Wire and Balloons" has a story within a story: the narrator's uncle describes how a good deed killed off a herd of cattle who munched their way through an alfalfa field after he turned them loose.

Some spooky doings are at work in Kristjana Gunnars's "Kolla, Ticks," about a northern camping trip filled with blood-sucking ticks and the ghostly top half of a dead Indian in search of the bottom half. Terrence Heath's "A Proper Burial" is a sparse story about a crazy man who digs up the body of his beloved only to rebury her with a rose in her decomposed hand. It's a scene more than a full-blown story, while John Hicks's "The Rivers Run to the Sea" is a somewhat predictable tale of a man who buys a pipe in an old shop and discovers it belonged to a dead sailor who wills its return. William Klebeck's "Pieces" tries to find a prose style equivalent to the state of a man who blows himself up because of an error in refueling his tractor. The convention is too forced, the style too mannered.

But some stories do find the tone. Lois Simmie's "Emily" describes the odd connection between a young girl and a promiscuous retarded girl who lives near her parents' summer cottage. Barbara Sapergia's "Sun" is a chilling story about a hyperkinetic child who systematically tries to destroy her mother's house and life. Geoffrey Ursall's "Fat" is one of the highlights of *Sundogs;* it takes a leap forward into the future with an energetic burst of language that describes an age of fat people, their search for a large-scale practical diet, and an invasion of flying saucers.



Writing in the Prairies has changed considerably in the last half century: we probably won't have to read many more awful Depression stories that clutter up other anthologies. No more dubious symbolism from *Who Has Seen the Wind*. The *Sundogs* authors take a close look at where they live, and try to match form to content. A regional intent informs their work, but doesn't dominate it. Literary values, though they are timidly worked out in places, predominate. Eli Mandel, in "Images of Prairie Man" (in *Another Time*, 1977) says the distinctive element of Prairie literature is "the adaptation of images of the environment to a pattern that belongs to all men." The images in *Sundogs* are missing a few pieces, but they are making a shape that looks good, and fills up the rhomboid with a noisy pattern. □

Breach of tryst

Shacking Up, by Kent Thompson, Oberon Press, 165 pages, $15.00 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 375 6) and $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 376 4).

By I. M. OWEN

KENT THOMPSON is a mature male academic with an uncanny ability to impersonate undereducated young females. He has demonstrated this in several short stories. Here he outdoes himself by performing the same trick in a nearly full-length novel.

On a Monday morning in summer Ellen, a typist in an insurance office in Fredericton, is taking her coffee-break in a restaurant near the post office where she has been sending registered letters. A sudden downpour prevents her from leaving to go to her car, parked two blocks away, and she gets into conversation with a slight acquaintance, Dennis, the star of the baseball team on which her husband Jerry is a substitute player. As Dennis's car is parked right in front of the restaurant they go off together. One thing leads to another, and the upshot is that they spend the rest of the week in a motel just out of town.

The outline suggests a potentially dull story about dull people, and that's just how it struck William French of the *Globe and Mail*. I don't agree. The unflagging vigour of Thompson's narrative carried me swiftly through the book, and the story of Ellen's life up to this point, deftly touched in without once impeding the forward movement of the surface plot, fully justifies for me Thompson's choice of an epigraph whose point, briefly summarized, is that the most commonplace people will prove to be complicated and therefore interesting if we will only look into them.

In the foreground, then, is the story of the five days in the motel room. The narrative is in the third person, but Thompson firmly restricts it to a single point of view, Ellen's. We share her initial nervousness, then her

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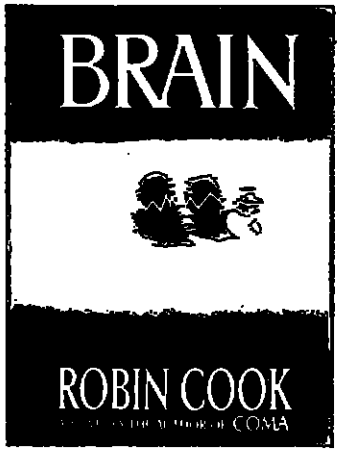

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exuberant delight at the discovery that intercourse is quite different with a new partner. Very naturally, she mistakes the new sensation for true love, destined to be lifelong. Disillusion gradually sets in as she begins to detect that Dennis has lied to her on various salient points, and everything goes downhill toward Friday night, when he leaves to go back to his wife, and Saturday morning, when she phones her mother-in-law and asks to be picked up.

That's the foreground, but it's the background story that gives the book its depth — not profundity, perhaps, but depth of field — and its point. In giving us Ellen's thoughts continuously during five days, Thompson is able to weave in enough of her recollections to build up the whole story of her life and the main scenes and people in it: among others, her slatternly mother, who owns a corner grocery and may or may not be a widow; her wimpish husband Jerry; and his managing mother, a successful real-estate agent. It's all done with apparent ease and without obvious artifice; a small but authentic *tour de force*. □

The cook and the curate's egg

The Witnesses and Other Stories, by Donn Kushner, Borealis Press, 78 pages, $7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88887 001 9).

One Cook, Once Dreaming, by Derk Wynand, Sono Nis Press, 112 pages, $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 919462 67 7).

By ROSALIND EVE CONWAY

THESE COLLECTIONS of short fiction are written by two very different men: Donn Kushner is a scientist (he teaches biology at the University of Ottawa), while Derk Wynand, who teaches creative writing at the University of Victoria, is a poet who seems to work more intuitively. The techniques they employ contrast sharply: Kushner uses realism, Wynand surrealism. Both are careful writers, and it's not surprising that they are academics.

Kushner's *The Witnesses and Other Stories* is the work of an observer. A character has a chance encounter, or a difficulty with subtle ramifications. The verisimilitude of both the situations and the dialogue is striking and effective. His fiction, though engrossing, seems uneventful at first. One reads it quickly, becoming more and more unsettled and disturbed. His subject matter includes anti-Semitism, moving (or immigrating), and encounters with strangers. Ultimately one realizes that many of the characters are hiding or running away, that they are self-centred people looking after their own hides. A depressing conclusion, yet one in keeping with Kushner's adherence to realism.

In "The Witnesses" three men meet after a coroner's inquest. Delbert Feeney, hired hand and heavy drinker, has died after swallowing anti-freeze in his employer's basement. Of the three, the man one would expect to be the most sympathetic, a minister, is least so. Early in the story he is described prophetically: "He was short, and his red hair shone brightly but without warmth in the streetlight." None of the characters is generous; most are motivated by self-preservation — yet there is a pervasive sense of guilt among them.

Many of Kushner's characters are isolated and evasive. "A Matter of Luck" relates a few events that affect Martin Sussman, a lonely lodger and student with a vaguely antisocial and embittered outlook. "Two Europeans" is the story of two men named Smith — only one was once named Silberman and the other Schmidt. Both have tried to erase their origins, yet in their meeting (in which each quickly guesses the other's secret) they ironically find a reason to draw together. The prejudice vented by the woman they meet is simply directed at foreigners, and they are both, after all, from Germany.

Kushner's fiction is clever, and reading it is rewarding; his prose is polished and his choice of verbs is particularly powerful, at times startlingly original. The only weak story in the collection is "The Librarians," in which the women are stereotypes, and the plot seems little more than an extended joke when contrasted with Kushner's other work.

Derk Wynand's *One Cook, Once Dreaming* is a series of untitled prose pieces, some of which are stories in themselves while others are prose poems. They are about rebellion, the pressure to conform, hunger, and man's need for fantasy. The setting is wartime somewhere in Europe, and while one supposes the narrative must take place during the First World War the villagers are strangely mediæval. Many are violent and superstitious; others are hermits who use their status as outcasts and holy men to seduce foolish, vulnerable wives who think their infertility is being cured.

None of the characters is named; they are simply "the cook," "his wife," "the barmaid," and so on. As a result they are amorphous, as shapeless as the dough the cook kneads, and they blend into one another. The cook is nebulous on still another level: he is by turns human, divine, animal. The book is invested with an air of mystery reminiscent of Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, yet not nearly as successful.

A collection of prose pieces such as this needs a strong narrative link, a myth or thread of history. Poets (Wynand has published two books of poems) must overcome the urge to write a long prose poem when they attempt experimental fiction. While Wynand's book is pleasant on an aesthetic level — its language often rhythmic, its descriptions sensory — it, like the cook's marital problems, is simply not compelling

beyond a few passages. Some stories, however, contain lingering images. In one some boys create an ice sculpture for a competition: a bear is attacking a man, only at times it seems that a man is ravishing a woman. The village is shocked, and the judges vent their rage on the boys and the sculpture.

Some of the sections in Wynand's book are fine work, but reading *One Cook, Once Dreaming* reminds one of the curate and his egg: parts of it were good. Kushner's *The Witnesses and Other Stories* leaves one feeling much more satisfied. □

Mom of a smaller hero

The Errand Runner: Reflections of a Rabbi's Daughter, by Leah Rosenberg, John Wiley & Sons, 144 pages, $12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 471 99874 5).

By JUDY MARGOLIS

WHAT ARE WE to make of Leah Rosenberg, Mordecai Richler's 75-year-old mother, who dedicates her autobiography to her father and mother, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, yet omits the crucial generation in between? Or the woman who asserts on the very first page: "I have brought children into the world. Whether they agree or not, I live in them. I will go on forever in my children and theirs." Whose retort when she is greeted with the exclamation, "I read about your famous son," is invariably, "Which one?" (Her eldest son is an optometrist.)

She's a slippery subject, there's no doubt about it. At one moment she's grasping, possessive, vain, and proud and at another she's self-effacing — so determined not to embarrass her family that she says in the prologue that their names have been changed "to protect the reticent." "Reticent," moreover, is an interesting choice of words, given that Leah Rosenberg hasn't spoken to her son since his rather unbecoming parody of her as Mrs. Hersh in *St. Urbain's Horseman*.

Naturally, she expressed no surprise on learning that "Moshe," her second-born, who "was flesh of my flesh, mind of my mind, and heart of my heart," had decided to become a writer. "We are, after all, a literary family." One of her brothers had been a playwright, and her beloved father, Rabbi Judah Yudel Rosenberg, whom she idolized, had written books as well as translated the *Zohar*, a 13th-century "mystical, symbolic interpretation of Jewish writings and Law," from the original Aramaic into Hebrew. Thus, she can say of her son, whose grandfather died when he was only five years old: "In view of the career he chose, his inspiration and gift as a writer would have benefited considerably from a closer relationship with this extraordinary man."

What is remarkable, judging by her autobiography, is how Richler is truly his mother's son. Just as his early writing is often marked by bitterness and anger at any injustice, large or small, hers is a less skilful attempt to exorcize her own demons and obsessions. Unfortunately, she is not equally adept as a writer, nor is she blessed with the gift of self-ridicule. A little humour might have redeemed her oh-so-solemn tale, or what she regards as her "tragic" life story. For the most part, she has realized her lifelong dream of becoming a writer. Had she not been the mother of Mordecai Richler, however, this book probably would never have been published.

There are rewards aplenty for those who have wondered whether and how thoroughly Richler has plundered his own life for material to use in his novels. Mrs. Rosenberg's sporadic account offers documentary evidence to support the true identity of her literary counterparts. Leah Adler in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Maw in his collection of autobiographical short stories *The Street*, and Mrs. Hersh in *St. Urbain's Horseman* are all heavies; all worship their god-like fathers, and either were or are desperately unhappy in their marriages; all are virtually indistinguishable from the

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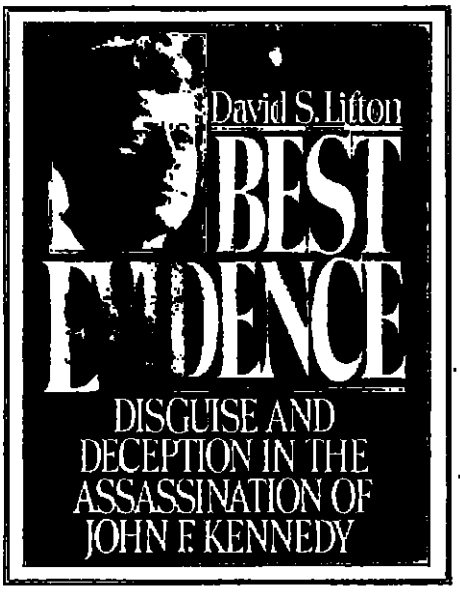

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woman we meet in *The Errand Runner*. Of course, Leah Adler's portrait differs from the others: she does, in fact, die of a broken heart.

Mrs. Rosenberg, no doubt, got tired of playing the eternal straight man to Richler's sarcastic, often saccharine, wit. Now it has fallen to her to exercise some of that same control — to get her own back. But that control eludes her. She ends up grappling with her ambivalent feelings for her father, a Chassidic holy man, a *rebe*, "the business adviser, psychiatrist, matchmaker, and, on occasion, physician of his followers." Much as she insists that her father was "a lion of a man, a king of Israel . . . endowed with all of God's graces," too many other factors lead us to suspect that Richler's portrayal of the grandfather in *Son of a Smaller Hero* as a man who, "having lived for too long in another country, died a character," is more accurate.

But Mrs. Rosenberg cannot fathom the possibility that her father might have been a holy fool. He must remain forever her hero (and ours). Her memoirs, in fact, must stand as a testament to his greatness. Can we really blame her? As she admits, "It was as if my heritage was a painting, and I was brushed into it."

For that reason, she fails to see herself as part of the menagerie of failed rabbis, messiahs, matchmakers, and assorted misfits who once assembled in her father's study. Her father may have been a wise man, a mystical man, but by the same token, he was unworldly. He never thought to let her pursue her education beyond public school — a fact that she can neither forgive nor forget — nor would he let her marry a penniless scholar. He persuaded her instead to make the best of a rich but incompatible match that was her life's undoing. The poor husband bore the full brunt of her unhappiness until their divorce when Richler was 13.

Mrs. Rosenberg does take the occasional stab at sorting it all out. At one point she even writes: "I sometimes feel that I am on trial with myself." Yet despite her protestations, I find it hard to believe that she ever does come to grips with what she herself regards as her stunted psychological growth, the result of her religious upbringing. Ultimately she is too skilled a practitioner in the art of self-pity. □

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Barefoot in the kitchen

by Eleanor Wachtel

The Tent Peg, by Aritha van Herk, McClelland & Stewart, 227 pages, $14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 8702 0).

IN ARITHA VAN HERK's first novel, *Judith*, an odd and charming woman named Mina breathes that sigh of resignation — Ah men, you can't live with them and you can't live without them. J. L., the heroine of *The Tent Peg*, spends a summer trying to do both.

A 24-year-old graduate student in sociology (she panders to popular prejudice by dismissing the discipline as "crap"), J. L. decides to get away from it all in the Arctic, the last frontier. Conveniently flat-chested, she pulls a hat over her brow and lands a job as cook for a geology team, rock-picking its way through the Yukon mountains. Once hired, she announces she's a woman, but the fair-minded boss, Mackenzie, mortified by his own inattention, keeps her on.

J. L. may want to be alone, but the ineluctable presence of a crew of nine envelops her in a cocoon of maleness. Her strategy is to tune out and not get involved, to live with them but outside their concerns. It is, of course, impossible. However androgynously she may dress or behave, she is still for three months the only woman in a man's world; she becomes its node. One by one, the men approach her as Everywoman, keeper of a feminine viewpoint that is utterly impenetrable to them. Her words constitute wisdom, so grateful are her supplicants for any insight at all. This is no mere casual conversation but, in the artificial intensity of isolated living, resembles a spiritual pronouncement.

All we know about J. L. is that she wants silence, a new perspective from which to view her troubled life. The nature of her *Angst* is left unstated, but a stream of essentially unsatisfactory sexual involvements seems to have played a contributing role. Her only acknowledged love is Deborah, a beautiful singer with whom she corresponds during the summer. Her friend bolsters her resolve to stick it out when J. L. realizes that instead of being alone, her centrality means that she belongs to all these men, emotionally and intellectually she's "everyone's property."

The crew is assayed and tagged as efficiently as their geological samples — good guy, bad guy, sympathetic, or gormless. Mackenzie, the boss, is an aging (over 40), kind, and distracted man who discovers that this is the summer he must come to terms with his wife's desertion of him a decade earlier. Second in command is Jerome, a red-necked, competitive martinet, whose hostility to J. L. climaxes in an attempted rape. Present too are a bush hippie awash in auras and meditation, a

Mennonite religious zealot, a delicate Brit, an obsessive photographer, all in all a diverse group.

But this is not simply Dear Abby of the North. Strange events occur as the novel's apparent mythopoeic side comes to the fore. A landslide nearly devastates the camp. Awakened by the vibrations, J. L. is its only witness; the geologists dream on. "Men with no ears, men with no connection to the earth."

Then J. L. communes with the only other female in the landscape: a she-bear. (The bear too advises J. L. to stay out the summer; not exactly profound advice from the Canadian novel's official animal.) The men start to regard J. L. as a witch or mascot or both. When a self-styled ladies' man jumps her in the shower, instead of a quick giggle he finds himself weeping like a baby. Her comforting is a quasi-ritualistic laying on of hands. Her impact on each of the men (except Jerome) is experienced in increasingly awesome terms. They will never forget this woman nor what she has taught them.

But just what has J. L. done? Her portentous effect is belied by words that are at most sensible, at worst trite. Mackenzie's wife left because she had to find herself. It wasn't his fault; much. The timorous Brit is told that he doesn't have to take Jerome's bullying. And Thompson, a pleasant, regular guy, is cautioned that marrying his girlfriend won't mean that he'll possess her.

A rather facile approach also colours J. L.'s own social analysis: Men are the products of hundreds of years of socialization. She and Deborah remain heterosexual because of "a centuries-old habit." Not bad for 25-year-olds, but surely homosexuality has been around for some time too.

Yet there is an intriguingly subversive side to *The Tent Peg*, evoked by its Biblical resonances. J. L. is short for Jael, the woman who lured the head of the enemy army into her tent. She covered him with her mantle. When he asked for water, she served him milk. Once he was lulled to sleep, Jael picked up a tent peg and hammered it through his temple, nailing him to the ground. Jael was a hero. To further the parallel, Deborah was the Judge and prophetess at this time. It was she who urged the Children of Israel to rally and fight off their oppressors. In victory, Deborah sang Jael's praises in her hymn to God, just as J. L.'s friend Deborah sings to her.

Translating from Canaan to the Yukon, as each man came to J. L. in trust, searching for succour, she tried to plant a tent peg of doubt in their minds, opening them up to the notion that females are human. This aggressive act, a reversal of traditional female acceptance, is the mark of the new hero. Surprise the enemy. There's a glibness to these allusions too but van Herk does get at the core of some feminist concerns: male presumption and the ever-present threat of rape. J. L. concludes that "it's better not to make love to them." It's her "solution" to living with and without men, and it seems to enhance their humanity for her as well. But is this the "New Chastity" in a coat of a different colour?

The Tent Peg is a curious story. Its multiple layers are underlined by an increasingly popular technical device — the perpetually shifting point of view that's effective enough when we're inside one of the major characters, but awkward to encounter "I'm the pilot that flies them. . . ." The different voices are seldom sufficiently distinctive. Contrived, the extra perspective doesn't always redeem a freeze frame slow action.

The second novel is a bashful creature. Frequently authors will either knock off a variant of the first success or succumb to describing what happened to *them* as a result of it (Erica Jong, Kate Millett). Winning the very first $50,000 Seal Book Award with its attendant hype and expectations doesn't seem to have daunted van Herk. She's written a riskier, less controlled book than *Judith*. Presenting pigs with sacred resonances is one thing; piercing skulls, even symbolically, is quite another. □

The plains and Abraham

Jews: An Account of Their Experience in Canada, by Erna Paris, Macmillan, 304 pages, $16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9574 3).

By BARBARA WADE

JEWISH IMMIGRANTS to Canada over the past 150 years fled Russian pogroms, social intolerance, or simply the orthodoxy of their own heritage for a country whose reaction to them has ranged from friendly curiosity to outright hostility. Erna Paris reflects this wide diversity in the Canadian-Jewish experience by dividing her book into the three regions where the largest number of Jewish immigrants settled: Montreal, Toronto, and the West (particularly Edenbridge, originally Yid'n Bridge). But her view of Canadian Jewry is telescopic: it expands and contracts according to her own interests and experiences.

The section on the West is wholly dedicated to disproving the common notion that Jews are not farmers. The early settlers began the 1880s under close, though not unkind, observation from their neighbours. Paris writes:

> The *Manitoba Free Press* and the *Winnipeg Times* tripped over each other reporting on the strange habits of the Jews. On June 3, 1882, both papers rushed to detail the Sabbath services being held in the immigration sheds. Wrote the *Winnipeg Times:* "The Jewish immigrants who recently arrived held divine services . . . this morning, presided over by one of the old Jewish rabbits. Saturday, as is well known, is observed among them as Sunday. . ." The editor of the *Manitoba Free Press* gloated over his competitor's faux pas. "We observe by our esteemed contemporary that the divine service held at the immigration sheds on Saturday were presided over by 'one of the old Jewish rabbits.' This is base calumny. The community of Jews in this city are not in possession of any rabbits, and if they had, it is not likely that they would permit one to preside over such a grave occasion. . . ."

Jews in Quebec, however, settled somewhat more quietly, dividing themselves into "*uptown*" and "*downtown*" Montrealers according to family wealth and influence. They got along reasonably well with the Gentiles up until the early part of this century, when rising Quebec nationalism fed resentment against anglophone power. The Jews were accessible scapegoats. Newspapers like *Le Goglu* used propaganda and anti-Semitic cartoons to further fears that Jews were taking over the business life of the community. The most dangerous consequence of such prejudice was the Canadian government's hesitation over the issue of harbouring Jewish refugees during the Second World War.

The political game-playing at this time is ably documented, but Paris manages to jump from the 1940s to the language problems inherent for anglophone Jews in René Lévesque's Bill 22. She gives more coverage, in fact, to Quebec Jews involved in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, which surely must have involved more research, than to the post-war problems of Jewish refugees, which surely must have been more acute. In two paragraphs we move from "After the Second World War, Montreal Jews continued to look towards Ottawa rather than towards Quebec City to defend their political interests" to "So in 1966 the Jewish community happily helped elect Dr. Victor Goldbloom to the Quebec legislature."

Paris's history of the Jews in Toronto is focused completely on their participation in the Canadian Communist movement up to 1956, when Nikita Khrushchev admitted that the system that had pioneered in banning anti-Semitism had liquidated major Jewish leaders during Stalin's regime. It is true that many Jews gave their hearts to Communism as a protest against the intolerable sweatshops they worked in, sewing and tailoring clothes for the good customers of Timothy Eaton and similar manufacturers. Labour troubles divided families and friends:

> Occasionally apparent adversaries understood each other better than one might have imagined. In a small, gabled house on Beverley Street, two brothers shared a bedroom. One of them owned a millinery shop: the other brother worked for him and was the shop chairman for the union. Inevitably, the union called a strike. On the morning of the strike, the owner brother woke the union brother. "Hurry and get up," he said. "You have to watch the picket line. I'm the boss. I can sleep in."

But at its peak the Communist movement that sprang from these labour difficulties

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involved only one Toronto Jew out of three. Some account of the other two-thirds would be welcome.

A brief anecdote about one of those families says more about the ability of the Jews to cope with Canadian life than do Paris's brief and sporadic attempts at analysis. When Joe Salsburg became the first Jewish Communist to be elected to the Ontario legislature in 1943 thousands marched to his home to visit his parents. "They called for his parents to come out and clamoured for the old man to speak — the Orthodox father whose rebellious son had become a triumphant communist. The elder Salsburg declined. 'My wife will speak for the family,' he replied. Mrs. Salsberg accepted the congratulations of the campaign workers. 'May you all have such naches (satisfaction) from your children,' she cried." Many middle-aged and older first-generation Jews in this country could surely say the same. □

What a good boy am I

Jack Horner: My Own Brand, by Jack Horner, Hurtig, 233 pages, $14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88830 189 8).

By J. L. GRANATSTEIN

JACK HORNER'S MEMOIRS are a tale of misplaced loyalty, wilful obtuseness, and outright political betrayal. This book tells us a good deal about Horner, the maverick MP from Alberta who backed Diefenbaker to the end, who made Robert Stanfield's life hell, and who ultimately broke with Joe Clark to join Pierre Trudeau's Cabinet as minister from Alberta. It is also interesting in its own right, as good a memoir by a member of parliament as we have, something that probably has to be attributed equally to Horner and to his editor/ghost, John Munro, the historian who performed the same role for Lester Pearson and John Diefenbaker. The publisher, however, deserves no praise — this book has more spelling mistakes in proper names than I have ever seen in a volume issued by a major publisher.

Horner was a Diefenbaker cowboy, one of more than 200 Tories elected in the great Diefenbaker sweep of 1958. He was 31 years old, a well-off rancher and no barefoot boy from the Prairies — his father had been appointed to the Senate by R. B. Bennett in the 1930s and so Horner had been raised in a large family that lived and fought about politics tooth and nail. Yet in some curious way Horner, clearly tough-minded and no one's fool, developed a blind spot for John Diefenbaker. He was one of the people the Chief could count on in the caucus, someone ready to shout down the grumblers, and even to menace them physically, if and when that became necessary. This misplaced loyalty apparently blinded Horner to Diefenbaker's weaknesses — his indecision, his complete unwillingness to retire gracefully. All Horner saw then and sees now was a clique of Camp-followers hounding the great man for reasons of personal ambitions; there is no recognition whatsoever that Diefenbaker might have passed his prime by 1965, that he had become querulous, a divisive force in the House, the country, and the party. For Horner, it was loyalty up and loyalty down, to use that good old military phrase. Even after the Chief first promised his support in the 1976 leadership race to Horner and then switched elsewhere, Horner retained his loyalty to the old man. It is admirable in a way, but it makes Horner's scorn for Diefenbaker's successors difficult to understand.

Clearly he had nothing but contempt for Stanfield. Stanfield was, in Horner's view, only a front for Dalton Camp and the Toronto gang that had dumped Dief. He totally lacked the Kennedy-esque qualities that Horner deemed necessary in a leader, and was too easily gulled by his Liberal opponents. This book is most interesting for the way in which it describes the opposition Horner and some of his caucus friends launched against Stanfield's efforts to bring the Tories along in support of Trudeau's bilingualism efforts. Stanfield's work here — which I consider an act of high statesmanship — was completely incomprehensible to Horner. Horner argues with some success that he was not anti-French (although my own memory of him the one time I met him in 1967 is different), and his interventions in the bilingualism debates focused largely on the means of implementation and not on the principle. Still, by leading the anti-bilingualism rump within the Tory caucus he fostered anew the impression that his party remained opposed to the aspirations of Quebec. He also stuck Stanfield with the problem of fighting the government on a host of issues with a divided, disloyal caucus at his back. No loyalty up (and none down either) this time.

The emergence of Joe Clark, a man for whom Horner had only disdain, led to Horner's leaving the party to join Trudeau's Cabinet. The story is splendidly told here: it reveals Clark as a weak man posturing vainly, shows Trudeau in almost a wistful fashion as he swallows his aides' judgement and accepts the unacceptable, and brands Horner as a man with woefully weak political judgement. To assume that Horner would strengthen the Liberals in the West was mad; to expect that this act of outright political opportunism would sit well anywhere in Canada was to downgrade even our too-foolish electorate. Needless to say, Horner's political career came to a halt in the elections of 1979 and '80.

A fascinating story, this, told with some frankness and some humour. Horner can never be a very attractive figure — his weaknesses are too apparent — but he almost certainly merits respect. Indeed,

Jack Horner stands out as the quintessential Prairie politician of his time, misunderstood, unheard, unloved. Even the words with which he ends the book — "nobody was listening" — convey the sense of betrayal that he feels. In a very real sense Horner, a man of regional loyalties and strong passions, is the kind of person who today is questioning the merits of Confederation west of Manitoba. Could he be the man on horseback the Prairie separatists are seeking? □

The hard-headed defector

by M. B. Thompson

The Oak and the Calf: A Memoir, by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Harper & Row, 568 pages, $21.25 cloth (ISBN 0 06 014014 3).

LIKE ANY SOVIET dissident, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was known in his own country to only a tiny handful of brave and beleaguered men and women. For a while he was fashionable in the West, at a comfortable and martyred remove, but when he appeared grimly and censoriously among us the reality was too harsh to swallow.

Even before *The Oak and the Calf* appeared, with additions, in this good workaday translation, Solzhenitsyn had been dumped from the Western liberal band-wagon. The book appeared in Russian (as *Bodalsya telenok s dubom*) in 1975, having been begun as early as 1967, seven years before Solzhenitsyn's expulsion from Russia. The fellow-travellers have sniped away at it ever since, armed with emigré rancour, or Lenin, or half-masticated radical leftovers from the 1960s, or in a number of cases Michael Glenny's translation of Vladimir Lakshin's partisan *Solzhenitsyn, Tvardovsky, and Novy Mir*.

There are various strands in Western opposition to *The Oak and the Calf*. One is that Solzhenitsyn's account of the decade that began with the publication of *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and ended with his expatriation is malicious, inaccurate, and partial. This may be, in small details — no one in the West can really know — but his account is not inaccurate in its larger truth. Another is his contemptuous and implacable axiom that Communism in any form is an affront to decency and civilization. It does not help that Solzhenitsyn has suffered so very much and serves as a bleak reproach to those of us of lesser fibre. A more sinister and disgusting strand is the eagerness of Western liberals to squirm away from any kind of human truth at all, particularly the kind about tyranny, perversion, and death.

Some of the problem is thought to reside not in what Solzhenitsyn opposes but in what he stands for. Many Western detractors view him as eager merely to replace Soviet totalitarianism with a retrogressive, equally authoritarian theocratic-paternalistic system. It's hard to know just where he spells it out, but it may be he detects that there is something fundamental in the Russian makeup that requires paternalistic discipline. If so, Solzhenitsyn maintains that the version his people underwent before 1917 is infinitely preferable to the new improved brand after the Revolution. Only Western academic intellectuals would disagree with that. There were isolated atrocities in 19th-century Russia, but nothing approaching the purges, gulags, mass deportations, genocides, and psychiatric prisons so instinctive to Stalinist Communism.

Most of us know about Tsarist prison camps from Dostoyevsky's *From the House of the Dead*. Dostoyevsky's Siberia was bleak and horrible, but the majority of the inhabitants were legal criminals — brutalized no doubt, but criminals. A "political" like Dostoyevsky was a rare bird, and he served four years, followed by six more of compulsory military duty, before returning to society. And he had been a conspirator. One is reminded of that grimmest of gulag exchanges: "How long did you get?" the new zek is asked. "Twenty-five years" he howls, "but I'm innocent, comrades, I'm innocent." "You can't be innocent," say the lags, "you'd have only got 10 years if you were innocent." We can always quibble about figures, but we are talking about a few thousand (maybe) in the Tsarist 19th century as against some 30 million in Stalin's time.

Old Russian proverbs permeate these memoirs ("The pig that keeps his head down digs up the deepest root"; "The woodpecker could hide in the forest but for his beak"), and none is more apposite than that which informs the title. Either the calf will finally and improbably butt the oak down, or the oak will break the calf's neck. It was with the publication in 1963 of *Ivan Denisovich* that the calf began its deliberate assault on the oak of the Soviet state. The "Thaw," spearheaded by Khrushchev more for his own political purposes than for any fundamental love of liberty and free speech, enabled men like Solzhenitsyn to emerge from the as yet unspoken horrors of the gulag to bear their heart-rending witness. What freedom of expression there was emanated from *Novy Mir* under the editorship of Aleksandr Tvardovsky, and it was here that Solzhenitsyn's shattering indictment was first mooted, circulated, copied, "edited," and then published.

But the Thaw did not last long. Russia iced over again leaving a warmed spot or two of "dissidence" and a faint chance, thanks to a ripple of foreign publicity, to melt a patch or two of the frigor unpunished. But only for a while. Electric in the brain replaced the bullet in the back of the head, xenophobic isolationalism gave way to xenophobic détente, and the economics of hard currency drove out the inept former regime of slave-labour. To discredit Stalin, Khrushchev let the jailbirds sing for a short while until their song threatened to deafen a whole system.

It is this world that Solzhenitsyn describes in *Oak and Calf*. He is the central figure — uncompromising, tough, cruel, at times unlovable, sacrificially single-minded. Counterpointing his presence is the other Aleksandr, Trifonovich Tvardovsky, the embattled, alcoholic, emotional Communist poet and editor of *Novy Mir* whose shifting, typically Russian two-faced relationship with Solzhenitsyn raises the book some way toward the condition of great art.

It is worth leafing through *Testimony*, the recent memoirs of Shostakovich, as a sub-text to these of Solzhenitsyn: the musician chose to hold his tongue till after death, the writer took the oak square on. Shostakovich lived in (justified) mortal fear throughout his life, sending up the smoke-screen of acceptable Socialist Realist works, obediently withdrawing, rewriting, recanting what displeased Stalin and Zhdanov, preparing his truth for posterity in the hieroglyphics of musical notation. Solzhenitsyn did not ostensibly get on with Shostakovich. Dmitri Dmitriyevich ("that tragic genius, that pitiful wreck") had not been in the camps, had not stood up to be counted.

Solzhenitsyn had learned self-reliant survival in the Gulag, not at any cost, but at the cost of trusting no one else. His loathing and contempt for the conformers and informers crackle from the book, topped only by his excoriation of the Western intellectuals, who had no excuse for not knowing better. If, says Solzhenitsyn:

> some Greek leftist had failed to find a publisher in Greece for one single paragraph of his work, we should have had Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre and the Labour left screaming bloody murder... and promptly convening an international congress to anathematize the Greek butchers. Whereas if the process of smothering a Russian writer not quite extinguished under Stalin continued under the collective leadership, and if the end could be expected pretty soon, this did not insult their leftist creed: if people were stifled in the land of communism, that must be what progress demanded!

No wonder Solzhenitsyn asks whether

Sartre, "the man whose canvassing obtained the [Nobel] prize for Sholokhov" — and inflicted the most hurtful insult imaginable on Russian literature — "discerned in my refusal to meet him the depth of my aversion to him?"

Solzhenitsyn is a human being and so, unlike angels, is not spotless. But what he stands for is quite utterly right, his calf-like butting so much the only thing one can morally do, that to carp about details, particularly ideological details, is miles beside the point. To carp at the underlying truth of Solzhenitsyn's testament is an abdication of whatever standards of human decency we have left. □

A jest of God

The Mushroom Jar, by Nancy Senior, Thistledown Press, 63 pages, $6.95 paper (ISBN 9 920066 27 5).

Marsh Burning, by David Arnason, Turnstone Press, 88 pages, $7.00 paper (ISBN 0 88801 045 1).

By GLENN DEER

SOMETIMES THE grinding of Juvenal's satiric axe can produce a cutting edge of wonderful sharpness and precision, able to slice through layers of sham and expose the rotting dung underneath. At other times, the grinding itself grates on our ears with a vengeance, making a lot of noise without really giving us a tool capable of intricate dissection — the cutting edge is just too imprecise. Such is the case, unfortunately, with many of the poems in *The Mushroom Jar*.

The first two-thirds of Nancy Senior's book contains a variety of attacks against those who purport to justify the ways of God to men: specifically, Christian fundamentalists and Anglicans. Often, the strategy of the attack is to undercut absurd religious argumentation — for example, the great transubstantiation debate — with the poet's own ironic humility. Hence, in "Easter Bread," the question of the manifestation of Christ's spirit in mortal flesh is met with a so-what shrug: Does it matter?

Yes it does, they say
No it doesn't, they answer
It's a more important question
profounder than mere historical fact

Listen:
I have written poems
they are not the only way to God

In "The Paradise Garden," "Theology Lesson," "Rosebud at Thirteen," "Think of the Fun You missed by not being Brought up as a Fundamentalist," "Revised Standard," and "Father John," Senior takes on everyone from tacky, adolescent Bible-camp kids to the real heavies like the Anglican Church, "where God speaks to all generations/ in timeless/ seventeenth-century English." These poems show the author's penchant for, and ability to deliver, the sardonic punch at the end of the stanza. The effect of her punch-line poetics is often witty and sometimes comic; at worst, it seems as heavily one-sided and unjust as the subject matter it seeks to lampoon. Too often, instead of intelligent argumentation, we are presented with a simplistic tongue-in-cheek sarcasm:

Father John tells me all about divorce
He does not ask for my opinions
for having been through it myself
I am not a reliable informant
and in this objective discussion
we must confine ourselves to facts

Sometimes it is difficult to discern the exact target of the author's satiric barbs. In the poem "In One Life," the newly educated working-class narrator laments the loss of the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome and renascent Europe; ironically, she forgets the struggle for subsistence her peasant ancestors experienced during these periods of artistic achievement:

Now I sit in my study
books and music all around
and dream of days

when I walked the columned streets
a scroll in my hand
wore furs and velvet
and listened to minstrels
in castle halls . . .

in better times
than this philistine age

If our newly cultured narrator is unconsciously revealing her lack of understanding of her heritage, then why is she portrayed so sympathetically? In fact, other poems — like "Rosebud at Thirteen" — seem to affirm the notion that this is indeed a "philistine age" — that the narrator of "In One Life" is right. Thus, there is an awkward tension between the implied lampooning of the narrator's position and the validity of her verbal profession.

Fortunately, the last third of *The Mushroom Jar* is more successful. Here, Senior concentrates on the descriptive and emotional efficacy of the language of her verse, rather than trying to pack each line with satiric profundity. The result is a series of moody, impressionistic European cityscapes, mixed with a wry affection for the unpretentiousness and, sometimes, crudity of the Saskatchewan prairie. In the "France" section of her poem "Trees," her verse is tight and exciting:

When children here paint trees as round
green balls
it is not a childish archetype
They are painting what they see in summer

In winter each crippled tree stands naked
a hand its fingers cut off at the knuckles.

For more tightly-wrought, sensuously-woven verse, David Arnason's *Marsh Burning* is a veritable feast. This sensitive work is a complex, but balanced, history of the poet's associative realizations of the structures of mortality. His individual heritage and sensibility, as a Scandinavian-Canadian, is expressed and explored through the weaving together of Norse mythology with the problems of the contemporary world. In its totality, *Marsh Burning* is a poetic cosmos that contains images of the pipelines, arteries, organs, and geometric structures of the earth, the city, and the human body. The literary work itself is a kind of verbal nervous system containing the memory and imagination of the poet:

the word angling for desire, drawing
memory out of the brain's random electricity, out of the blood's
plasma, the heart's erratic pump, out of
white chickens dead on the
chickenhouse floor, out of horses plowing
in October, out of fire
out of named things, the lettered words,
the alphabet of need

Arnason formally alternates between sections of tight, image-packed verse poems and sections of narrative/ historical prose poems. He succeeds equally well in both. The second section of verse poems shifts from sensuous expressions of nature, "underground messages translated/ into blossom and nectar/ perfume become a silent alarm/ to fumbling bees," to the sensual "fumblings" of human beings:

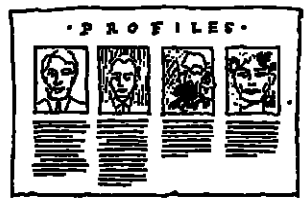
our unpeeling
the casual urgency of
our fumblings/my rising
cool flesh mouths tongues
the sweet sour taste of you
words spilled in embrace
the suck of that sunshine
stunned/stung

The fourth section, a series of prose poems relating events in the narrator's early life, including many dalliances with Eros and Thanatos, introduces the dream sequences of the fifth section: dreams of the disease-stricken Icelandic settlers of Manitoba in 1876 and their interaction with the sometimes beautiful, sometimes grotesque, and often cruel, natural and human landscape.

If any worthwhile criticism of this work ought to be made, it is that sometimes it is too consciously trying to be a poem about the creative process. The whole poem is a series of overlapping structures whose actual content is concerned with the physical and spiritual intertextuality of human lives: all of this is apparent. There is really no need for the blunt authorial self-consciousness of the concluding poem:

ways of ending

this is the end
the final tie
the line broken
the circle closed □



Mind over malice

Understanding Ghosts, by Victoria Branden, Gollancz (Clarke Irwin), 164 pages, $18.95 cloth (ISBN 575 02623 5).

By GAIL McINTYRE

THOUGH SHE CAN conjure up spooky experiences of her own — the sighting of a ghost at the age of nine, an apparition of a mad motorcyclist, out-of-body experiences during a near-accident, and once while swimming — Victoria Branden believes that such phenomena are products of ourselves rather than some evil presence. "The difficulty with these experiences," she writes, "is that I don't believe in the supernatural." In the process of seeking rational explanations for precognitive dreams, telepathic communication, psychokinesis, and the like, she draws on an impressive array of writers as diverse as George Bernard Shaw and Carlos Castaneda, Dostoyevsky and Carl Jung, to support her conclusion that psychic powers are entirely natural and more common than we may think.

Of ghosts, for instance, she notes that "far more apparitions are seen in moist climates than in dry ones, as if dampness lent itself to the recording or reproducing." Ghosts are often seen in closed rooms or other sheltered places, and — if they are recognizable — frequently wear the clothes in which the people they represent were last seen. Because people in states of strong emotion give off more energy than in ordinary circumstances, "it has been hypothesized that such concentrations ... leave a sort of trace behind them that lingers in the atmosphere, or is somehow retained in the physical surroundings."

The realm where the most consistent pattern of behaviour has been observed is psychokinesis, which tends to occur in a household where an individual is in an acutely disturbed state, which he is unable to articulate or understand. In many cases, the person is an adolescent, most frequently a girl between 10 and 20 years old. Her repressed anger and fear supposedly generate bursts of energy that produce the noises, levitating crockery, showers of stones, and other characteristic poltergeist activity.

Non-believers may find themselves more open to the possibility of psychic events after reading this book, but the prospect shouldn't disturb them. "Fictional ghosts from professional writers of creepy stories ... are revengeful, destructive, and completely imaginary," Branden says, while most real-life apparitions "appear to be harmless. I have read hundreds of accounts of them, and in not a single case has the ghost done, or attempted to do, anything threatening or dangerous. There is no reason to be afraid of them." □

The official autobiography

Paper Boy, by Stuart Keate, Clarke Irwin, 238 pages, $15.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7720 1300 4).

By PHIL SURGUY

STUART KEATE has had a pleasant life. He grew up in Vancouver's small-town golden age. During the Depression he never lacked for amusement or work in his chosen profession, journalism. He had an interesting war, finishing his active service as an officer on HMCS *Uganda*, Canada's first cruiser, the largest ship in our fleet, and the only warship ever known to have voted itself out of combat duty.

After the war Keate worked as a writer for *Time* in New York. In 1947 he became that magazine's Montreal bureau chief, a

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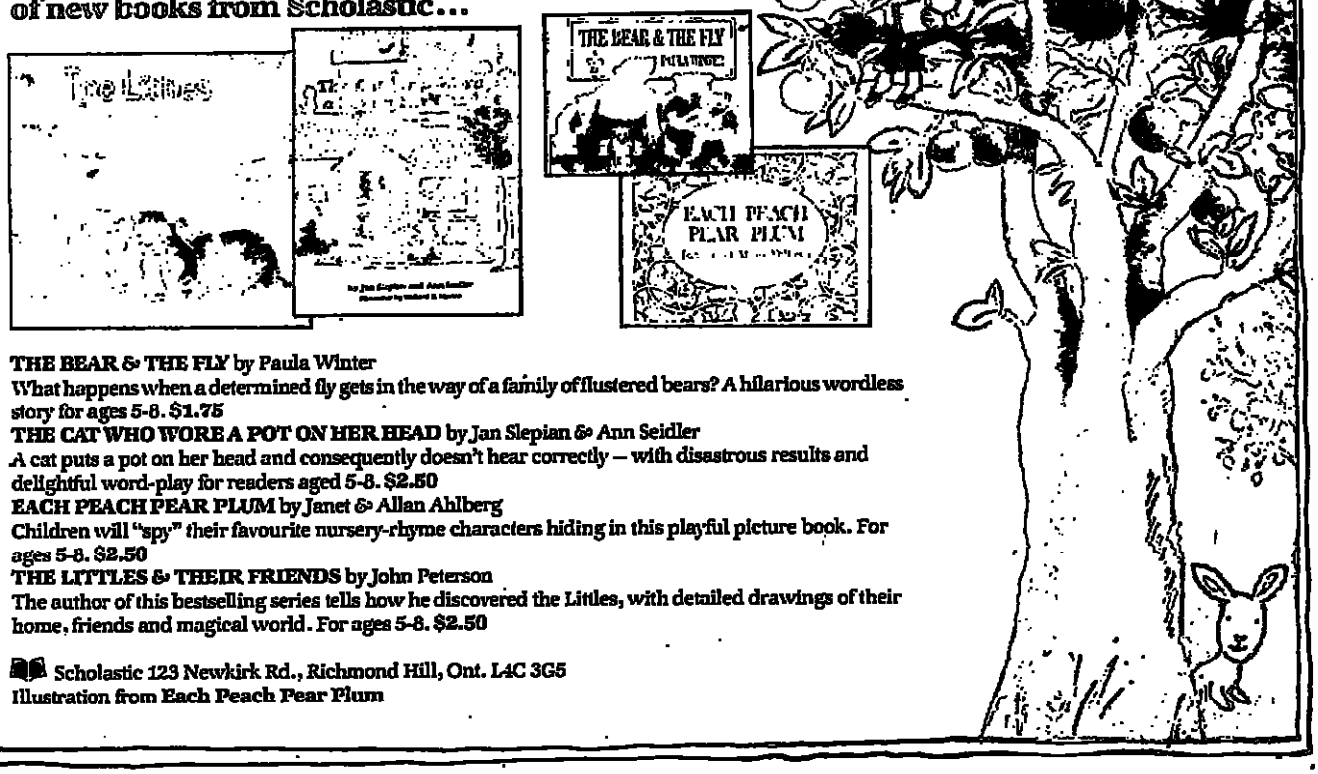

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Illustration from Each Peach Pear Plum

post he held until 1950, when Max Bell appointed him publisher of the Victoria *Times*. In 1964 he became the publisher of the Vancouver *Sun*, the job he retired from at the end of 1978, by which time the era of automated journalism was well underway. The *Sun* newsroom

> looked like NASA control in Houston, with about 100 video screens and black cables snaking across the floor.
>
> I thought of that dreadful day when we had a numbing crash of the entire computer system and all the stories disappeared from their screens — indeed, from their host receivers. In the elevator, I met one of our electronic whizkids and asked him what happened.
>
> He replied — and I quote — "Our infrastructure suffered an improbable interface."
>
> ....
>
> There, in microcosm, was the whole problem of Pacific Press. We spoke to each other but in strange, incomprehensible terms.
>
> It was clearly time to go.

Keate is a very good writer. His brisk style and sense of humour, his unself-conscious Canadianism, his enthusiastic love for his profession (the old-fashioned, competitive journalism that's all but disappeared in Canada), and his delight in people of all stripes make *Paper Boy* a pleasure to read. But it's just *because* Keate is such a good writer that the book is ultimately disappointing, another of the missed opportunities that blight Canadian publishing. It could have been a major work.

That is, Stuart Keate has had first-hand experience as a functionary in several very important areas of our national life — the worlds of power, politics, and money, to which most Canadian writers just don't have access or in which they are simply not interested — and it's a terrible shame that someone didn't persuade or inspire him to use his talent to the hilt and tell us what it was *really like*. For instance, what's it really like to be trying to put out the best paper you can (as Keate always did) and still please the men in the East, who don't care about quality, who can only see your bottom line? Or what's it really like, what pressures are on you, how does your mind work, when you're responsible for tough labour negotiations that could drastically damage your company's profits and perhaps destroy your career?

Keate gives us only one real glimpse of the heart of his (or any corporate executive's) business experience. In 1958, on a yacht cruise, he was summoned to the cabin of Col. Victor Sifton, the Winnipeg publisher and one of Max Bell's partners in FP Publications, which by then owned both of Victoria's newspapers. Keate hadn't met Sifton before and was expecting some pleasant chit-chat.

> I was quickly disabused.... Without any greeting, or formality, he said: "Keate — what's wrong with Victoria? Why aren't you making more money?"
>
> I was completely taken aback. I had no financial statements with me, nor had I expected to be called on the mat in these salubrious surroundings. But some inner voice whispered to me: *Don't argue with this guy. Don't get into debate. There's no way you can win*. So, after a moment's hesitation, I stammered: "Well, Mr. Sifton, I thought we were doing pretty well there. Our return on equity is something like 30 per cent. I think that compares pretty favourably with other returns I have seen, both here and in the U.S."
>
> "Not at all," he replied. "The situations are not comparable. You have the whole ball of wax. You ought to be doing better." And he proceeded to go over the expenditures, item by item, while I sat like an errant school child, being ticked off by his principal.

Somewhere in that passage is the *real* history of our country.

Keate knew and was more than passingly involved with many of the movers and shakers who, over the past 30 years, have had a tremendous effect on the way we live and think. In the political realm, for example: John Robarts, the future premier of Ontario, was a gunnery officer on the *Uganda;* covering the Quebec Asbestos strike in 1949, Keate encountered Gérard Pelletier, Pierre Laporte, Jean Drapeau, Jean Marchand, and Pierre Trudeau; he also claims a close, 25-year friendship with Lester Pearson. And he did some moving and shaking of his own, both up front and behind the scenes, especially in B.C.'s "bloody and hilarious" political battles of the Bennett and Barrett years. But again, he rarely gives us more than glimpses of what it was really like to function and wield some influence among the elect.

Only toward the end, in describing the rise and fall of Richard Malone, former FP president and general manager, does Keate get close to the nitty-gritty; and the sudden sharpness of tone and detail suggests that he is quietly paying off some accumulated grudges. Yet the overall impression left by *Paper Boy* is that the Establishment is little more than a chummy men's club. It probably *is* for the most part, as long as your bottom lines are straight.

Of course, no one can question Keate's right to the autobiography of his choice, to remember mainly the best moments of a life he can look back on with pride and satisfaction. However, as I suggested earlier, when a good Canadian writer is in possession of experience that is both central to our national life and inaccessible to other writers, it's saddening to see him use only a small part of it. Autobiographies are not automobile transmissions, though. They can't be recalled. But there is still room and time for biography: a no-holds-barred life of Stuart Keate by a writer with Allan Fotheringham's wit, insider's eye, and sense of political dynamics would tell us one hell of a lot about how this country is operated. □

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Cold comforts

Shadow of the Hunter: Stories of the Eskimo Life, by Richard K. Nelson, University of Toronto Press, 282 pages, $15.00 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 2388 6).

Pitseolak: A Canadian Tragedy, by David F. Raine, Hurtig, 176 pages, $12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88830 186 3).

Paper Stays Put: A Collection of Inuit Writing, edited by Robin Gedalof, Hurtig, illustrated, 172 pages, $12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88830 181 2).

By PAT BARCLAY

DAVID RAINE is an Englishman who immigrated to Canada in 1968, worked as a community teacher at Cape Dorset on Baffin Island, and now lives in Bermuda. Richard K. Nelson is a cultural anthropologist at the University of Alaska who spent a year in an Eskimo village learning how to hunt, travel, and survive. Robin Gedalof is a well-travelled Newfoundlander who's working on her Ph.D. at the University of Western Ontario and calls herself an "amateur Eskimologist." All three have produced books on their findings and the results are pretty well what one might expect, with one important surprise: Richard K. Nelson is an artist with words.

Shadow of the Hunter contains 10 stories illustrating the yearly cycle of life in the Arctic. Nelson calls them "collages," for their material is drawn from personal experience, observation, and stories he was told; though they are fiction, nothing in them could not have happened. Basically they are factual hunting stories, whose action varies with the game pursued: caribou, seal, duck, walrus, fish, whale, and bear.

When one considers how crashingly dull this book might have been, its success seems little short of miraculous. Nelson's characters are lightly drawn and, with one exception, forgettable. His plot lines are repetitive (hunter sights game, hunter loses game, hunter kills game). Everything in sight is wet, cold, snow-covered, or frozen. There is little dialogue and a very great deal of description.

Yet *Shadow of the Hunter* compels our interest with continuing suspense and rich detail. Six men in a 25-foot sealskin boat, with one explosive bomb-shooting gun and a darting gun or harpoon, take on a 45-ton bowhead whale. Four hunters, caught in a storm, are trapped on drifting ice. A wily old man stalks a polar bear. When a crew of hunters kills one too many walrus for their boat to carry, they inflate it under the skin with a bicycle pump and tow it home.

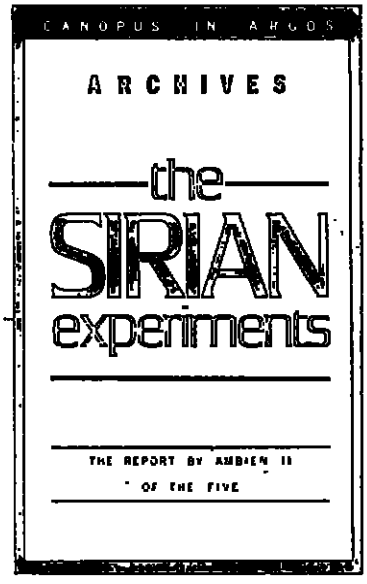
"The year I spent with Eskimos changed the course of my life and made me a very different person," writes Nelson. "I can only hope that what I have written of them shows that I watched carefully and learned well." The man is overly modest.

By contrast, David Raine's *Pitseolak: A Canadian Tragedy*, is a strong story sapped by inept writing. "He span a record across the room as if it was a discus," writes Raine on one occasion, though even this is less awkward than the parade of rubbed hands, raised eyebrows, and exhaled cigarette smoke that galumphs through his dialogue.

Thus hindered, Pitseolak's story misses tragedy by a wide margin, though his plight is certainly pathetic: as a bright child he is singled out by white schoolteachers for further education in the south. When he returns to his family in Cape Dorset there is no work for him, and he is ignorant of traditional skills. On the brink of solving his dilemma he dies, the innocent victim of his own inexperience.

Raine, who was Pitseolak's friend and counsel, is justifiably angry and distressed at the young man's fate, but is content to tell his story without rattling a single bureaucratic cage. The result is a sincere but clumsy exercise in wasted opportunity.

Paper Stays Put is one fruit of Robin Gedalof's bibliographical studies in Inuit literature. It is an entertaining collection of Eskimo poems, stories, essays, plays,



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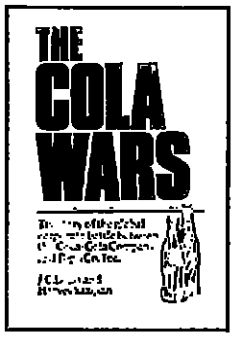

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songs, and memoirs, gathered from newspapers, books, and magazines.

"It is virtually impossible for an Eskimo to write ... without being aware of his unique position as a time-traveller, a product of a stone-age culture in an atomic-age world," Gedalof writes in her introduction. Her selections bear this out, whether they describe conditions in a Prince Albert jail, a "marvellous" puppet design that has been lost because the makers all died of a "severe illness," or the disappearance of fish in Pond Inlet.

On the evidence of this book and, indeed, of all three books, the Eskimo's view of life's complexities seems as clear and precise as his art. It's an attribute that should lend him strength in his struggle for cultural survival. ☐

The lost tycoon

Bull of the Woods: The Gordon Gibson Story, by Gordon Gibson with Carol Renison, Douglas & McIntyre, 310 pages, $16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88894 292 3).

By BARRY DICKIE

GORDON GIBSON has done everything a red-blooded Canadian male should do: he was born in a Yukon log cabin in 1904, retired from school at the age of 12, spent his teens logging in the wilderness of Vancouver Island, learned how to fish and sail, hung around with Indians, formed a logging company with his brothers, did some whaling, married twice, became a millionaire, invented a few things, planned and constructed an entire community, got himself elected to the B.C. legislature, uncovered a government bribery scandal, got himself thrown out of the B.C. legislature, navigated his own boat to Hawaii, built a tourist paradise on Maui, plus lots more.

Such a remarkable life deserves a good book and, for the most part, *Bull of the Woods* is a good book. The beginning chapters are the weakest, bogged down with too many dreary details: Gibson and his co-author Carol Renison seem overly anxious to impress upon the reader just how difficult it was carving out an existence in the soggy forests of Vancouver Island, how poor and rugged and determined and resourceful the family was. No doubt the life of a pioneer logger was a hard one, but over-stressing the point only smothers it.

The book progressively improves, however, relaxing into a treasure-book of anecdotes told for their own sake rather than to prove any points about heroism. There are sea stories galore: Gibson is an exciting sailor, relying more on his own intuition than on nautical precepts. He is constantly getting lost, stranded, shipwrecked, or chased by the cops for operating an unsafe ship. He is ingenious enough to convert a pleasure craft into a logging vessel, crazy enough to sail it into a hurricane. All for the sake of a profit or, perhaps, survival. Gibson is a capitalist in the romantic sense of the word: an adventurer willing to risk his life in order to make a few extra dollars and be his own boss. However diluted or distorted the entrepreneurial spirit might be today, it thrived in Gibson and is responsible for the birth of Canada's logging industry.

Problems, problems: if he isn't losing a boat then his sawmill is burning down or the fish aren't biting or the market isn't cooperating. Not until he is 48 years old and sells his logging company does Gibson realize any substantial wealth or discover the fringe benefits of being a millionaire. But the book is more than a rags-to-riches tale: Gibson is an innovative thinker, whether as a labourer, manager, businessman, or politician. His inventions, which include logging and construction techniques and the design of a blade for ice-breakers, are described with the simple clarity of a man who never progressed beyond grade five. Similarly he looks at business and politics with an uncluttered mind, sometimes naive, but always clear and very honest.

What makes the book interesting, however, are not the man's accomplishments but his reckless spirit and often drunken calamities. When he is a politician, for example, he visits a nudist colony to have a heart-to-heart chat with the people, stripping off his political garb and shaking hands in the raw to prove his sincerity. On another occasion he hikes through the bush to prove the necessity for a road and, of course, gets lost and nearly starves to death. As Canada's representative to a fishing conference in Japan he drinks the Russian representatives under the table, where he proceeds to give them classified information about the nuclear reactors that are to be found in each and every Canadian household. Even at the age of 71 he doesn't lose his penchant for foolhardy adventure, carrying an inexperienced crew home from Hawaii, through the stormy Pacific on a crippled ship whose engine sludge is trapped not in a filter but in a pair of woollen socks. Today Gibson lives in Vancouver, where he is rebuilding an old ship that he hopes to sail around the Aleutians and Vancouver Island.

With the exception of some awkwardness in the early chapters, the book is well written, the style as straightforward and gruff as Gibson's own manner of speech. He is an unusual man and his story is worth reading. ☐

The biographer and the great man himself at Llandrindod Wells, May 1963.

In search of a silver lining

Signs of Spring, by Laurel Lee, Dutton (Clarke Irwin), 118 pages, $9.95 cloth (ISBN 0 525 20428 8).

By BETH GREENWOOD

WHEN SHE WAS seven months into her third pregnancy, Laurel Lee was told that she had Hodgkin's Disease, an extremely serious malignancy infecting the lymph node system. The radiologists who were consulted by her family doctor recommended a therapeutic abortion before beginning radiation therapy, but Laurel Lee refused to abort. And so the tumours, like the baby, continued to grow. Finally, aggressive radiation treatment was started at the risk of damaging the child. But the child, a daughter, was born healthy, and Laurel Lee continued to have surgery and X-ray therapy as the disease moved into its final stages.

She also continued her journal of her hospital stay, and many months after the birth of her baby — after seven hospitalizations; after her husband had decided he couldn't cope with the situation and filed for divorce; and after the doctors had pronounced the therapy successful (that is, she was not cured but in a state of remission) — her journal was passed around among the doctors in the university hospital where she went for treatments. It came to the attention of a visiting doctor who sent it off to publishing friends in New York. Her journal was eventually published under the title *Walking Through the Fire* and created a critical stir — not only for its story (and not only for the way it triumphed over its story, for such stories are often badly, maudlinly told) but for its intelligence and clarity and for its spare and original language.

It is all as if Colette were still alive and casting those amazing eyes of hers on illness and dying and on the technology of modern medicine in a little hospital in the city of Portland, Oregon. And yet Colette, if she hadn't been locked into a room and forced to write by the notorious Monsieur Willy, might never have become a writer at all. In Laurel Lee one senses the same accidental genesis of giftedness, for she was locked in too — locked in by her husband's abandoning her to poverty, to emotionally surviving alone the terror of a possibly terminal illness, and to total responsibility for three very young children.

She didn't write the journal with the idea of raising money, though; she wrote it to celebrate and capture a world she might not have with her much longer. And maybe also to hold onto faith and sanity, although in her case, holding onto faith never seems to have been much of a problem, in either the time period covered by *Walking Through the Fire*, or by its sequel, the recently published *Signs of Spring*. Laurel Lee is a born-again Christian and both books are acknowledgements of the power that comes with great faith.

Usually she's not an insufferable convert, although she does occasionally give in to the wish to convert others, and sometimes (sadly) to the sin of pride. But these qualities are mainly offset by wit and originality and a generally buoyant approach to life. Here she is on doctors:

> When the examination showed no new abnormalities, I asked Dr. Anderson if I could possibly be in a permanent remission.
>
> He answered, "We'll wait and see."
>
> I thought he could have done better by saying, "Let's hope so." A patient is always examining a doctor's bedside manner, sometimes with the same intensity that he is looking for disease.

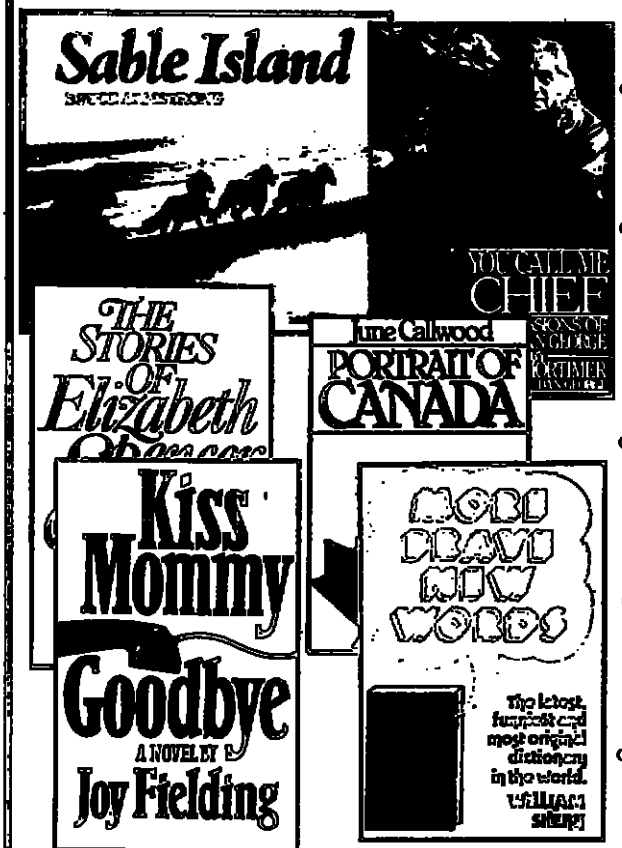
On the waiting room of the radiation department:

> The waiting room had the same quality of silence as passengers in an elevator.

On a bad telephone connection from her publisher in New York:

> There was bacon frying in the wires.

CANADIAN BOOKS FOR SPRING



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On a bone scan in nuclear medicine:

> The machine concluded our visit together by clicking back and forth, only inches from my face. I was overwhelmed by the feeling that I had had a conversation with an android.

On diagnostic procedure:

> Hospitals are known for their drama. First the doctor brought me into the *Bone Marrow Play:* a murder in one act. They draw the curtain around the bed and stab you.

There's a danger here, though, in being misleading about the book by quoting from it. The book, in its quoted parts, can seem more wonderful than it is as an experienced whole. This is because Laurel Lee's gift is for image and scene and epigram, and not much at all for character or for handling time. She's like a comic who works with one-liners rather than a comic who works from character. Her one-liners (both the funny ones and the ones that are more like poetry) are very good, but one is left with the feeling that it wasn't simply the shortness of the book that made it seem in a certain way (and in a heartbreaking way too) slight; it was also the condensed, epigrammatic quality, the snappy refusal to stay with the sorrow sometimes.

But it isn't only desertion and poverty and the remission of the disease that Laurel Lee has to cope with. The time covered by *Signs of Spring* brings new trials: chemotherapy, and a love affair that doesn't work out. The affair (with one of the young doctors from her hospital), is touched on so lightly, is so jokey and full of nostalgia, that it's hard to see it as a real connection between two people — it seems instead that Laurel Lee and her doctor are playing at being lovers, and engaged in a tender parody of love. There's bravado here, and pathos; the love never seems quite real.

Her love for her children is another matter, however, and she neatly skirts all the usual danger areas in writing about them — sentimentality, cuteness, overblown parental pride. When she uses some of the money from the paperback sale of her first book to buy a car, her two oldest children come to her with a request for a bumper sticker. Matthew suggests GET WELL, MOM, but Anna objects, saying it's the kind of message that goes on a card. She wants one that will read: PLEASE MARRY OUR MOTHER — I WANT A DAD. "That's absolutely too long!" cries Laurel Lee. And when, during hospitalizations and post-hospital rests she sometimes has to farm the children out to neighbours, she notes that she has become a mother by telephone: "My alternate slogan to 'Have you hugged your kid today?' was 'Have I dialed my child?' "

One last point: all through the book I kept wondering (our carcinogenic environment notwithstanding) how such a spunky woman got to be so sick. The cancer-prone personality, after all, is now widely assumed to be quiet, self-effacing, unaggressive and repressed, and cancer therapist O. Carl Simonton believes that "malignancy is a response to despair, experienced biologically, at the level of the cell." On the surface, Laurel Lee seems not despairing at all. Unless, possibly, her great faith is a kind of reaction-formation to a deep secret despair that she carries inside herself. If this is so, then *Signs of Spring*, like its predecessor, raises many complex questions about the nature of faith, courage, denial, depression, anger, and love. Both books make brave and lively monuments to a great struggle and to a love of the language. □

THE CITY OF TORONTO BOOK AWARDS

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1981 TORONTO BOOK AWARD FINALISTS

Colton, Timothy J. **Big Daddy: Frederick G. Gardiner and the Building of Metropolitan Toronto.** University of Toronto Press, 1980.

Kealey, Gregory S. **Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892.** University of Toronto Press, 1980.

Lownsbrough John. **The Privileged Few: The Grange & Its People in Nineteenth Century Toronto.** Art Gallery of Ontario, 1980.

Smith, Mary Larratt. **Young Mr. Smith in Upper Canada.** University of Toronto Press, 1980.

Thompson, Austin Seton. **Jarvis Street: A Story of Triumph and Tragedy.** Personal Library Publishers, 1980.

Weinzweig, Helen. **Basic Black with Pearls.** House of Anansi, 1980.

Wright, Richard B. **Final Things.** Macmillan of Canada, 1980.

City of Toronto, Council Chamber
March 16, 1981

by Morris Wolfe

The farce be with you: from the wisdom of Woodcock to the transgressions of Trudeau

SOMEONE APPROACHING the work of George Woodcock for the first time might well wonder where to begin. The amount and range of his writing are enormous and it's rare that a week goes by in which one doesn't run across some new review or article or book by him. Doug Fetherling's **A George Woodcock Reader** (Deneau & Greenberg, 238 pages, $15.95 cloth and $10.95 paper) provides a good introduction to the man and his work. Included are examples of some of the many kinds of writing Woodcock excels at: biography, travel literature, poetry, the literary essay, art criticism. With one exception the editor has wisely avoided excerpts from books and has used self-contained pieces.

In his introduction, Fetherling points out that Woodcock has always really had only *one* subject. He quotes Paul Goodman, who once said of himself, "It is false that I write about many subjects. I have only one, the human beings I know in the man-made scene."

I'm glad to see "Fragments from a Tenth-Hour Journal" reprinted here — some autobiographical and other snippets that originally appeared in an issue of *Northern Journey* in 1973. I kept that issue because I liked this piece so much. "I am ready to proclaim," said Woodcock, "that fucking and masturbation are the two most reliable pleasures — more reliable even than eating and drinking — but ... we deceive ourselves when we give them mystical overtones, and to build our conception of sound and fulfilled lives around them is trivial to the point of absurdity."

* * *

LAST YEAR Peter Desbarats and Terry Mosher gave us *The Hecklers*, a useful historical overview of Canadian political cartooning. Now we have **The Art of Political Cartooning in Canada 1980**, edited by Steve Bradley (Virgo Press, 224 pages, $7.95 paper), which promises (threatens?) to be the first of *many* such annuals. I think we can do without it. What this collection of 225 samples of the work of 37 cartoonists reveals is what many of us already suspected — that there are really only two or three good cartoonists in the country: Donato of the Toronto *Sun*, Aislin of the Montreal *Gazette* and maybe Cummings of *This Magazine* and *The Canadian Forum*. (That's not a complaint; two or three *isn't* a bad average.) Most of the others are OK, I guess, but their work doesn't really stand up outside the context of their own newspapers. And that, after all, is the test.

Even a whole collection of someone good can be a bit much, as **Donato's 1980 Political Cartoons** (The Toronto Sun, unpaginated, $7.95 paper) demonstrates. It looks as if *every* Donato cartoon drawn between January and September, 1980, is here — 186 by my count. A slimmer collection would have been preferable. But there are some gems here. Marines ramming an American flag up the Ayatollah Khomaini's ass, for instance, or a slimy Trudeau telling us in the first five frames of a six-frame cartoon: "In 1968 I promised you a just society and gave you the War Measures Act. In 1972 I promised you a new society and gave you record inflation and unemployment. In 1974 I promised *no* wage and price controls and I gave you them anyway! In 1980 I promised *no* increase in gas prices and I gave you an increase." Then he points at us, eyes glaring, and says, "So don't bitch. You should know better!"

* * *

EVERYTHING STOPS around our house at 1:04 p.m. on Sundays. That's when the Royal Canadian Air Farce comes on the radio. Now we have **The Air Farce Book** by Roger Abbott, Don Ferguson, and John Morgan (Collins, 96 pages, $7.95 cloth). I'm afraid it's a bit of a disappointment. Radio skits inevitably lose something in print — after all, it's not the words but the delivery that gives them their punch. (Can you imagine a collection of Bob and Ray skits working in print?) The best thing in the book *is* something that only really works *visually* — five *do-it-yourself, connect-the-dots* autographs of Air Farce stars.

* * *

TWO BOOKS that I wish were better are C. H. Gervais's **The Rumrunners: A Prohibition Scrapbook** (Firefly Books, 149 pages, $9.95 paper) and Grant MacEwan's **Illustrated History of Western Canadian Agriculture** (Western Producer Prairie Books, 185 pages, $24.95 cloth and $14.95 paper). *The Rumrunners*, about the liquor trade beween Windsor and Detroit during Prohibition, feels thrown together rather than edited. The editor's prose is flabby. ("How all this came about," he writes, "can be boiled down to about five causes, situations or environments responsible in ushering in Prohibition.") The fragments of oral history need pruning. And the photographs, which aren't very good to start with, are all too dark in reproduction. There must be better visual material available. One simply has to look harder.

by Priscilla Galloway

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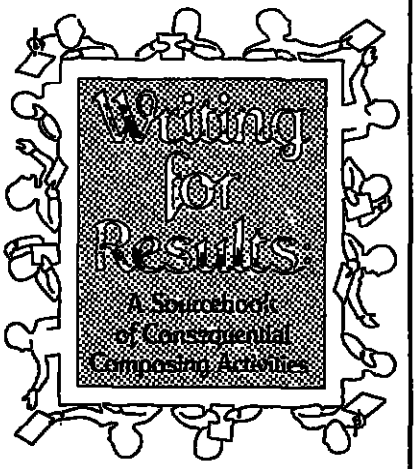

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Grant MacEwan's book is equally disappointing. It's dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the birth of two of Canada's leading agricultural provinces — Alberta and Saskatchewan. But the prose is turgid and the illustrations are dull. Do we really need a large full-page photograph of the Winnipeg Wheat Pool building in 1828? And where are all the wonderful ads for such things as the first horseless Rein-Drive Tractors? There must be a wealth of material buried in the pages of old agricultural magazines. Either of these books, properly done, would no doubt do very well. □

a thousand words

by Christopher Hume

Most artists should be seen and not heard, and some writers shouldn't even be seen

WOODLAND INDIAN LEGEND painting has been a fixture of the Canadian art scene for nearly 20 years, since Jack Pollock gave Ojibway artist Norval Morrisseau a one-man show in 1962 that immediately sold out. If Morrisseau "invented" the genre and remains its greatest proponent, one of the better-known members of his school is Jackson Beardy, a 36-year-old Cree from Manitoba. He is the subject of **The Life and Art of Jackson Beardy** (Lorimer, 48 pages, $14.95 cloth) by Kenneth Hughes.

Although Beardy may not be an artist of the first rank, he certainly deserves better treatment than this book gives him. Hughes's tribute is a paltry, shabby affair. Visually the book rates about as low as one can get. The quality of the reproductions could hardly be worse. Throughout they are fuzzy, dirty, and plain ugly. In one case a note was necessary to explain that the "colours ... have been incorrectly reproduced."

The text is as irritating as it is pompous. Hughes tells the familiar story of an Indian taken at an early age from his family of noble savages by the soulless and nature-hating white man. "The hero" (as Hughes refers to Beardy) descends into a hell of alcoholism and illness, which he finally transcends to become a great artist. "Visions," writes Hughes, "do not always come easily." No siree!

Needless to say, Beardy finds himself blocked every step of the way by a succession of fair-skinned philistines. Here is the author's description of what happened when Beardy, then 18, decided to take up a high school principal on his offer of art classes: "That is not possible," replies the blue-eyed, red-necked creep, "for artists are beatniks who sit around all day and do nothing. They live on crackers and sleep on lice-ridden mattresses on the floor."

Professor Hughes (he teaches English at the University of Manitoba) offers lengthy explanations of Beardy's symbolism but never deals with the question of its origins. He implies that artists like Morrisseau, Carl Ray, and Beardy suddenly appear, working in similar styles, without being aware of each other. This is hard to believe, especially since Morrisseau had his first — internationally acclaimed — show the same year Beardy was talking about art classes with ignorant principals. As I said, Beardy deserves better.

Though a very handsome book, Rebecca Sisler's **Passionate Spirits: A History of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, 1880-1980** (Clarke Irwin, 295 pages, $35.00 cloth) should be a source of acute embarrassment to its editors. Sisler, a sculptress and executive-director of the RCA, is no writer. She gets through the book on sheer energy and faith, and they just aren't enough. The fault isn't all hers: basically, the book needs editing. Her writing never actually says what it means. Usually the reader can figure out what Sisler had in mind, but it's not always what she's written.

Chapter One, "A Short Perspective on Academies," is really a short history of academies. A typical excerpt follows:

> ... artists were at the mercy of an only modestly enlightened middle-class public. Vast numbers of students from the new class enrolled in the academies across Europe, and then flooded the continent.... In an attempt to stem the flood, academies atrophied around systems that had spelled excellence in the past.

Sisler tells us that when the RCA finally came into existence, "it was late in the day as academies go." Problems — as always — quickly developed. "The bones of contention," she writes, "were not black and white." Soon after its formation the RCA set out to organize life-drawing classes in Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. "As the years passed," we are told, "A. Y. Jackson was one earnest young artist to catch a whiff of the flame in the Montreal classes...." Fortunately it was just a whiff; Jackson escaped and went on to enjoy a long and distinguished career.

"We Morrisons are eight generations within the confines of Prince Edward Island. I am the sixth." With these words folk artist A. L. Morrison introduces himself, his family, and his book, **My Island Pictures: The Story of Prince Edward Island** (Ragweed Press, unpaginated, $10.95 paper, $19.95 cloth). It is not a written history but a collection of delightful, primitive paintings that illustrate various incidents in the history of Prince Edward Island. Morrison's canvases possess the same simple power as his language. His colour sense is unerring and as sure as his love for his home. □

men and their libraries: 9

by Foo

by Douglas Hill

Fiction by equation: a coarse discourse on the hows and whys of writing novelty novels

Bushed, by Ken Stange (York Publishing & Printing, 221 pages, $5.50 paper), says it will be "a record of one man's winter spent alone in the bush of Northern Ontario." It will also be "a coarse attempt to combine the different methods and approaches of literature and somehow form them into the shape of Northern Ontario." Neither ambition is realized satisfactorily, though there are features to interest and challenge a reader here and there.

The book is a series of entries — poems, notes, meditations, bits of a plot — one for each of 152 days. There are characters, including one Tom Thomson, an artist who drowns. There's a lot of deliberate mystification, which is irritating, as well as a set of footnotes that are truly stupefying. The dialogue Stange invents is bad. Elsewhere the writing sometimes achieves a hard precision, sometimes labours with naiveté and self-indulgence. What, for instance, do you do with the following? "Why? The hell with why! How? There is a more useful question. How? How leads us onto the path to why. *How* permits of real and solid answers. This is not true of the amorphous and ambiguous *why*." I know what *I* do.

Some of Stange's insights about death and aloneness are intriguing, and some of his conceits are clever. When he gives you the sense he's not messing around, that the experiences are real, he can hold your attention. But that doesn't happen often enough, and there's far too much that's pretentious and windy. "I type this," Stange says, "seated at a small wooden table. You read this and accept it." No way.

* * *

The Hawryliw Process: Part One, by Robert Allen (The Porcupine's Quill, 285 pages, $8.95 paper), is attractively designed, bound, and printed. For me, its charms end there.

The novel is in the manner, if not under the influence, of the John Barth of *Giles Goat-Boy* (which I also found nearly unreadable) or *Letters* (which I did not), though it lacks the narrative power of either. It's clever, inventive, and difficult, but it's also ostentatious, cute, sterile, and tedious. This is writing performed in front of a mirror — occasionally brilliant, occasionally flat, always irritatingly self-conscious and too often self-satisfied.

In an attempt to describe the book's plot, which struck me as both silly and stale, I can do no better than quote the book's back cover:

> At the shotgun marriage between thought and act Minden Sills sits holding on to what part of the world he can make sense of. Downstairs, Aunt Moodie prepares to shoot Deputy Sheriff Cletus Dumont who is trying to foreclose on her ranch. Is any of this really happening? Why can't Minden go back to sleep? Are we just in the world of laboratory instance, set up as a controlled experiment in human behaviour by Dr. Sandor Hawryliw, Psychotechnochretician and real nice guy? Has Sandor's benighted attempt to realign reality via 'Christian and Empirical Principles' rent the fabric and allowed Fathers Robert and Arthur, Levantine Jesuits, to crawl through into the here and now in order to conduct Minden on a fool's tour of Him's Parking Lot Hell, netherlands of junked cars and lost souls, governed in reality by the Apocryphal McRat? Is McRat the same boyo who paid that illicit visit to young Helen Moodie years back in Kansas? Is the fruit of their brief union, the detective Asa McRat, hot on the trail of his apocryphal pop? And in a brilliant reverse, coached by crackerjack football coach Pop O'Doom, is that gaunt saviour of mankind, J — on the lam from His old man, determined to let suffering humanity go to hell and back if it wants — is this here J who He claims to be, or is He just another monster of the labs — like Walter Pater, Head Rat, or that strange committee adorned only with elk heads that meets throughout the story in order to try and wrest control away from the narrator and put it into the trustworthy hands of the scions of Christian and Empirical Principles?

Now there are moments that are fun, or funny, in all of this, and the odd episode that catches the attention. But there's also the distraction of epigraphs, diagrams, dialects, typographical play, general literary showing-off, and several pages of mathematical or pseudo-mathematical (I don't know which and don't care) equations. There's a chapter titled, "How To Read This Novel." Indeed.

I went at *The Hawryliw Process* in several moods over the course of several days, all to no avail. I'm willing to admit that perhaps I've missed the point with the book, that I've gone astray and lost touch with a masterpiece I'm too dim to understand. But I don't think so. The novel, as far as I'm concerned, does too little to earn an audience and far too much to drive one away. *Part Two* will follow in 1981, the publisher announces. Someone else can deal with that. □

Dig in!

New York Times Book of Annuals & Perennials
Joan Lee Faust
For both beginners and pros, a book you'll refer to again and again. It's packed with colour illustrations of 100 different flowering plants, with tips and advice from buying the seeds to enjoying the flowers. A must for every gardener.
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Louise Riotte
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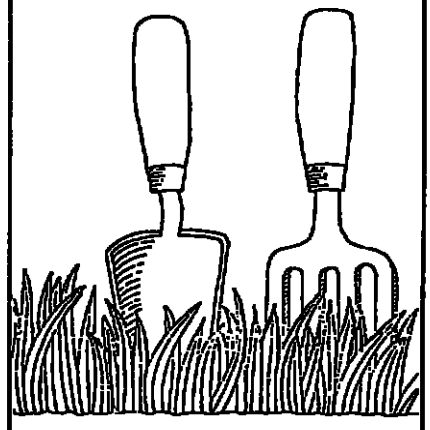

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by Bob Blackburn

A rose is a rose, and a mule is a mule; hopeably Safire will see the difference

SOME YEARS AGO, in reviewing Kingsley Amis's book *On Drink*, a witty compendium of advice to boozers, I felt unable to give unqualified approval to the work of anyone who put ketchup in his Bloody Mary. Today, faced with a copy of William Safire's **On Language** (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 256 pages, $17.25 cloth), an enjoyable collection of New York *Times* columns that appear under the same title, I feel unable to give unqualified approval to the work of anyone who approves the current misuse of *hopefully* to mean "I hope that" or "one hopes that" or "it is to be hoped that."

Safire offers a lengthy (and specious) argument in favour of acceptance of this barbarism. Essentially, he favours it "because no other word better substitutes for the awkward 'it is to be hoped that.' "

That's silly. Hopefully has a useful, established meaning that should not be destroyed by misuse. Must we now search in a hopeful manner instead of searching hopefully? If we hope that a problem will be solved, Safire would have us say "hopefully, the problem will be solved." If we have no hope of a solution, would he have us say "hopelessly, the problem will be solved"? I think not.

The first person who had to refer to the offspring of a male ass and a female horse did not say, "Well, since there's no such word as mule, I'll call it a rhinoceros." He invented a word. (Our mule comes from the Latin *mulus;* nobody seems to know where *that* came from.)

Interestingly, Safire says that, if there were such a word as "hopably," it would do for "hopefully" what "regrettably" does for "regretfully." Regretfully, he notes that there is, regrettably, no such word as hopably, "so it makes no sense to keep fighting the extended use of 'hopefully.' "

What Safire evidently does not know is that the English language contains the word *hopeable*, meaning "that may be hoped for." The *Oxford English Dictionary* calls it "rare," but if there is a great need for such a word, surely it would be better to revive *hopeably* than to debase hopefully.

Still, hopeably would have to mean "it may be hoped that," rather than "it is hoped that" or "it is to be hoped that," and a further extension would be required to make it useful as an alternative to the misuse of hopefully. Perhaps Safire is right in saying that hopefully in its new sense has won the usage battle. Hopeably he is wrong. I hope so.

Safire is not to be regarded as an authority, nor would he wish to be. He is a professional writer enjoying an opportunity given to few professionals. A surgeon cannot cut about cutting; a cabby cannot drive about driving. Arguably, a lawyer could argue about arguing, or an illustrator could illustrate the job of illustrating. Unquestionably, a writer can write about writing, and Safire does so in an entertaining and stimulating way. He has avoided (with difficulty, he confesses) the pitfall that threatens every writer who writes about writing: letting the fear of error stifle his style, and writing pedantically in the hope of avoiding the inevitable niggling criticism of pedants.

He insists on his right to break both new ground and old rules, but, save for such exceptions as the one discussed above, he exercises it in an orderly and reasonable manner and only in the interest of improving the tools of his trade. His errors are to be rebuked gently, not reprimanded (look up that distinction), because he is a writer who cares about his craft; would that there were more like him.

* * *

A WRITER FOR the *Globe and Mail* informs us that a building on a movie set is "an almost exact replica" of another. A replica, the *OED* tells us, is "a copy, duplicate, or reproduction of a work of art; properly, one made by the original artist." This was not a replica, then. Had it been, it would have been as like the original as possible, so "almost exact" is redundant. The writer probably meant it was a good copy.

Speaking of words derived from the Latin verb meaning fold, have you noticed that *explicit* has become a dirty word? There's nothing wrong with saying that a writer has described, say, an act of fornication in explicit language—meaning that he has left nothing to the imagination. Suddenly, though, some writers have taken to using explicit as a pejorative adjective. This is a result of all the talk about censorship, of course, and demonstrates that nothing good can come of censorship. Explicit writing should be a constant goal of the journalist.

The implication that explication is evil is insupportable.

* * *

WHAT'S ALL THIS we read about "preventative medicine"? Is that something designed to preventate illnessness?

What did the reporter at a hotel fire mean by saying, "An estimate of the damage is unknown at this time"?

Who is going around scaring the daylights out of doors? I see signs everywhere saying such things as "For emergency use only. This door is alarmed."

Someone has asked about *envision* and *envisage*. Envision is a neologism recognized by Webster but not by the *OED*. It means to imagine something that does not exist, or to picture in the mind. Envisage, Fowler says, is a vogue word imported from France and pretentiously used as a substitute for several more precise terms. It is not necessary to choose between them. Neither has a unique meaning; both are imprecise.

A final note from Safire, who, writing on the subject of vogue words, says: "I remain of two minds about *ambivalent*." □

interview

by Wayne Grady

Matt Cohen maps his fictional journey from rural Ontario to beyond the Pale

MATT COHEN'S eighth novel, *Flowers of Darkness* (reviewed on page 11), is the fourth part of a quartet set in Salem, Ont., a few fictional miles from Cohen's native Kingston. It brings to full circle an impulse that first took hold of him 10 years ago, when he began *The Disinherited*. Now, having dealt with the effects of the European migration on the North American landscape, Cohen intends in his next novel to explore "what they were running away from in the old world that got, in a not very disguised form, instituted in the new." This term's writer-in-residence at the University of Western Ontario, Cohen lives in downtown Toronto a few blocks from the house in which his mother and grandmother were brought up, where he is deeply engrossed in reading about the irrigation system of mediæval Valencia, and from which he emerges occasionally to talk to friends and importunate interviewers. Wayne Grady talked to him about the influences on his novels:

Books in Canada: *One of the themes in the Salem quartet, especially in* Flowers of Darkness, *is the Protestant work ethic. Since you grew up in rural Ontario, has that ethic affected you as a writer?*

Cohen: I think the Protestant ethic — the idea that a man finds his true fulfilment through work — has been a very powerful force in the development of capitalism and in the wealth of the whole Western world. And yet I think that as cities have grown up in North America the force of that ethic has been cut away at the roots. *The Disinherited* was about people who were living in the country, still fueled by the original idea of what it meant to have a farm, but forced to confront the encroachment of the city, machines, technology, and a changed idea of what life was. *The Disinherited, The Colours of War, Kitty Malone*, and *Flowers of Darkness* are four different looks or takes on the collision between what had been rural values and the effect that the city is having on them.

In *The Disinherited* the rural values are strongest. Richard Thomas, the main figure in the book, managed to live his whole life by those values even though he sees the walls, as it were, shrinking in on him. He is still able to hope — though he may see it as a faint hope — that his children will live by those same values. In *Kitty Malone* a certain decadence has set in; people are pursuing not a desire to change the face of the earth but the desire to fulfil themselves as human beings. In other words, they seek passion, not money or estate. By *Flowers of Darkness* even the seeking of passion has become a destructive activity. There is, in effect, nothing left to seek. The rural mythology no longer supports a person. People are supported by their mythologies just as flowers are supported by the earth. The novel is about the final collision between two mythologies. Finch desires both: he is both a farmer and a minister, he seeks passion both in his relationship with the land and in his relationship with people. He perceives the land in a passionate way, as a woman who is fertile and who interacts with God.

Matt Cohen

So in the four novels there's a progressive deterioration in the abilities of people to be nourished by the mythology of the land, the rural Protestant ethic. But it isn't just in Ontario — all over the world the peasant and farmer class is undergoing tremendous attack and is losing ground. People in Germany and England who have read *The Disinherited* and *Kitty Malone* have said to me that this is very similar to what's happening there.

BiC: *How is it different from when, say, Wordsworth or Byron talked about the evils of the Industrial Revolution? Is it just now coming to Canada?*

Cohen: Well, I'm writing novels, not philosophy. If you ask what is the philosophical theme of my novels, it may not be that different from something that was written 500 or 1,000 years ago. Novels describe somewhat unchanging emotional events among very individual people.

BiC: *You began as a somewhat experimental novelist with* Korsoniloff *in 1969, and yet these rural novels are quite traditional family sagas. Has the experimental vein dried up?*

Cohen: I've always hated the label "experimental writing." It seems to imply that a writer doesn't know what's going to happen, that he just throws a whole bunch of stuff together in a test tube to see if it explodes. I think I've written quite a few stories that are in a modern, surreal mode. But with the rural novels, because I wanted to let in so much of the landscape, and to deal with people over whole lifetimes, I felt they had to be written in a narrative style.

BiC: *So you adapt your style to whatever the content of the novel is.*

Cohen: I think so. At least I certainly think that's what one ought to do. There's no separation between style and content. But all this sounds as if I set out to write this or that with the big purpose in mind. Actually it's completely different. I started writing *Korsoniloff*, and it was like it was, and it continued to be like it was until the book was over. Similarly, when I started *The Disinherited* I was writing it at exactly the same time as I was writing some of the craziest stories in *Columbus and the Fat Lady* — the same week, in fact; I started it between "Straight Poker" and "Columbus and the Fat Lady" and it just took off in a different direction. It could have been one of the stories except that it was clearly going to be a novel.

BiC: *Did you feel torn at all? A little schizoid?*

Cohen: No. My experience of my writing is that it all comes from the same place, it all seems of a piece to me. There's a very conventional novel I wrote between *Johnny Crackle* and the *Columbus* short stories — a very linear, ordinary novel set in downtown Toronto, about a group of painters — that's completely terrible and never got published. So in a sense yes, there has been a change in my writing, but it has been a lot more gradual than it appears from a distance. And

I can't even say if the change has been permanent or not. I'm a very intuitive writer. I don't have a big plan. If it seems gripping to me I continue along to see what turns out. It's not much different from day-dreaming.

BiC: *So when you begin a novel you don't know what's going to happen to the characters?*

Cohen: Except in the broadest terms, I have no idea.

BiC: *When you began* The Disinherited *had you thought that it would be the first of four novels?*

Cohen: I thought it would take several novels to write what I wanted to write because I was fascinated by the interaction between people and the land, and I knew that I could only really bring in one point of view with each novel. I've now come to the point where I'd like to write about something else.

BiC: *So you feel that* Flowers of Darkness *has brought you full circle.*

Cohen: It completes a physical and intellectual impulse in me. My next novel isn't sketched out exactly, but I think it will be set in Europe, probably in the 14th century. But I'm terrible at predicting what I'm going to write because I always change my mind.

When I started *The Disinherited* I was writing *Columbus and the Fat Lady* at the same time, and I've always been interested in the movement of Europeans to the New World. The idea that there'd *be* a new world, a sort of *tabula rasa* on which people could inscribe their hopes, ambitions, etc., to say nothing of their most horrible impulses. And now I'm interested in another facet of that, which is what it was they were running away from in the old world that got, in a not very disguised form, instituted in the new.

BiC: *Does this tie in with your latest short story, "The Expatriate"?*

Cohen: Only in an incredibly indirect way. As I've said, all my writing is very linked. It all seems part of one consistent map, that is my ridiculous life.

BiC: *How is a novel set in 14th-century Europe a part of your ridiculous life? Will it involve ancestral members of your family?*

Cohen: My grandparents came from the Pale section of Russia — White Russia, where most Jewish people came from. But I'm not writing about that migration, which has been written about a lot by Yiddish writers and by Adele Wiseman in *The Sacrifice*. I'm writing about the period before that, when people moved from Spain and Israel to what eventually became the Pale. I suppose this might include what happened to my family, but it's deep in the murky past.

Up until *The Disinherited* I was not a rural writer, and I think those four novels may turn out to be a moment — an extended moment, perhaps the best moment — but not the main stream. One thing I have realized is that I'm not one of those writers like Richler or Hugh Hood who can write about the same people and the same place for his whole life. □

Notes and comments

THOUGH THE PAST year has been financially difficult for book publishers (and pretty well everybody else), they have managed once again to produce a good crop of first novels. But while there were some new names and adventurous ideas among the more than 30 new novelists whose work was reviewed in these pages, many publishers have also tended, like the Detroit auto-makers, to emphasize quality and past performance. Several of the finalists for the fifth annual Books in Canada Award for First Novels — which offers a prize of $1,000 for the best first novel published in English in Canada during calendar 1980 — will be familiar to faithful readers of CanLit.

The five titles on the short list are: *Laughing War*, by Martyn Burke (Doubleday); *The Charcoal Burners*, by Susan Musgrave (McClelland & Stewart); *Seahorse*, by Graham Petrie (Academic Press); *Fat Woman*, by Leon Rooke (Oberon Press); and *Gentle Sinners*, by W.D. Valgardson (Oberon Press).

This year's panel of judges is chaired by Douglas Hill, who regularly contributes a column about first novels from the vantage of Port Kirwan, Nfld. The other judges are: Toronto critic Sandra Martin; Montreal columnist and translator Sheila Fischman; John Richardson of A Different Drummer Books in Burlington, Ont.; and novelist Robert Kroetsch, who teaches English at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg. Their verdict and comments will be announced in a future issue. □

Letters to the Editor

SCIENCE FICTION

Sir:

Since my anthology *Other Canadas* was mentioned in the January issue by both Terence M. Green and Phil Milner, perhaps you will allow me a few words on the subject of the documentation of the history of Canadian fantastic literature.

The assumption of those who love SF and know nothing of Canadiana, or of those who love Canadiana and know nothing of SF, is that "ne'er the twain shall meet." But to someone like myself, a knowledgeable and long-time lover of both SF and Canadiana, the twain not only will meet, but already have met. *CDN SF&F*, the bibliography I compiled with John Bell, Michael Richardson, and Alexandre L. Amprimoz, annotates 600 such meetings — all book-length works of the fantastic imagination, so grouped as to suggest themes (like the National Disaster Scenario, the Polar World, etc.). John Bell is continuing the inventory and has, I believe, passed well beyond the 1,000 mark, documenting works that nobody before considered constituted a genre.

Well, not quite a genre. We see SF through American eyes, and while SF in the United States passed through a stage of development called "genre SF," this happened in no other country, as Sam Lundwall points out in his study *Science Fction: An Illustrated History*. In no other country was SF as "ghettoized" as it was (and continues to be) in the United States. It was not fenced off in Australia, Sweden, Bulgaria, or Yugoslavia, to take four countries at random, because there was nothing to fence off from "serious literature." Nor was it "ghettoized" in Canada, for there were no pulp magazines here at all (except for a few so-called Canpulps issued during the Second World War. For that reason such SF as we have was penned by serious stylists like Stephen Leacock, Margaret Laurence, Hugh Hood, and Hugh MacLennan, rather than by pulpsters like "Doc" Smith, Ray Cummings, Hugo Gernsback, and Garnett P. Serviss. What we lack in quantity we make up in quality. We should be grateful for the differences, yet well-meaning readers do nostalgically, adolescently, yearn for the Bug-Eyed Monsters, Ray Guns, Space Operas, etc. (In point of fact, we *had* a genre SF. I hope in some future anthology to represent it by reprinting popular stories by pulp-magazine contributors like H. Bedford-Jones, John L. Chapman, Leslie Croutch, Chester D. Cuthbert, Chan Davis, Thomas P. Kelley, and John Keith Mason. Maybe then the trekkies who read might be happy.)

As for defining Canadianism, I do not go as far as to maintain (as one reviewer implied) that anyone who ever flew over Canada in a rocketship was a Canadian, but I do go pretty far, and I think readers and reviewers should be prepared to go the extra parsec. (After all, this is a highly imaginative literature.) By my books, a work is Canadian if it was written by a Canadian (whether new or old is immaterial), or if it is set in Canada. Should it meet either of these criteria, or both, and if it is a work of quality, you may expect to read it in one of my future anthologies. In sum, Jacques Cartier was a Canadian while he explored the riverways of early Canada.

One further point. Why must all science fiction be *fiction?* It might have the SF spirit and be *poetry!* My feeling is that Canadian writers have distinguished themselves in the writing of fantastic verse, but so inured are reviewers to prose that they do not even see the poetry as relevant, and balk at the introduction of — horrors! — a movie script (like the never-before-published script of the NFB short *Universe*). It is not for nothing our leading SF writer — Phyllis Gotlieb — is also a poet.

Mr. Green may find my definition of what constitutes a Canadian work too "generous" (his word). Mr. Milner may find my sense of tradition to be based on "thin evidence" (his words). Yet there is substantial evidence that intelligences, however native or alien, have addressed themselves to those problems and issues created and raised by humans and non-humans who reside on the land of little lakes, known as Canada, in the northern zone of our watery blue planet. And generosity remains, however rare, a virtue.

John Robert Colombo
Toronto

SCIENCE FACT

Sir:

Anyone who has had work appear in print is gradually inured to the inevitable typos that slip into the final text, and learns to shrug off the "much" that becomes a "such." However, I feel

compelled to correct the alteration that somehow occurred in my piece Future Imperfect (January), and note for the record that Judith Merril has never been, to the best of anyone's knowledge, an "anthropologist." She is, though, one of the SF field's finest "anthologists."

I also state that Susan Wood, who taught at UBC, suicided last November. Upon receiving a phone call about the matter, and upon further reflection, I would like to amend the comment to "Susan Wood, age 32, suffered an untimely death on November 12, 1980. Although a fatal combination of medicinal elements was involved, the situation could have easily been accidental." My interpretation of the events may have caused undue concern.

Terence M. Green
Toronto

BLACKBURN ATE HERE

Sir:

Bob Blackburn, your guardian of the language, advises concerned readers (January column) to limit themselves to entrées as main courses, and he will not countenance the entrée as appetizer. Bob Blackburn is perhaps within his rights when he enters upon a typical English-Canadian restaurant meal by way of the appetizer, only then proceeding to the main-course entrée, a widely sanctioned and perfectly illogical American barbarism. He is certainly not within his rights, however, when he takes Bob MacLean to task for following a convenient usage borrowed from the French, sustained (or maybe endured) in its original meaning by the British since 1850 and encouraged by any number of Canadian authorities, including the Gage dictionary and some of my favourite eateries. Is none of this part of "our English"? What would Fowler — to whom your columnist appeals on an earlier point — have made of this tug of war between the courses? He might well have opined that entrées should be confined to their proper place, namely transplanted French restaurants, so that our English terms could be left to do their work undisturbed. But now that such an easy compromise is safely beyond our reach, we can only speculate as to how we managed to get into this mess. I like to imagine that after his earliest contacts with French cuisine, some Yankee restaurateur of wide influence but limited appetite and linguistic resources concluded that *plat* (*principal* or otherwise) rang a bit dull for the main dish, that *pièce de résistance* made entirely too much of a mouthful for the folks back home and that the *hors-d'oeuvre* threatened to pre-empt the entrées as appetizers anyway. Never mind. We live in a civilization built on the twin pillars of fad diets and junk food, and at the rate we're going main courses may soon be a thing of the past.

David Ellis
Ottawa

BACKHOUSE SLEPT HERE

Sir:

In reference to "Ardour in the Cathedral" by Douglas Marshall (December), your statement that Edmund (not James!) Backhouse "had absolutely no links with Canada" is not correct. In fact, Hugh Trevor-Roper points out in his excellent book, *The Hermit of Peking*, that Backhouse spent time at the Empress Hotel in Victoria, B.C., during the First World War. It is therefore likely that he *did* know where Toronto was!

Since Marshall obviously hadn't read Roper's book when he wrote his article, yet felt free to make sweeping statements about its subject, he has damaged the credibility of what may or may not be a good article on the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

Roger Coster
Ganges, B.C.

Douglas Marshall replies: I have read the book but unfortunately did not have it at hand when I wrote the article. I am indebted to Mr. Coster for his corrections. However, I'm not entirely convinced that his logic is sound. The premise that all people who spend time in the Empress Hotel in Victoria, B.C., necessarily know where Toronto is has about it a ring of Central Canadian smugness that I'm sure Mr. Coster deplores as much as I do.

CanWit No. 61

WE'VE BEEN rummaging for a suitable rival to praetertranssubstantiationalistically ever since that dandy word was coined by Mark McShane in his 1963 novel *Untimely Ripped*. The longest word the *Oxford English Dictionary* can offer is floccinaucinihilipilification, meaning "the action of estimating as worthless," and *Webster's Third International Dictionary* offers pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis, the name of a miner's lung disease. We'll pay $25 for the best

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....from the Concise Oxford Dictionary, 6th edition

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omnibus word (up to 50 letters), along with a plausible definition, that we receive before April 1. Address: CanWit No. 61, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 1N4.

RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 59

TO NOBODY'S SURPRISE, our request for an outline of a science-fiction novel set in Canada in 2001 didn't tap any great resources of optimism. Like all good science fiction, the most successful plots were also the most plausible. The winner is Margret E. Samson of Winnipeg, whose summaries seem chillingly close to reality:

The Anti-Media Strain
(or 2001: A Spaced Oddity)

The majority of people under 40 are essentially illiterate and depend on audio-visual sources for information and entertainment. The working class has become the largest wage earners and funds for universities, artists, theatre, environmental research, etc. have been withdrawn. Western Canada has separated and the right-wing fascist regime's capital at Calgary is considering an "attractive" proposal to join the U.S.A. Groups of people over 55 are conducting cultural events in secret, and risking their lives to hold anti-government demonstrations. The story *centres on a few of these rebellious senior citizens* and their underground intellectual movement, which has caused the same people who were alienated from their parents' generation back in the 1960s to be disowned and censured by their children and grandchildren.

Furniture.451

Based in Calgary, cultural centre of the West, this story is about a society whose furniture is all formed from plastic and fibreglas in styles of Louis Quinze, rococo, etc. All original pieces in natural materials are sought out and burned by storm troopers. Sometimes people coat real antiques with plastic to hide their authenticity. The beauty of its form, however, would often give it away as the synthetic furniture is always badly proportioned. A few surviving craftsmen, called "furniture people," hiding in the mountains west of Banff, continue to build and reconstruct real pieces from memory. Each one is named for his or her piece of furniture: (Hepplewhite Desk, Chip and Dale Armoire [twins], etc.) and spends his life passing the details of design and construction of his piece on to a younger person.

Honourable mention:

The Moon Is a Harsh Minister

The estranged wife of the prime minister of Dacana comes under the influence of an evil Moon-worshipping sect of strange nocturnal creatures. She is programmed into kidnapping her three children to Fortress 54, stronghold of the sect. As a ransom demand, the prime minister must attack and destroy the Unified States' capital city with his new strategic fighters. When he learns that his fighters are incapable of reaching their target, he strikes a deal with his clone RE-NE, leader of a rebel Dacanian colony. RE-NE leads a perilous expedition through underground tunnels into Fortress 54. A furious laser light battle ensues. Wife is zapped. RE-NE zapped. Fortress 54 destroyed. Children saved. PM lives happily ever after.

— R. D. Leachman
Fredericton

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

White Lies and Other Fictions, by Sean Virgo, Exile Editions. An auspicious first collection of 10 stories variously reminiscent of Joyce Cary, Joseph Conrad, and Malcolm Lowry, thematically united by Virgo's disorienting sense of alienation.

Inspector Therrien, by André Major, translated from the French by Mark Czarnecki, Press Porcépic. Book two in the *Tales of Deserters trilogy, which centres here on the chaste* bachelor inspector, his fondness for photographing nude women, and his participation in a village triangle that leads to his unexpected marriage.

NON-FICTION

Long Way from Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada, by Myrna Kostash, James Lorimer & Co. A personal account by a child of the 1960s, who makes clear how Canadian young people diverged from the heady influence of the U.S. youth movement once the first shocks of rebellion had passed.

POETRY

Atlante, by Robert Marteau, translated from the French by Barry Callaghan, Exile Editions. The first Canadian publication of one of France's leading contemporary poets who moved some years ago to Quebec. His landscape is the New World, which first repels, then offers composure through spiritual transcendence.

Books received

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

Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology, by Marie-Louise von Franz (1980).
An Ache in the Ear, by Wayne Clifford, Coach House (1979).
Art and a Century of Canadian Rowing, by Peter King, Amberley House (1980).
Arthur Darling: The Romance of Arthur Sullivan and Rachel Scott Russel, by George S. Emmerson, Gait House Publications, (1980).
Atlas of Canada, Reader's Digest/Canadian Automobile Association.
The Automated Citizen, by P. Pergler. Institute for Research on Public Policy.
Black Around the Eyes, by Jeremy Akerman, M & S.
Canada Lost, Canada Found, by Peter Desbarats, M & S.
Canadian National in the West, Volume I, by J. A. Love, The Calgary Group of The British Railway Modellers of North America (1978-1980).
A Certain State of Mind, by Norma Harris, Virgo Press (1980).
Canadian Perspectives on Economic Relations with Japan, edited by Keith A. J. Hay, Institute for Research on Public Policy (1980).
A Crack in the Mosaic, by David Lazarus, Vesta (1980).
Crime, Detective, Espionage, Mystery, and Thriller Fiction & Film, by David Skene Melvin and Ann Skene Melvin, Greenwood Press (U.S., 1980).
A Cross of Fire, by Charles Ewert, PaperJacks.
Cry of the Illegal Immigrant, by J. C. Fraser, Williams-Wallace Productions International.
Dealing With Interracial Conflict: Policy Alternatives, by Dhiru Patel, Institute for Research on Public Policy (1980).
Defectors are Dead Men, by Frank Smith, PaperJacks.
A Dream of Promise, as told by Megumi Zola, illustrated by Ruben Zellermayer, Kids Can Press (1980).
Elephant and Ice, by Rienzi Crusz, The Porcupine's Quill (1980).
An Examination of Tenure (1980 edition), by Michael P. Czuboka, Manibeauhead Books.
The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation, by John A. Livingston, M & S.
Faithful Unto Death, by Aviva Ravel, Arthur Zygielbaum Branch Workmen's Circle (1980).
French Canada, (Third edition) by Stanley B. Ryerson, Progress Books (1980).
Georgian Bay Gourmet: Winter Entertaining, by Connell, DeCarli, Hunt, Leavens & Parker, Georgian Bay Gourmets' Company (1980).
Glendinning, by Pamela Ferguson, M & S.
Going for Coffee: An Anthology of Contemporary North American Working Poems, edited by Tom Wayman, Harbour Publishing.
Gonbei's Magic Kettle, as told by Michiko Nakamura, illustrated by San Murata, Kids Can Press (1980).
In the Smoky Light of the Fields, by Roo Borson, Three Trees Press (1980).
The Lister Legacy, by Jan Drabek, Muswon (1980).
Living, Learning, Remembering: Memoirs of Robert England, Centre for Continuing Education, University of British Columbia (1980).
Love and Revolution, by Steve Moore, published by the author.
Megasynthesis, by Adam Apple, Megasynthesis Limited (1980).
Mister Miku, by Frances Facci, Virgo Press (1980).
Music and Spirituality, by Richard Rickerson, Vesta (1980).
New Worlds, edited by John Metcalf, McGraw-Hill Ryerson (1980).
The Night Sky, by Katie Hemblen, illustrated by Angela Wood, Kids Can Press (1980).
Plants of Quetico and the Ontario Shield, by Shan Walshe, U of T Press (1980).
Political Convictions of G. B. Shaw, by Stephen Gill, Vesta (1980).
The Printing of Music 1480-1680, by J. Evan Kreider, The Alcuin Society (1980).
A Proper Acadian, by Mary Alice Downie and George Rawlyk, illustrated by Ron Berg, Kids Can Press (1980).
The Reel West Film and Video Digest 1981, Reel West Productions (1980).
Renga, by Patrick Deane et al, Brick Books (1980).
Rent Control: Myths and Realities, edited by Walter Block and Edgar Olsen, The Fraser Institute.
Saskatchewan: A History, by John H. Archer, Western Producer Prairie Books (1980).
Saskatchewan Governments Politics and Pragmatism, by Evelyn Eager, Western Producer Prairie Books (1980).
Six Tales, by Lino Lettso, Vesta (1980).
Son of the Salmon People, by Hubert Evans, Harbour Publishing.
Spirit Wrestler, by James Houston, Seal Books.
The Stone Bird, by Al Purdy, M & S.
Stories Plus, edited by John Metcalf, McGraw-Hill Ryerson (1979).
The Story of Plucky, by Larissa Kuperman, Three Trees Press (1980).
The Tin-Lined Trunk, by Mary Hamilton, illustrated by Ron Berg, Kids Can Press (1980).
Toronto: Past and Present, Toronto Public Library (1980).
Towards a Constitutional Charter for Canada, by Albert S. Abel, U of T Press (1980).
Traces, by Frank Zingrone, Paradigm Communications (1980).
Wilson's Bowl, by Phyllis Webb, Coach House (1980).
Writing Power 1, by Gillian Bartleu, McGraw-Hill Ryerson (1980).

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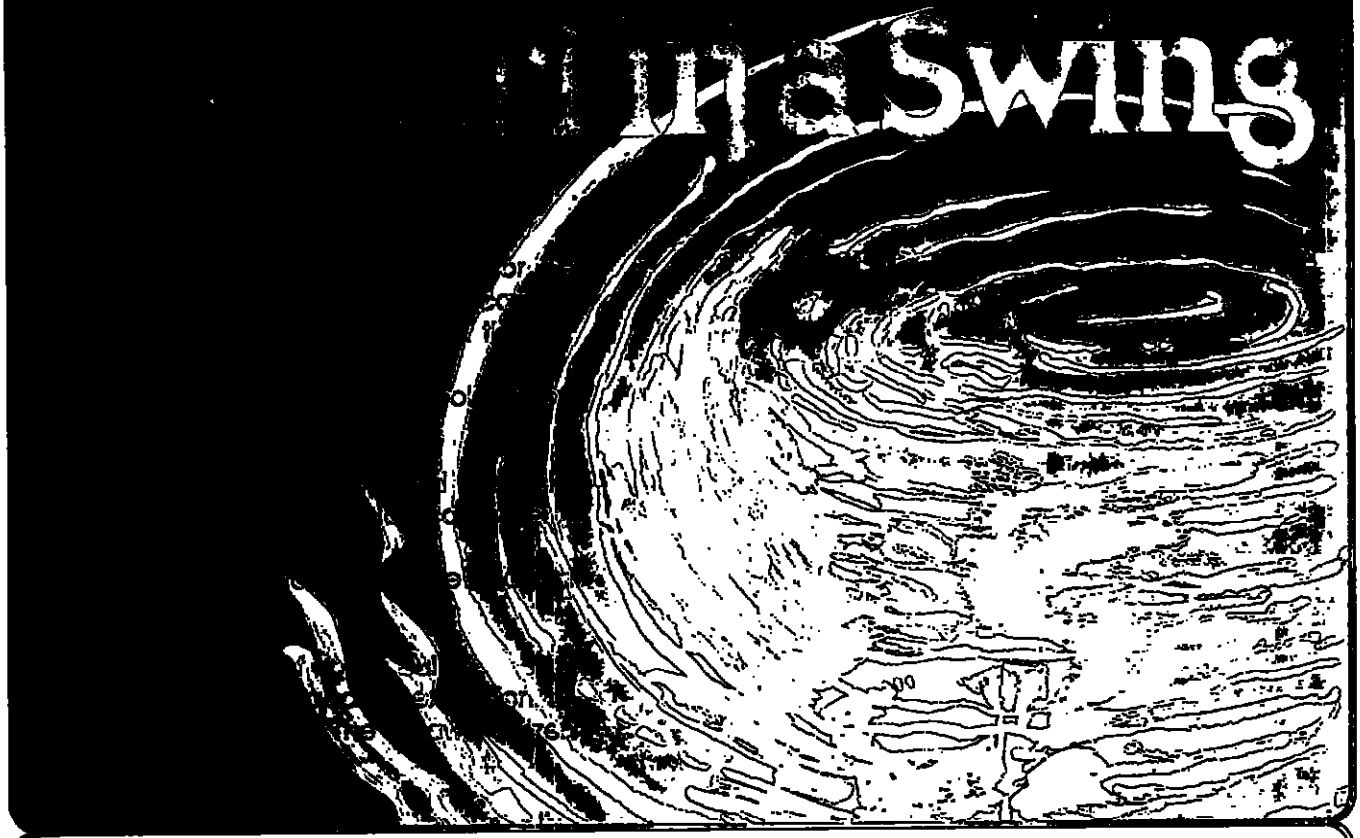

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