

A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

# BOOKS IN CANADA

## SPOTLIGHT ON DRAMA



### THE STAGE BUSINESS OF ERIKA RITTER

The year's drama publications in review

Gerald Pratley on the state of Canadian film

Margaret Atwood on the poetry of Jay Macpherson

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CONTRIBUTORS

Margaret Atwood's most recent novel is *Bodily Harm* (McClelland & Stewart). Bob Blackburn writes frequently about English usage in these pages. Barry Brown is a Toronto freelance writer. Anne Collins departs shortly for South Africa to interview Nadine Gordimer for *City Woman*. Doris Cowan is a contributing editor of *Books in Canada*. Gary Draper teaches CanLit at the University of Western Ontario. Howard Engel is the author of *The Ransom Game* (Clarke Irwin). Sheldon E. Gordon is an economic journalist with CBC-TV. Douglas Hill's first novel, *The Second Trap*, is to be published this summer by Breakwater Books. Jane W. Hill is a Toronto freelance writer and editor. Maria Horvath is a Toronto freelance writer. Christopher Hume is a contributing editor of *Books in Canada*. Ruth Kaplan is a Toronto photographer. W.A. Marsano is editor of *TV Guide*. Steve McCabe's drawings, which appear throughout the issue, frequently grace these pages. Duncan Meikle contemplates the international scene in Maberly, Ont. Barbara Novak is the author of a children's book, *The Secret* (Three Trees Press). Richard Plant is co-editor of *Theatre History in Canada/Histoire du Théâtre au Canada*. Gerald Pratley is director of the Ontario Film Institute. Frank Rasky is the author of *The Taming of the Canadian West* (McClelland & Stewart, 1967). Stephen Scobie teaches English at the University of Victoria. Christine Sigurdson is an administrative assistant at the Canadian Book Publishers' Council. Paul Wilson, a Toronto translator, spent 10 years teaching English in Czechoslovakia.

EDITOR • Michael Smith MANAGING EDITOR • Wayne Grady ART DIRECTOR • Mary Lu Toms  
 GENERAL MANAGER and ADVERTISING MANAGER • Susan Traer  
 CIRCULATION MANAGER • Susan Aihoshi CONSULTANTS • Robert Farrelly • Jack Jensen  
 CONTRIBUTING EDITORS • Eleanor Wachtel (West Coast) • Robert Kroetsch (Prairies) • Doris Cowan • Douglas Hill  
 Christopher Hume • David Macfarlane • Stephen Scobie • Sheila Fischman (Quebec) • Phil Milner (East Coast)  
 Tim Heald (Europe)

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY RUTH KAPLAN

# The magazine has had a good life, but I think it has outlived its influence'

## Tamarack's wake

ONE EVENING a few weeks ago about 50 guests squeezed into Oxford University Press's reception foyer in Don Mills to pay tribute to the late *Tamarack Review* (1956-1982). Apart from the magazine's four editors — Robert Weaver, William Toye, John Robert Colombo, and Janis Rapoport — some of the country's brightest literary luminaries were there, rubbing each other's elbows, lighting each other's cigarettes, sipping their own gin-and-tonics, and nipping into the adjacent boardroom where the cheese and ashtrays were arrayed on a huge oak table with lion's-paw feet. Arranged alphabetically, the list included Earle Birney, Barry Callaghan, Morley Callaghan, Frank Davey, Marian Engel, Timothy Findley, Phyllis Gottlieb, Joy Kogawa, Norman Levine, and that's only the first half of the alphabet.

It was a true Irish wake. There was enough laughter and good talk and free drink to make everyone almost forget that a death had recently occurred. When we shook hands with William Toye and offered our condolences, he demurred: "Oh no-no-no, you mustn't. This is not a sad occasion at all. It's a happy one. The magazine has had a good life, but I think it has outlived its influence." And continuing in this vein, as if he were talking about dear old Aunt Millie, he added: "I'm glad the end came suddenly, you know, that the poor thing didn't just dither away."

Copies — we almost wrote "corpses" — of the final issue, number 83/84, were being sold in the corner by Beth Appeldoorn of Toronto's Longhouse Bookshop. "You know," she said in amazement, "Bob was only going to print 150 extra copies? I had to persuade him to go another 200, so I could keep some in the store."

The table of contents of the final issue reminded us so strongly of the first that we found ourselves indulging in a little nostalgia. That first issue appeared in the autumn of 1956, sold for \$1.00 (it sells today for about \$7.50, if you can find one), contained advertisements for such things as Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice*, Ivon Owen and William

Toye's *A Picture History of Canada* (published by Oxford), and a brand of skim milk powder called "Mil-ko" that was highly recommended "for all milk uses" and came in handy four-quart boxes, as well as in the more cumbersome 80-pound package. A full-page ad offered "Good Luck and Best Wishes for the Success of *The Tamarack Review*" from the House of Seagram, and the back cover poem, sponsored by the Hudson's Bay Company, was by Tatilgak (a Musk-ox person of Bathurst Inlet), who warned the magazine's new subscribers and patrons, in language strongly reminiscent of Ezra Pound's translation of "The Seafarer," that

*There is fear in  
Turning the mind away  
Longing for loneliness  
Amid the Joyous  
People's throng  
Iyaiya-ya-ya*

Some of the other contributors displayed a remarkable mixture of international-mindedness and home-grown talent. Ethel Wilson's travel memoir-short story, "On a Portuguese Balcony," ended with an observation that has echoed through much Canadian fiction, and is also a fitting epitaph for Ethel Wilson herself: "All this is particularly beautiful, but I would like, now, to return to my own country." Next came a short story by Brian Moore, "A Vocation," in which a 12-year-old Belfast boy has day-nightmares about his catechism classes. Vincent Tovel wrote an article about the American playwright Paddy Chayefsky. George Woodcock, in his first of many "Fiction Chronicles," reviewed three novels: one by Nelson Algren ("the current literary hierophant of the North American underground"), one by Simone de Beauvoir (who exhibited "the grey landscape of the existentialist mind"), and one by Iris Murdoch ("one of the younger British writers who have come recently to public notice"). There were also some poems by Jay Macpherson, Timothy Findley's first published short story ("About Effie"), and one of the first critical articles in English about a young French-Canadian writer from Manitoba named Gabrielle Roy, written by Alan Brown (who has since become Roy's translator).

The final issue is in many ways a mirror of the first. George Woodcock's memoir, from his perpetual autobiography-in-progress, is about the trial of four English anarchists in 1945; two new poems by Jay Macpherson are about "Reading Pindar" and "Reading Ovid"; there is an excerpt from Timothy Findley's play-in-progress about the trial of Ezra Pound in 1945; and a poem by Alden Nowlan, dedicated to Robert Weaver, mourning the death of Bobby Sands. There are also new stories by Alice Munro (who first appeared in *Tamarack* number 2), Derk Wynand, and Margaret Atwood. And a farewell editorial by Robert Weaver: "There may be few today," Weaver writes, "who remember that *Tamarack* began publishing partly because John Sutherland and his magazine *Northern Review* were dying together. There was a gap in the literary scene that we felt we might at least attempt to fill." Weaver had described that gap in issue number 2 (in an essay he wrote about Sutherland and the *Northern Review*) as "the space that yawns between, say, the university quarterlies and *Maclean's*." For those of us who grew up with *Tamarack*, whose lives indeed have been measured by the slow accumulation of its thin white spines on our bookshelf (until they finally demanded a whole shelf to themselves), its passing is like the death of an old friend whom we had not noticed growing old because we had not noticed ourselves growing old. *Tamarack* filled the gap admirably, filled it during what has been the most important quarter-century in Canadian literature. But as Weaver writes in his farewell editorial, if *Tamarack's* passing leaves another gap, that too will be filled.

Talking over these matters during lunch next day, Norman Levine (perhaps reminded of T.S. Eliot by the tray of cheeses that had been on the oak table in OUP's book-lined boardroom) said that he had quoted Weaver some lines from one of the *Four Quartets*. "I think from 'Little Gidding,'" he said, "Do you remember them?"

*For last year's words belong to last  
year's language,  
And next year's words await another  
voice."* □

# ODE TO JOY

Joy Kogawa's poetic narrative about the Japanese Canadians during the Second World War is the best first novel of 1981

THE SIXTH ANNUAL Books in Canada Award for First Novels — and a cheque for \$1,000 — goes to Joy Kogawa for *Obasan*, published by Lester & Orpen Dennys. All four judges praised Kogawa's poetic narrative of the evacuation, internment, and dispersal of British Columbia's Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, though the decision to award it the prize was not unanimous. In particular, George Jonas's *Final Decree* (Macmillan) was a very close runner-up.

Twenty-two novels were available for consideration this year, one fewer than last. The judges (translator and critic Sheila Fischman of Montreal; novelist Jack Hodgins, who is teaching English this year at the University of Ottawa; critic Sandra Martin of Toronto; and John Richardson of A Different Drummer Books in Burlington, Ont.) worked from a short list prepared by Douglas Hill, who writes a column about first novels for *Books in Canada*. Besides *Obasan* and *Final Decree*, it included: *Streethearts*, by Jim Christy (Simon & Pierre); *Sunday's Child*, by Edward Phillips (McClelland & Stewart); and *Always Tip the Dealer*, by Gary Ross (McClelland & Stewart).

In past years it has been relatively simple to choose the short list. This year it was not. There were more than a dozen novels (add to those nominated the books by Jeremy Akerman, Abraham Boyarsky, Frances Duncan, Valerie Fitzgerald, Michael Gilbert, Joseph Green, Janet Hamilton, and James Poll;) that presented solid if not unassailable credentials. But even among all of them, *Obasan* stood out. Here are the judges' comments:

**Sheila Fischman:** Large moral and political questions are raised by each of the four serious contenders for this year's first novel award. (I'm leaving out *Streethearts* because it was so abysmally written, so unrelievedly trite that I can't understand why it was even published, let alone included in such a competition.) But style and effect are important too, and I have a bias in favour of novels that are entertaining as well as informative, challenging, or even outrageous.

I was certainly outraged by *Obasan*, by the moral and political outrage it recounts, even though the shameful story was not unfamiliar. I was deeply moved by the characters as well,

but in the end I believe that the novel suffers, as a work of art, by too much documentary insistence as opposed to imaginative re-creation. Much of the poetic prose was very beautiful, and I believe the novel, as work of art rather than moral or political indictment, would have been better if there had been more lyrical passages (for tragedy may be lyrically expressed as well as beauty or joy) and fewer quotations from documentary sources.

A very different world is the one depicted in *Always Tip the Dealer*, and I confess it's one for which I hadn't previously felt much interest. Nevertheless, the author succeeded in drawing me into the shadowy lives of the pathological or compulsive gambler and the other characters in their drama with astonishing ease, so that I read voraciously, even learning a tiny bit about basic gambling practices in the process. But that learning left me rather quickly, as did the lives and fates of the characters, and I had to conclude that this was very light entertainment indeed.

*Final Decree* is another potentially harrowing novel, and again, political and moral questions were presented — and answered — with intelligence and passion. The central characters are well and fully drawn, but I found the presentation somewhat leaden — from an accumulation of

detail, perhaps, or a too-conscientious attempt to render the intricate workings of the mind of the male central character. Toward the end I found both my patience and my interest flagging.

Then there was *Sunday's Child*, my choice as the best of these first novels. I don't choose it without some reservations: the author has his central character commit a murder and then dispose of the corpse in a manner that I found quite unbelievable. And the fact that the murderer suffers neither punishment nor, would it seem, appropriate remorse, was troubling. But curiously, the very implausibility of the murder somehow made this grave moral transgression less offensive. I think the novel would have been improved if crime and subsequent absence of punishment had been excised. What remained, then, would have been the bulk of this delightful novel of manners — the only one, I might add, that made me laugh. The author has an acute ear and the proverbial acid-dipped pen is



PHOTOGRAPH BY LEE DAVIS

used to fine effect. In addition, the intimate relationship between the central character and his one-time lover is depicted in a particularly satisfying and moving way; the fact that both partners were men was neither trumpeted nor exploited. On the other hand, some observations about other aspects of the far-from-monolithic world of homosexual men were both enlightening and amusing.

Of the four novelists whose work I considered seriously for this award, Edward Phillips is the one from whom I would most expect more and even better fiction. And perhaps such an expectation, too, is a useful criterion for making a choice among such disparate works.

**Jack Hodgins:** *Sunday's Child* made me laugh, made me tense, made me care — an interesting study of a 50-year-old's disturbing confrontation with time. Of the five finalists, however, the two that offer the richest rewards (to me) are *Obasan* and *Final Decree*. Kogawa is the more relaxed writer, allowing her material to speak for itself; Jonas is the more determined writer, carrying story, character, and reader forward on a compelling style that permits little opportunity for doubt. Both surprise, entertain, challenge, and move the reader. Each speaks with a unique and consistent voice. Asked to choose between two such dissimilar novels I'd like to split the prize. Backed into a corner and forced to choose, I'd ignore my usual discomfort with thesis novels (where I keep hoping the protagonist will refuse to cooperate with the author and spoil his didactic plans) and vote for *Final Decree* — for its strong, imaginative, and entertaining narrative drive as exemplified by those wonderful passages set in Transylvania.

**Sandra Martin:** I found things to admire in each of the five competing novels — the pulse of Las Vegas and the minutiae of gambling practices and techniques that permeated Gary Ross's *Always Tip the Dealer*, the humour and sincerity of Edward Phillips's middle-aged establishment homosexual in *Sunday's Child*, the videotape quality of Jim Christy's nostalgia in *Streetharts* — but the only serious contenders were *Obasan* by Joy Kogawa and *Final Decree* by George Jonas. Both are novels of ideas, meticulously constructed and artfully plotted, and both rank outside the ghetto of either first novels or Canadiana. Incidentally, on one level, each deals with immigrants combating an alien and rigid Canadian system of justice. At times in reading *Final Decree* I felt George Jonas was allowing his characters to be stifled by his need to prove his thesis. It didn't diminish Jonas's argument, but it did reduce the book's fictive power. I chose Joy Kogawa's novel because of its intricate mix of historical fact and lyrical form and because of the subtlety and resiliency with which she had drawn her characters.

**John Richardson:** George Jonas's *Final Decree* and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* are the only serious contenders for this year's award. I found the other three novels maddening and frustrating, not only because they were poorly constructed and badly written at times, but because the authors exhibited no control over their work. At times I wondered whether the respective publishing houses offered any critical suggestions on *Always Tip the Dealer*, with its wooden and silly dialogue, or on *Streetharts*, with its embarrassingly simple-minded ending, or on *Sunday's Child*, whose main character dismembers a body with the dispassion of someone in *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Each of these novels, however, had some moments.

The dialogue in *Sunday's Child* is witty, and the characters are engaging. The energy in Christy's *Streetharts* is constantly high. Gary Ross's *Always Tip the Dealer* has the germ of an interesting plot, but it is completely undermined by ill-defined characters. Flabby is the only word I can find to sum up these

three books. They all seem to be drafts of novels rather than finished works.

In the end I had difficulty choosing between *Final Decree* and *Obasan*, but Joy Kogawa, simply because of her masterful handling of the language receives my vote for the award.

Aunt Emily sends letters to the Government. The Government makes paper airplanes out of our lives and flies us out the windows.

All the political tracts or speeches in the world cannot sum up

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**'I chose Joy Kogawa's novel because of its intricate mix of historical fact and lyrical form, and because of the subtlety and resiliency with which she has drawn her characters'**

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the poignancy or bitterness that these two sentences achieve. Kogawa's own poetic language contrasts perfectly with the government's Newspeak justification of the internment of Japanese Canadians; it enlarges the shame and horror that we feel. It's unfortunate that Mackenzie King isn't able to read this book.

I enjoyed Jonas's story about Kazmer Harcsa, the immigrant who loses his wife and possessions to fuzzy feminism and an intolerant judicial system, very much. The pace never slackens and the dialogue is unfailingly true. But I became increasingly irritated with the endless aphorisms that seem to form a large part of Harcsa's thought process. Although far superior to the other three novels, *Final Decree* did not have either the emotional impact or subtlety of *Obasan*. □

## BOOKS IN CANADA

congratulates

JOY KOGAWA  
winner of our sixth annual  
First Novel Award

The award will be presented  
in Toronto on April 26, 1982,  
at a banquet to be held in  
conjunction with this year's  
National Book Festival

# HOLLYWOOD'S CANADA

Being a Canadian means accepting everything the film world has to offer, while showing no concern that little from one's own country is ever to be seen

By GERALD PRATLEY

THE NATIONAL FILM THEATRE in London recently held a retrospective program on Quebec film-maker Jean-Pierre Lefebvre. The writer of the notes accompanying the announcement of this event pointedly remarked that "In recent years the Canadian industry's bad imitations of American pot-boilers have won few admirers abroad. But there is another Canadian cinema coming primarily out of Quebec." One could add to this that even if the pot-boilers were *good* imitations it is still doubtful they should find admirers. But, strange as it may seem, these pseudo-American films, good or bad, do have admirers in Canada, particularly in the popular press. Dismaying though this may be to many of us, the discouraging fact is that many Canadians are neither surprised nor troubled to find that most English-language feature films are supposedly set in the United States (or, like *Heartaches*, in a never-never land that could pass as the U.S.), with non-Canadian (usually American) actors in the leading roles and Canadians relegated to small, supporting parts.

We hear a great deal about how we are indoctrinated into the American way of life by the number of American films in our cinemas, by the amount of American programming on Canadian radio and television, and by the flood of American books and magazines available in every variety and drug store, bookshop, and library. What no one can properly assess is the effect this has on Canadians, particularly the younger generation, in turning them into Americans. One hopes that the very act of living and being educated in this country would help to offset this influence, but it is obvious there is so much that is American-influenced and inspired in every aspect of our daily life that Canadian character and identity are all but swamped. It is not funny when lawyers tell us that people arrested by the police expect their arraignment and subsequent trial to proceed according to what they see on American television, or that children going to school expect to find the Stars and Stripes in their classroom.

Is it because Canadians are so used to American film and television that they are neither surprised nor disturbed on finding that Canadian films are American? The way people show so little concern would seem to bear out this contention. And further, that they react with a certain hostility to those of us

who question the americanization of Canadian films, as though the expression of these doubts is an indication of anti-American feeling. The response is usually a defensive "What's wrong with being American?" or "What's wrong with admiring American films?" (the implication being that they are always better than Canadian programming) or "We should be grateful to have the Americans as our neighbours."

It goes without saying that no sensible person denies or disputes this, nor would anyone want to see the imposition of controls (which would be unworkable anyway) on the amount

of American material available in this country. But why does this admiration of American films and television always seem to preclude the acceptance of, and to deny the reality of, anything Canadian? It is one of the penalties we pay for our greedy acceptance of all things American that we have lost much of our feeling of what being Canadian really means. How far we have lost this is shown in our ready acceptance of the true-blue portrayals of American society in American films to the extent that, having so submerged our thoughts and feelings about anything Canadian, our country is no longer considered worth depicting in the form of subject, place, or presence in the cinema or on television.

To ask or to expect our producers to make Canadian films

that are set in and identify this country (as all American films identify their place of action and the backgrounds of their characters), with our actors portraying Canadians, is to make oneself seem rather quaint and ridiculous. Who needs Canada on the screen? The academics of the cinema courses, the columnists and reporters, the politicians in the provincial and federal governments — all seem to think it is out of the range of their concerns to even ask for such a reasonable state of affairs. Even worse, just to discuss the matter would make them seem petty-minded, small-town, less international in outlook, and, heaven forbid, *nationalistic*. Being a Canadian means being broad-minded enough to accept everything the world has to offer, while showing no concern whatsoever over the fact that little from one's own country is to be seen.

All of this is most comforting to our producers, of course, who in the past three years or so have managed to make more than 200 feature-length films with pseudo-American back-



DRAWING BY HOWARD ENGEL

grounds in their race to reach for the pot of gold that glimmers in the American marketplace. They have gone arrogantly forward, aided and abetted by the Canadian Film Development Corporation and the government's tax allowance plan, in denying the existence of this country in the films they call Canadian. Their justification for doing this is to make money, and a few of their ill-conceived projects have been successful in the United States and Europe. But for every one that succeeds, there must be 10 that have never seen the light of a commercial cinema screen.

No one objects to producers making decent profits from decent pictures. This is the only way they can stay in business and continue to make films. But there are very real grounds on which to object to their making personal profits (as most have done) by making films at the taxpayers' expense that have nothing to do with Canada, and which all too often lose the money invested in them by others. The producers (who are more akin to hustlers than the serious producers one finds in Los Angeles and Europe) claim they give work to Canadian technicians, the laboratories, and film-makers. They certainly aren't giving work to our actors, who must stand aside for Americans who in most cases are no more "box-office magic" than many of our lesser-known but far more talented performers — actors who remain unknown because our producers do not provide them with opportunities.

But what does it profit creative people to work on dreadful horror films and similar inanities that have no relevance to their life or their society? This is precisely where Quebec film-makers have the advantage over their counter-parts in the rest of Canada. They know who they are, what they are saying, and the lives they are depicting. As a result, Quebec has established its separate identity through the cinema.

All film-making is creative, and all film-makers take pride in their work. Most of them would like this work to reveal something about who they are and what the background to their lives is. This seldom happens in Canadian films. The producers deny them the opportunities that Quebec film-makers have because they claim that, as we are first cousins to the Americans and speak the same language, our films should be like theirs. This is nonsense. Canada has much to portray that would be appealing, if well made, to English-speaking audiences everywhere, just as the Australians have shown us fascinating glimpses of their life and history. Can any producer prove that *Meatballs* would have been any less successful in the U.S. had it contained a few matter-of-fact Canadian references? Did *Middle Age Crazy* have to be set in Houston? Did *The Changeling* (filmed in Vancouver) have to pretend the setting was Seattle? Did *Threshold* have to be set in Washington? One could go on and on.

It is perverse the way audiences accept the premise that American films will naturally be American, that if a film is French then it will be about France — and the same for German, Russian, British, Italian, or Swedish films. But when one expects that Canadian films should be about Toronto, Hamilton, London, Calgary, Edmonton, and places between and beyond, with references to our police forces, newspapers, schools, shops, politics, streets, and buses, such hopes are met with a stare that suggests such activities in a Canadian setting would have no interest to anyone. Yet when good Canadian films do appear and are given the opportunity to reach audiences — films such as *Goin' Down the Road* and *Outrageous* — the public responds as if awakened from a trance to a Canadian reality that makes interesting screen material. Unfortunately, there are so very few genuine Canadian films in English that the spark of interest is quickly extinguished.

To add to our bewilderment we now have Canadian films that were not made here and have nothing to do with this country. Columnists and television reporters now are proudly referring to "the Canadian film" *Atlantic City* (formerly

*Atlantic City U.S.A.*), which has been nominated for an Academy Award, and *Quest for Fire*, an expensive oddity about pre-historic man that comes to us as a France-Canada co-production. There is very little about these films (and there are others) that is Canadian, other than the money invested in them. Does the fact that they were paid for entirely or in part by Canadian banks and investment houses make them Canadian?

The supporters of this commercial huckstering claim that Hollywood companies invest money in films made abroad that are not American. Sometimes they do, but Americans always have the interests of America at heart, and such films are never without creative participation by Americans. Furthermore,

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**'The moneymen in our film industry  
have no faith in this country,  
no vision and no imagination, and  
the CFDC does nothing to change  
this dismal state of affairs'**

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countries that enjoy steady production of indigenous motion pictures can afford, in the cultural as well as financial sense, to make some films that are not preoccupied with themselves. Canada has no indigenous films except for those made in Quebec, so how are we to find any satisfaction in such movies as *Atlantic City* and *Quest for Fire*? The cynics will argue that what is important is that the films were made, but this is too glib a reply. At this level, we could go on forever making films that have nothing to do with the country that paid for them.

Motion pictures mean much more than this, and money is not always the deciding factor in determining the nationality of a film. An American company might, for example, finance entirely the making of a film of Mordecai Richler's *St. Urbain's Horseman* (a much bandied-about possibility), shot in Montreal, written and directed by a Canadian, with Canadian actors and technicians. This, quite simply, would be a Canadian film. But why should we expect an American company to do this? Why don't we have enough desire and determination to do it ourselves, for our own sense of well-being? Because the moneymen in our film industry have no faith in this country, no vision and no imagination, and the CFDC does nothing to change this dismal state of affairs.

Mentioning Richler's book brings us to another of our continual frustrations over film-making in this country. The producers are forever quick to excuse their non-Canadian films on the grounds that we have "no writers" and no stories to tell. This, of course, only confirms our suspicions that they are incapable of reading, or only read their bank balances. The pages of this journal and the book-review sections of the daily newspapers are filled, month after month with reviews of Canadian novels and works of non-fiction, most of which, even if not great literature, would make splendid films. These, together with the many Canadian plays being staged today, could provide a steady flow of small, intimate, inexpensive, important films that would please audiences in cinemas and on television, and provide us with a visual record of our times past and present.

Just as discouraging are those rare occasions when Canadian books are filmed — such as Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* — and the producers distort them by using non-Canadian actors. If there is anything positive about *Surfacing* it is that the film proves that Canadians and Americans are *not* the same. The use of Joseph Bottoms and Kathleen Beller causes a good deal of damage to the essential Canadian quality of the story. They were out of place and out of their depth. But among the reviewers only

James Beveridge on TV Ontario pointed out, in his mild and matter-of-fact manner, that the characters they played were definitely not Canadians in the same sense that R. H. Thomson and Margaret Dragu were very clearly native to the story.

Will this situation ever change? It has not changed over 80 years of motion picture history. Will pay-TV bring about a new beginning? The applicants for licences are falling over themselves promising Canadian movies, just as the television

operators promised Canadian programs, which have never materialized. One would have to be an incurable optimist to believe them. The situation will not change until people of vision, courage, and belief in this country are given the opportunity to run the CFDC, the NFB, the CBC — and when private enterprise comes to understand that it cannot go on living high from paying low prices for American programming. □

## FEATURE REVIEW

# Precious blood

The year's drama publications range from a humorous portrayal of Lizzie Borden to a perceptive portrait of Mackenzie King

By RICHARD PLANT

LAST YEAR in this annual review of drama publishing, I cautioned that our theatres, and the plays being written for them, were treading dangerously close to damaging commercialism. While that still appears to be true to some extent, and while publishers continue to face restricted financing, this past year's plays and books related to our theatre show few signs of an overwhelming search for the filthy lucre. A large proportion of the published scripts consists of serious, imaginative attempts to deal with rewarding topics, and the plays are complemented by a body of historical, analytical, and critical works.

Among the most appealing is *Blood Relations and Other Plays*, a collection of three of Sharon Pollock's dramas published by Edmonton's NeWest Press, and carefully edited by Diane Bessai — the same editor who gave us the *Prairie Performance* anthology last year. The title play of the volume is an often humorous, occasionally frightening work that has already seen productions in Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa and is likely to see more. Though it is about Lizzie Borden, this is no idle toying with the gory details of murder. Shortly after the action opens in 1902, Lizzie's actress friend casually tells her of some children she saw skipping rope to "Lizzie Borden took an axe"; then she gradually comes round to asking: "Lizzie, Lizzie . . . did you?" She and the audience never do find out, but as Bessai says in her brief, incisive introduction, we discover reasons Lizzie might well have done so — and with

justification. For in the play-within-a-play that follows we return to 1892, with Lizzie playing the family maid and the actress performing Lizzie's role, to meet a fiery, witty young woman whose complexity of character and strength make her a misfit to those around her, and dangerously uncontrollable within the restrictive mores of the time. For some dramatists the play-within-a-play is merely a self-conscious framing device. But Pollock's is an integral part of her dramatic expression. It plays on the delicious ambiguity of "Lizzie, Lizzie . . . did you?" to reveal a rich interweaving of individual perceptions,



legend, and relative fact that make up the Lizzie Borden reality.

Space does not permit much comment on the other two plays in the volume. *One Tiger to a Hill*, inspired by a 1975

hostage-taking in a British Columbia prison, explores how a bureaucratic maze conspires with individual irresponsibility and complex social demands to destroy people. *Generations*, a play that has met a bit of critical intolerance when performed, is an emotional dramatization of the tensions aroused in three generations of a family by their conflicting plans for their heritage farm. Criticized as kitchen-sink drama and cliché, its very strength, which is considerable, lies in the play's accurate depiction of events that happen over and over again in all parts of Canada with only the external circumstances changed.

These latter two plays do not quite come up to the standard set by *Blood Relations*, but along with her earlier *Walsh* and *The Komagata Maru Incident*, to mention only two, they comprise a body of work worthy of serious study. For a decade Sharon Pollock has created consistently satisfying work, and gives evidence of not only continuing to do so, but also of writing with ever-increasing skill.

TALONBOOKS, OUR leading drama publisher, has ridden through its ups and downs over the years. Although this is not truly a down year, Talon has only managed four titles (with another just ready for release), compared to 1980, when it published nine. The *Twilight Dinner and Other Plays* continues Talon's attempt to include writers from outside Canada in its list. Lennox Brown, a Trinidad-born playwright, is a welcome addition. The three short plays



in this volume are generally unknown, but should not be, and should draw an audience especially in urban areas where the issues he writes about receive a higher profile.

The other three Talon plays are by Michel Tremblay, once again in very playable translations by John Van Burek who, like other translators, rarely receives the credit he deserves. None of these plays equals Tremblay's earlier work — they tend to be offshoots either in subject, character, or style of plays already written — but each is worth the time spent in reading.

Sainte Carmen of the Main, first produced in 1976, is a poetic as well as dramatic statement of the return of Carmen (one of the sisters in *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou*) from Nashville to the Main in Montreal. With her she brings a new vitality and a program of songs written in French that she hopes will speak directly to her audience. They do, but so directly that she is a threat to the old order on the Main: Gloria, a singer of Latin-American songs, and the Mafia-like owners of the clubs. Hence, Carmen must be destroyed by Toothpick, a hired assassin. As the play ends, Gloria, "with bananas on her

head," has made a come-back to her "South-American" fans on the Main.

The political analogy is clear, although Tremblay has said that some audiences fail to see that Carmen, who dresses and sings in an alien country-and-western style, is not Quebec's saviour. She is only one step in the direction of freedom for Quebec.

The poetic experiments (a chorus, long poems as speeches, and Tremblay's usual metaphorical language) are taken further in *Damnée Manon Sacrée* Sandra where the obsessively devout Manon (from *Marie-Lou*) and the transvestite Sandra (from *Hosanna*) carry on ironically interwoven monologues that juxtapose sex and religion, the profane and the sacred, the damned and the saved. But poetic monologue and dialectic are not enough to keep us engaged. The play suffers from not having a dramatic force to drive the words and characters along.

The Impromptu of Outremont brings together for their annual "impromptu" four Beaugrand sisters who grew up in Outremont. Compliments fly when the quality meet, as it were, so there are fireworks and the three unhappy sisters, who have remained trapped in Outre-

mont, attack each other's failures and the fourth sister, who is happily and procreatively married to an Italian gardener in St. Leonard, the antithesis of Outremont. The play is heavy-handed in its analogy, but speaks clearly and forcefully to many in Tremblay's audience. As well the witty dialogue and character portrayal come close to making the play successful in broader terms.

OUTSIDE OF publishing, 1981 was highlighted by the exhilarating Toronto Theatre Festival, by a conference in Saskatoon that brought together some 200 stage professionals, practising critics, academics, and others, and by Stratford, in the aftermath of its directorial/administrative wrangle, mounting a first-rate *Coriolanus* and an ensemble triumph, if nothing else, in *Wild Oats*. The autumn gave evidence that our theatre resources were tired, but since then they have recovered and are once again generating excitement.

The results of such events — confidence in our professionals, mutual respect among various interdependent sectors in the theatre and related work — are by nature difficult to see immediately. However, some of the the scripts

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from the Toronto Theatre Festival have already made it into print. Undoubtedly, people must be looking forward to others — for instance, the highly successful *Tamara*. In the meantime, Playwrights Canada has among its more than 30 scripts George Walker's *Theatre of the Film Noir*, an underground, after-hours Festival hit. One can see why, for the play is light-hearted and devoid of pretensions to being anything other than a delightful spoof of Second-World-War-spy-adventure-love films.

Marc Diamond's *The Ziggy Effect*, an engagingly comic depiction of the generation now in its 40s and its offspring, features a psychologist mother, an overall-clad, basement-dwelling father (both of whom spent their formative years in communes), their Punk poet son Ziggy, his New Wave friend Moon, and Val, an artist who's into painting in the air. The play can hardly help being a bit bizarre, yet Diamond's comic touch balances the criticism implicit in the piece with a zaniness that is refreshing.

Playwrights Canada has also published two plays by Allan Stratton: *Rexy*, which has won a Chalmers award, and *Nurse Jane Goes to Hawaii*. *Nurse Jane* is a clever farce, with substance enough to create some poignant, affecting moments, so it is not surprising that it is proving a popular play across the country. *Rexy*, the more significant of the two, is also clever comedy, but offers a perceptive portrait of Mackenzie King in the bargain. One of the pleasures of *Rexy* is how lightly Stratton touches on various aspects of King's character, yet how clearly he reveals the complexity of the man.

WE MIGHT PAUSE for a moment to draw attention to the fact that a full 10 years have passed since Playwrights Canada was founded as the Playwrights Circle. To mark the occasion, Playwrights has published a handsome, illustrated catalogue containing an annotated list of titles, biographical sketches of the playwrights, a list of other publishers and theatre resources, a very brief history of the organization, and descriptions of the services it provides. Over the years, it has rendered immeasurable service to our theatre community, no matter how hard the going was. This year's titles must bring to nearly 500 the scripts it has published.

Undoubtedly the co-op's greatest contribution has been in printing and otherwise aiding new playwrights. This year is no exception, for as well as Diamond and Stratton (he has only one earlier play printed), Judith Thompson makes her first appearance. Her *Crackwalker* is

a raw, powerful revelation of life for two retarded young lovers and a young married couple, their almost equally slow-witted friends. Thompson is amazingly compassionate at the same time as she graphically and unremittently depicts the crude fulfilment of the urges, mostly sexual, that drive the characters, and the tragic results as one couple kills its own baby. Clearly this playwright has unusual potential and must be encouraged.

Playwrights Canada also brings us a translation by Marc Gélinas of Robert Gurik's 1968 *Hamlet, Prince of Québec*, a barbed rendition of Shakespeare in which Hamlet is Quebec, his father's ghost is Charles de Gaulle, Claudius is The English, Polonius is Lester Pearson, Ophelia is Jean Lesage, and Laertes is Trudeau. Though the political analogy is strained, the nature of the satire is shown in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who, as the B and B Commission, speak alternately French and English, and in Hamlet's lines that end the play: "My death must serve those who follow on . . . *Vive le Québec libre.*"

THESE ARE ONLY some of the 50 or so plays published over the year, but there was activity in other areas, too. Canadian Theatre Review, which last year provided us with the third volume of *Canada's Lost Plays*, admirably edited by Anton Wagner, has this year published *Canada's Playwrights: A Biographical Guide*. Edited by Don Rubin and Allison Cranmer-Byng, this is a valuable reference book with biographical outlines and bibliographies for 70 Canadian playwrights. Such a study has long been needed and CTR deserves credit for providing us with essential tools again, for this work joins the familiar annual *Canada on Stage*, the 1981-2 *Canadian Theatre Checklist* and *A Directory of Canadian Theatre Schools 1981-2*.

CTR has also published *Stage Left: Canadian Theatre in the Thirties*, by Toby Ryan, a strong figure in the 1930s Workers' Theatre movement, as was her husband, Oscar, one of the writers of *Eight Men Speak*. By tracing her own career through the years, she provides us with anecdotes, descriptions of the establishment of several Workers' Theatres, descriptions of individual productions and their critical response, and commentary on various theatres' aims. Here is a wealth of information essential for an understanding of what was happening at the time.

Mary E. Smith's history of theatre in Saint John, N.B., *Too Soon the Curtain Fell* (Brunswick Press), outlines a theatre tradition stretching back into the 1700s. Most scholars are firmly convinced on strong evidence that all Cana-

dian communities have such a tradition waiting to be uncovered. No one can overestimate the positive effect the publication of similar regional histories would have on our theatre environment. I look forward to the day when we all say with pride that there is a Canadian theatre tradition, instead of through ignorance denying its possibility.

The Writer's Development Trust also has a book that will prove useful chiefly to primary and secondary schools. *Spotlight on Drama*, "a teaching and re-

source guide to Canadian plays," offers a very brief overview of Canadian theatre history, commentary on contemporary drama arranged by geographical area, and notes and suggestions on Canadian plays for classroom study. The sketchiness of the book is mildly troubling, as are some notable omissions among the lists of resources, but the factual details are accurate, and the overall achievement should be a welcome addition to a teacher's library.

Typically, only one non-Canadian

publishing house has brought out anything related to Canadian theatre, and that is Twayne with Geraldine Anthony's *Gwen Ringwood*. Largely a biographical study, the book is thorough in tracing the development of Gwen Ringwood's fascinating, long, and often successful career in our theatre.

In all, the year's publishing is satisfying, and attests to the strength of commitment possessed by people in the various sectors of our theatre. Because we again have challenging plays by new

## Charter of wrights

In 10 years of publishing and promoting scripts, Playwrights Canada has put 500 plays between boards

THIS SPRING, for the first time, there will be a Governor General's Award for the best published play of the year. Theoretically, dramatic writing has always been in the running for the award (the poetry prize was for *poetry and drama*), but in practice poets have always won it. That's hardly surprising, says Shirley Mann Gibson, director of Playwrights Canada, who helped get the new award. "I asked them, Would you let a jury of playwrights award the poetry prize? The poetry-drama prize, of course, had always been judged by poets."

The new award will still be a literary prize — entries must be in book or bound playscript form — but, thanks to Playwrights Canada, theatre folk need not fear that a masterwork will go unrecognized. Traditional publishers may not get around to printing plays until years after they are performed, but Playwrights' "minimal editions" can be out within six weeks of the final fadeout — typed, corrected, photocopied, and bound. If another publisher later wants to bring out the play in book form, the rights can be had for the asking.

Now celebrating its 10th anniversary, Playwrights Canada got its start at a conference at Stanley House in the Gaspé attended by, among others, Tom Hendry, Carol Bolt, and Len Peterson. They were tired of seeing their work vanish once a play ended its run, so they decided to

establish a service that would print and circulate their scripts. Originally called Playwrights' Circle, the name was unceremoniously changed by Hendry to Playwrights Co-op in an application for a Local Initiatives grant. ("Circle sounded too much like a sewing circle," he says.) Its first home was a warehouse on Toronto's Dupont Street, above the Karma Co-op, a macrobiotic food collective. "There was a very '60s feeling to it at the start," says Carol Bolt. "It was all very sweet and friendly and mellow. It wasn't very professional, but it worked."

Dramatists are "warmer, more social beings, who lean less toward melancholy than writers in other fields of CanLit," says Gibson, who joined Playwrights in 1977 after seven years as president of House of Anansi. "They're much better at act-

and critics. "I'm filled with admiration for their daring, the way they expose themselves, the risks they take. A poet can stay in his room and insist that not one word of his writing be changed. Playwrights are more . . . outgoing is an inadequate word. They positively *like* the fact that they don't work alone."

Today Playwrights Canada (it acquired its current name in 1979) operates out of a historic building on York Street, in the shadow of the Gardiner Expressway, where it offers playwrights many of the same sort of services as the Writers' Union and League of Canadian Poets provide for their members. "We're not a lobby group," says Gibson. "The Guild of Playwrights takes on those responsibilities. We provide a documentation service and various other support services. We distribute other publishers' editions of our playwrights' books. We don't have the money to compete with real publishing houses and still provide scripts in such numbers."

Those numbers are impressive. Playwrights Co-op had published 69 titles by 1973; in 1976 there were 240, and this year's catalogue lists 500. "We've been talking a lot about possible new directions," says Gibson of plans for the future, "but we all feel the most progressive thing we can do is to return to our first principle — getting plays into print and on stage."

— DORIS COWAN



ing out their feelings." A calm, careful, serious woman whose peaceful demeanour suggests reserves of strength, Gibson found it took a while to adjust to the different working style and priorities of playwrights after working with poets, novelists,

playwrights — Judith Thompson, Marc Diamond, and Allan Stratton, for instance — we can see promise for the future. The evidence of increasing skill in such established writers as Sharon Pollock is also pleasing, as is the display of enough energy in areas outside publishing to create enlivening events like the Toronto Theatre Festival. The most welcome addition to this active theatre world is the publishing of critical, analytical, and historical works, which are essential to support further growth in our theatres. The time has passed when a multitude of scholars and critics could safely ignore *Canadian drama and theatre*. □

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## REVIEW

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# Distant scenes

By WAYNE GRADY

**Ingmar Bergman: Four Decades in the Theater**, by Lise-Lone Marker and Frederick J. Marker, Cambridge University Press/Pendragon House, 262 pages, \$55.00 cloth (ISBN 0 521 2244 1) and \$13.20 paper (ISBN 0521 29501 7).

THERE ARE DOZENS of books about Ingmar Bergman as a film director, but this is the first study in English of Bergman's parallel and perhaps equally important career as a stage director. Although Bergman has often stated that "there has always been a short distance between my work in the theatre and my work in the film studio," and it is generally known that one of his best-known films, *The Seventh Seal*, grew out of his 1955 one-act play *Painting on Wood* (written as a dramatic exercise for his students at Malmö), Bergman himself has usually declined to discuss the nature of this intimate relationship. In the first of two interviews that form an important framework for this book, however, Bergman discusses — apparently off the top of his head — some of these occult connections. He talks about placing the actors in relation to the camera as being very similar to the way actors are placed on a stage in relation to the audience, so that "they feel — not that they are beautiful, but that the magic of their faces and their movements will be registered

by the camera . . . [or] that their charisma will work on the audience." In order to do that, he says, the director must find the stage's "magic point." Every stage has its own focal point, he believes, "the point on the stage where the actors are strongest . . . Approach and withdrawal effects are all created in relation to this point."

Bergman began his work in live theatre in 1944 as artistic director of the Helsingborg City Theatre. Since then he has directed two or three plays each year, at theatres in Malmö, Gothenburg, at Stockholm's prestigious Dramaten, at the Swedish National Theatre, at Oslo's Nationaltheatret, at London's Aldwych Theatre, and even at the Comédie Française. Although he has directed plays by nearly every major contemporary playwright from Albee to Brecht to Hjalmar Bergman, throughout his long career he has demonstrated a particular fascination for three playwrights — Strindberg, Ibsen, and Molière — and the team of Marker and Marker has devoted a separate chapter to each of them. Bergman in his films shows a remarkable affinity for Strindberg, and the sparseness of his images and the psychological depth of his perceptions have much of Ibsen in them, but Molière is somewhat more difficult to explain. Perhaps what Bergman most likes about Molière is the unashamed artificiality of his plays, the 17th-century costumes and settings, the contrived plots, the formal dialogue: there is no doubt that one is sitting in a theatre watching a play; there is no illusion of reality, and so if the play works it must be the result of pure theatre. In his 1973 production of *The Misanthrope* in Copenhagen, Bergman even had the actors who were not actually on-stage sitting in the wings in full view of the audience, waiting for their entrance lines — none of this Stanislavski business of pretending to be off consulting with one's tailor or seeing to the dinner menu. It is reminiscent of Bergman's recent film version of *The Magic Flute*, in which the audience is almost as much a part of the film as were the operatic singers. And Bergman's statement in one of these interviews, that "there are only three things necessary for a performance to work: the words, the actors, and the audience," gives those three elements the significance of an equilateral triangle.

In 1976, during rehearsals for Strindberg's *Dance of Death*, Bergman was investigated by the Swedish authorities for alleged tax irregularities. The charges were dropped, but Bergman placed himself in voluntary exile anyway: "I can no longer live in a land where my honour is publicly and unjustly impugned." He now directs Munich's Residenztheater,

where his first plays produced in German were typical of his life-long obsession: Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, Molière's *Tartuffe*, and Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. During the interview that ends this book Bergman grapples with an idea that has since developed into the "Project Bergman": simultaneous stagings of Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, Ibsen's *A Doll House*, and a stage adaptation of his television film, *Scenes from a Marriage*, to form another triangle that depicts traditional attitudes to women in European society.

This book is excellent and long overdue. Those of us in North America who know Bergman only through his films will find here a new and vital facet of one of the century's purest artistic geniuses. The Markers, who are with the University of Toronto, seem at times to know more about Bergman's theatre work than Bergman does himself, and their historical/critical approach gives a fine launching to Cambridge University Press's ambitious *Directors in Perspective* series. □

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## REVIEW

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# From Hamlet to ham

By FRANK RASKY

**More Champagne Darling**, by Patrick Crean, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 365 pages, \$18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 07 548077 8).

TWO CRITICISMS OF *More Champagne Darling*: I deplore the omission of the comma from the title, and I wish the book had been longer. Apart from those quibbles, I found the 365 pages of Patrick Crean's autobiography totally enchanting. As escapist entertainment, it's as light and bubbly as David Niven's *The Moon's a Balloon*, which is high praise. And as theatrical lore it's one of the most delightful showbiz memoirs by a Canadian to come out in years.

In case you've never heard of him, Crean has been the fencing master and fight director at the Stratford Festival since 1962. Before then he was a British journeyman stage and film actor, per-

forming with such luminaries as Errol Flynn, Ava Gardner, Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, and Alec Guinness. Now 70, he is able to look back at his four marriages, numerous amours, and myriad backstage adventures and write about them lovingly with a pleasant nostalgic glow.

What makes his showbiz reminiscences so singular in the genre is his joyous embrace of the actor's life. Champagne Charlie, as he was once nicknamed, may poke fun at himself as a ridiculous romantic, egotist, swashbuckler, and onetime boozier. But he has nothing bitchy to say about his fellow thespians. And unlike others who have entered his profession as an escape from tragic reality, he enjoyed an unusually happy childhood. He was born into a privileged *Upstairs, Downstairs* sort of world in Edwardian London that has long vanished. His father was a fashionable doctor in Mayfair; his mother, the daughter of a Spanish nobleman, was an Auntie Mame-like gadabout who seemed to know everybody from Lady Randolph Churchill to Coco Chanel.

Crean acquired from his mother a love for the heroics and melodrama of the stage as expressed by such *poseurs* as Ramon Novarro and Rudolph Valentino. His prose is steeped in the

atmosphere of that period and hence may be considered by some to be rather old-fashioned and drenched in schmaltzy sentiment. His narrative is interspersed



with quotations from Shakespeare and Rudyard Kipling that are both charming and apropos: after all, Crean has performed in 20 productions of *Hamlet* and is famous for his one-man Kipling show entitled *The Sun Never Sets*. Besides,

Crean is such a compelling raconteur of the old school that one forgives him for being occasionally hammy.

And he can be very amusing. One of his wittiest lines he attributes to Hermione Gingold: "She once remarked of two actors that one was a *tour de force*, the other forced to tour." I rather enjoyed, too, the remark of a Hungarian actress when she learned that Crean had won the role of Denisov which meant he got to kiss Audrey Hepburn and Mai Britt in the movie version of *War and Peace*. "Ah, Patrick!" she exclaimed. "I am zo 'appy forr you. I 'ear you 'ave marvellous part in Piss and Varr!"

Crean has a real talent for evoking the tinselly magic of the theatre, and reading his anecdotal autobiography is as pleasurable as munching chocolates at a superbly professional matinee performance of *Treasure Island* (for which he staged the fight scenes in 10 productions). He closes his book by referring to a recent interview with a young journalist: "Do you think Patrick Crean is a vanishing race?" asked the reporter. Crean says he smiled and answered, "Yes. But I hope I take a long time to disappear." Let's hope that Champagne Charlie will be able to write a sequel to his wonderful book before he takes his final bow. □

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# Into the fields of light

The poetry of Jay Macpherson is one of a kind,  
not in defiance of current convention so much as  
apart from it. It is a world unto itself

By MARGARET ATWOOD

*Poems Twice Told*, by Jay Macpherson, Oxford, 96 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 19 5403797).

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, poetry reviewing in Canada was very ingrown. Poets reviewed the work of their friends and enemies, partly because few others were interested in reviewing poetry at all, partly because the poetry world was so small that everyone in it was either a friend or an enemy. However, it was understood that anyone likely to read the review would know which was which.

Writers still occasionally review their friends and enemies, but it can no longer be assumed that the average reader knows it. So I feel it necessary to state by way of prelude that Jay Macpherson not only taught me Victorian literature back in 1960 — like all good teachers, she behaved as if it mattered, thus converting my surly contempt for the subject into fascinated admiration — but is one of my oldest and most appreciated friends. Having said that, I will retreat to the middle distance, from which the reviewer's voice should issue impartial as God's (though it rarely does), and try to deal with the subject at hand.

Impossible, of course. Rereading *The Boatman* (1963), the first of two books reprinted together in this volume, makes me remember Jay Macpherson as I first knew her. I was enormously impressed, not just by the fact that here in front of me was a real poet, and a woman at that, who had actually had a book published — no mean feat in the Canada of those days — but also by her wardrobe. She always wore clothes that were by no means "fashionable," clothes in fact that nobody else could get away with, but which seemed exactly right for her.

It's the same with the poetry. No one else writes like this. In fact, looking back, it seems that no one else ever did, and that all the fuss about a "mythopoeic school" of poetry was simply misguided criticism. If "mythopoeic" means that the poet lets on she knows

about mythologies, the most unlikely among us would have to accept the label (Daphne Marlatt, George Bowering, and Frank Davey, for example). Although a critic intent on the usual version of this theory might make a case for *The Boatman* and its involvement with the shapes of traditional stories, *Welcoming Disaster* (the second book in this volume) would probably defeat him. Its personal and indeed sometimes notably eccentric voice carries the reader far beyond any notions of "school." Macpherson's poetry is one of a kind, not in defiance of current convention so much as apart from it. It's a world unto itself, and from *The Boatman*'s poem called "Egg" comes the best advice for approaching it: "Let be, or else consume me quite."

*The Boatman* has been much written about, but for the sake of those who may not be familiar with it I'll say a little about it. It appears to be a "sequence" of very short, condensed lyric poems. (I say "appears" because it was not planned that way; Macpherson is not a programmatic writer, and her work, when it falls into sequences, does so because her imagination is working with a certain body of material, not because she thinks she needs a poem of a certain kind to fill a gap and then composes it.) They are not all of the same kind: some are straight-faced lyrics, some are sinister or comic parodies on the same subjects (*pace* Blake's two sets of *Songs*) and some are puzzle-poems, or riddles. I tend to get on a little better with the straight lyrics. The others are adroit and clever, though they seem to me to exist, as many kinds of jokes do, for the purpose of defusing a profound uneasiness.

The central voice of *The Boatman* is one of a complex and powerful grief, and its central symbols revolve around separation and loss. Like all hermetic poetry, *The Boatman* offers the reader multiple choices about its true "subject." Is it "about" the relationship between two lovers, the relationship between Creator and fallen world, bet-

ween author, book, and reader, or dreamer and dream, or man and his imaginative world? Why not all? The most potent poems in the book, for me, are those in the small sequence-within-a-sequence, "The Ark," eight eight-line lyrics that are astonishing for their simplicity and grace, and for the amount of emotional force they can pack into 64 lines. They are "about" all of the above, and after more than 20 years of reading them I still find them devastating.

One of Macpherson's most exquisite poems is in the small section entitled "Other Poems" — post-*Boatman*, pre-*Disaster*. It's called "The Beauty of Job's Daughters," and I won't quote from it because you need to read the whole thing, but it's an excellent example of what an outwardly formal, flexibly handled lyricism can do. It also epitomizes one of the main themes of *The Boatman*: the "real" world, that of the imagination, is inward.

Between *The Boatman* and "Other Poems" and *Welcoming Disaster* (1974) came a long pause. Macpherson's total output has been minute compared with that of most Canadian poets of her stature, and she's about the furthest thing from a "professional" poet you could imagine. A young novelist said to me recently, "Poetry isn't an art, it's a circuit." For Macpherson, never-a-circuit-rider, poetry isn't a "profession" but a gift, which is either there or not there but can't be made to be there by exercise of will. In fact, the first poems in *Welcoming Disaster* are about the loss or absence of the imaginative world so beautifully evoked in "Job's Daughters," the failure of inspiration, and the futility of trying to conjure it up. As well as its redemptive qualities: "Breathing too is a simple trick, and most of us learn it. Still, to lose it is bad, though no-one regrets it long." When the Muse finally shows up, what she reveals this time is not paradise regained.

If *The Boatman* is "classical" (which, in purity of line, simplicity of rhythms, and choice of myths and symbols, it is),

then *Welcoming Disaster* is, by the same lights, "romantic": more personal, more convoluted, darker and more grotesque, its rhythms more complex, its main symbol-groupings drawn not only from classical and biblical mythology but from all kinds of odd corners — 19th-century Gothic novels (and their 20th-century avatars, such as *Nosferatu* and *Karloff* movies), the Grimms' Goose Girl story ("What Falada Said"), Babylonian mythology ("First and Last Things"), lore of magicians, ghouls, mazes, and crossroads. The main movement of the book concerns a descent to the underworld; and, as everyone knows, the most successful recipes for this include a plan for getting not only there but back, usually by means of the advice or actual company of a sybil, spirit guide, or boatman. (The boatman in *The Boatman* is mainly Noah; in *Welcoming Disaster* it's his upside-down counterpart, Charon, who takes you not to the world renewed but to the world dead.) In this case the fetish-cum-spirit guide-cum-God-cum-sinister ferryman is a teddy bear, which — again — only Macpherson could get away with.

What's in the underworld? In Egyptian mythology it's the place where the soul is weighed; for Orpheus, it's the place where the lost love is finally lost; in Jackson Knight's book on Virgil (cited in Macpherson's notes) the underground maze leads to the king and queen of the dead, especially the queen: it's a place of lost mothers. There are echoes too of all those 19th-century ghosts, from Catherine Earnshaw on down, who come to the window at night; of vampiristic or sinister-double relationships that recall Blake's *Shadow* and *Emanation* figures; of Faustian pacts with darkness. Jungians will revel in this book, though it is hardly orthodox Jungianism. But the important thing is that in the process some poems emerge that would more than satisfy Houseman: they do make the hair stand up on the back of your neck. "They Return," for instance, or "Hecate Trivia," or "Some Ghosts and Some Ghouls."

*Welcoming Disaster*, like *The Boatman*, has its more playful moments, but on the whole its tone ranges between the eerie and the ruthless: poems of invocation or rigorous and sometimes bloody-minded self-analysis. Macpherson was never much of a meditative Wordsworthian, if such labels apply. She's much more like Coleridge: inner magic, not outer-world description or social comment, is her forte.

When I was asked to write this review it was suggested that I include an "appreciation" of Macpherson's "career." But what do we mean by a poet's "career," apart from poems? Do

poets even have "careers"? Some do, but it's a word that seems more appropriate when applied to politicians: something pursued, worked at, having to do with leverage and personal advancement and the media-created persona. Jay Macpherson is simply not career-minded in this way. There's nowhere she wants to get, in the sense of "getting somewhere." She reminds us that poetry is not a career but a vocation, something to which one is called, or not, as the case may be. She's still the best example I know of someone who lives as if literature, and especially the writing of poetry, were to be served, not used. □

#### REVIEW

## Paradise missed

By GARY DRAPER

*Sad Paradise*, by Britt Hagarty, Tafonbooks, 319 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88922 193 6).

WHAT'S REALLY SAD about Britt Hagarty's *Sad Paradise* is that it might have been a very good book. It isn't. Hagarty has a powerful story to tell, the story of a young boy's progress from shoplifting in Victoria to drug addiction in Vancouver and much of the West Coast. Plainly he knows the territory well. But the material is betrayed by failures in technique. Repeatedly, the reader is distanced when he should be involved, and the power of the story drains away.

One problem is Hagarty's narrator and protagonist, Sean Gallagher. He's a potentially interesting anti-hero, bent from the first on self-destruction. But the narrowness of his vision, his strident self-righteousness, and his relentless self-pity are monotonous and tiresome. He doggedly blows every opportunity that comes his way, then curses his fate or, more often, "the system." He sees life so strictly in terms of good guys (prisoners, junkies) and bad guys (everybody else), that the reader who isn't hooked or doing time begins to bridle a little. Sean's day-to-day life may not be romantic, but his moral system is. His fellow inmates at Bisco, the prison

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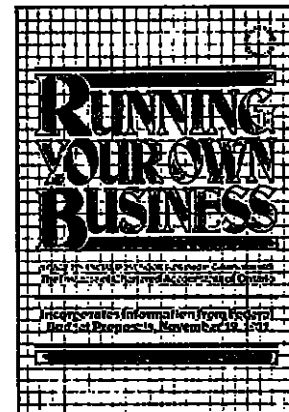
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for juvenile offenders, are "angels, angels wrapped in chains." And near the book's end, he describes himself as "wounded by life." It would help if Sean could see to what extent the wound is self-inflicted.

Sean, at least, makes an impression on the reader. With one or two exceptions, the other characters in the book fail to rise above the level of caricature; many don't make it that high. They are names only, attached to some incident or some period in Sean's life. There are far too many of them. And they keep disappearing. Hagarty simply doesn't bring them to life. Thus, when they meet their inevitable, sad ends, the readers can't feel the pain. They have no resonance.

The same might be said of the narrative itself. Hagarty writes (or Sean speaks) in an uninflected voice. Nothing is more or less important than anything else. In addition, pacing varies in an apparently arbitrary fashion. Some days go on forever. In the book's closing pages months go by in a sentence or a paragraph: new friends appear, disappear, die; Sean is married, then alone. However accurately this flatness and this erratic pacing may reflect the narrator's experience and state of mind, they only

increase the reader's alienation.

There are also a number of stylistic quirks that work against the book. The narrator yields too often to cliché. Fires are "blazing," stares are "icy," a good guy has "a heart of gold," and vain attempts are "to no avail." When Sean is awakened, it's likely to be "rudely"; at nights he can "drift off into dreamland." Sean, we are told, is successful at writing, if not much else. He is a published poet. Yet when he aims for imaginative language he often misses the target. The baseball bat brandished by a friend's father is a "sportive weapon." Sean pictures some other friends "pouring down the booze in a flurry of dipsomania." The narrator also has a weakness for quotation marks. Sometimes they underline ironies that are already obvious enough: sometimes they're just there: "Aaron . . . thought such 'collegiate' styles to be strictly for 'suck-holes.'" It's a device that draws attention to itself and away from the story.

What's frustrating about this, as I said before, is that Hagarty knows a world that is seldom explored in Canadian fiction. Moreover, there are occasional flashes of promise, of unrealized possibilities. The image of a friend's face at

the prison window is a haunting one. And — too rarely — there's a nicely understated irony. Consider the following reflection on smuggling drugs through customs:

Omar was always saying things like, "Don't worry, Sean. Justice is on our side and if we have nothing but love in our hearts, we won't get caught. Just don't give off any paranoid vibrations."

It was a real scientific approach.

Britt Hagarty is a writer with something to say. I hope he finds the words to say it with. □

## REVIEW

# Closed encounters

By BARBARA NOVAK

The Almost Meeting and Other Stories, by Henry Kreisel, NeWest Press, 148 pages, \$12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920316 13 1).

WRITTEN BETWEEN 1954 and 1980, these eight stories comprise the complete collected short fiction of Henry Kreisel. Considering the lasting success of his novels *The Rich Man* (1948) and *The Betrayal* (1964), it is unfortunate that we haven't heard more from Kreisel. Two of his stories, "The Broken Globe" and "The Travelling Nude," have been widely anthologized; the latter (which I found to be the weakest in the collection) was awarded the President's Medal of the University of Western Ontario. Like I.B. Singer and Sholom Aleichem, Kreisel has that European sensibility that lends itself to taking a relatively small encounter and shaping it into a finely crafted story that is rich in humanity. It is this ability, together with Kreisel's clean, easy-flowing style, that make me wonder why he hasn't been a more prolific writer.

Most of his stories are structured around meetings, usually spontaneous, that prove to have a deep effect upon the central character. So it is perhaps significant that the title story, written most recently (in 1980), is about a well-planned meeting that never takes place. A young author receives a letter from an older, much-admired writer, congratulating him on his first novel (about a

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# Home is the haunter

By JANE W. HILL

man who searches unsuccessfully for his father). The older writer points out that "an almost meeting is often more important than the meeting. The quest is all," and then sets out to prove his point in a way that spirals the young writer into his own novel.

In another story about a planned meeting, "The Anonymous Letter," a young boy sets out to confirm an allegation that his father has a mistress. This meeting, of course, is planned only by the boy, and when the confrontation takes place he intuitively knows how best to punish his father for the injustice to his mother.

In several stories the central character's role is simply that of an observer who is moved by the poignantly knotted lives of others, as in "The Broken Globe," in which a man, on moving from England to a university post in Alberta, visits the estranged father of one of his colleagues, and discovers both the hopeless barrier and the unbreakable bond between the father and his son. The central character in "Two Sisters in Geneva" meets two sisters on a train in Europe, and becomes sadly aware of how one is determined to impose her life on the other.

Some stories, like "Chassidic Song," are about chance encounters that have a more profound effect upon the protagonist. In this story, which is reminiscent of a chapter in Saul Bellow's *To Jerusalem and Back*, a highly assimilated Jewish man is seated next to a Chassid on an airplane and finds himself confronted with a past and a part of himself with which he has completely lost touch. The meeting in "Homecoming" helps a young man find a reason to go on living once he has returned, after seven years, to the Polish village he had fled during the Holocaust.

One particularly lovely story involves two 13-year-old boys who regularly visit an old woman who sells them chestnuts from her stand on a street corner. In response to her earthy, outspoken manner, one of the boys asks, "How does a man do it when he makes love, Annerl?" While she refuses to satisfy his curiosity, she nevertheless manages to teach both boys something about the nature of love.

The strength of these stories lies in their simplicity and their unity of purpose. One cannot help but feel that there must be more where these come from, and hope that Kreisel will set himself the task of further mining his own talent. □



Not to Be Taken at Night, edited by John Robert Colombo and Michael Richardson, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 191 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919630 48 0).

Friendly Aliens, edited by John Robert Colombo, Hounslow Press, 181 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88882 052 X).

JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO, that indefatigable anthologizer, has done it again, twice. Two volumes of short stories have come out under his aegis, both rather offbeat and of varying quality. *Not to Be Taken at Night* consists of 13 Canadian tales of mystery and the supernatural, ranging from the humorous and not-too-serious to the psychologically penetrating, the Gothic, the macabre, and the miraculous. Most of the writers are better known for their novels or plays or "regular" short stories, but all seem to relish their excursions into the bizarre.

Although modern Canada may seem an unlikely setting for the unearthly or the terrifying, this is not so. As Colombo says in his preface, "Have we grown too staid and unimaginative to invent harrowing tales of the dark powers? Are we too prosperous and complacent to derive the slightest *frisson* from the unknown? Not at all. The unknown has not vanished; it has merely shed its reassuring old European accoutrements and moved onto the modern Canadian scene . . . after all, it is not places that are haunted, but people."

Thus, we have Brian Moore's sensible businessman who, irrationally and unwillingly, comes to believe in his Irish housekeeper's "second sight" about his own impending death from cancer. In just a few pages we are taken from the normal to the paranormal and quite accept its inevitability. Yves Thériault, of French and Montagnais descent, has written in English "The Barren Field," a grim tale of Big Bill's widow who was determined to succeed in growing wheat where her husband had failed, and who carries out the sacrificial rites of her native land to accomplish that end.

In "The Lice" Wilfred Watson explores that fascinating and perhaps inexplicable urge toward martyrdom

that is so strong in the Christian tradition. The Bishop of Edmonton prayed for a sign of his congregation's sins and God answered him; the next Sunday, the crucifix swarmed with lice. But when his flock persisted in their wickedness the Bishop took their sins upon himself, with terrible results. The idea is an interesting one, but Watson could have pursued it with less repetition and obviousness: the subtle and provocative undertones one looks for are missing.

Lawrence Mathews's "The Death of Arthur Rimbaud" is one of the best stories in the book, moving swiftly from the merely peculiar to the threatening and violent in a deceptively plainspoken style. "The Late Man" by Andreas Schroeder is a strange, evocative tale of a fisherman who is out of kilter with the rest of his community and who persistently rows toward death; his place is later taken by the young fisherman who has set out to find out why.

Michel Tremblay's contribution, "The Thirteenth Wife of Baron Klugg," is a slight tale based on the Bluebeard legend — too inconsequential and derivative to deserve inclusion. But Ethel Wilson's "Mr. Sleepwalker" is masterful, and Robertson Davies's "The Cat That Went to Trinity" is delightful and preposterous at the same time. I can just hear Davies's rich, plummy voice reciting this satiric ghost story to his Massey College students at one of their

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annual Gaudy nights. It would sound even better than it reads.

*Friendly Aliens* is a sort of first cousin to *Not to Be Taken at Night* — it is 13 stories of the fantastic set in Canada by British and American authors. Some are weird and mysterious, delving into psychic phenomena; others are formulaic science fiction. Most are set in the vast, vaguely defined North, the dark, chill, dangerous Polar Regions that give scary scope to imaginative writers. Some took place long ages ago, others are set in the distant future; the dates of writing range from 1899 to 1978.

The long-extinct mammoth comes to life in Jack London's "A Relic of the Pliocene." Explorers in the Yukon know there is gold in the accursed Hand Mountain but they are defeated before they ever get to it — a dying traveller warns them of the terrible "People of the Pit" (by A. Merritt), who lives miles below the earth and will capture anyone who tries to enter their hellish abode. In "The Thing from Outside" George Allan England postulates a silent, invisible Thing that removes men's brains for its own scientific investigations.

In "Devolution," Edmond Hamilton suggests that man is the degenerate descendant of the Arctarians, protoplasmic blobs of jelly who came from a distant galaxy to "people" the earth, accomplishing everything through pure thought; rather than evolving upward through the eons, as we like to think, animal life has become steadily more bestial and primitive.

"Arctic God," by the indecently prolific John Russell Fearn, is a caricature, on a level with television's Flintstones, and other than serving as an example of the popular "space opera" genre is hardly worth bothering with. But James Tiptree, Jr. (in reality a woman named Alice B. Sheldon) shows both humour and great inventiveness in "Forever to a Hudson Bay Blanket" — her characters "time-jump" at will, but one young couple unwisely jump ahead 40 years for a brief half hour, with fatal results.

The oldest story in the book is one of the best — Algernon Blackwood's atmospheric account of a lone scholar's autumn stay on a Muskoka-like island which seems to be irrevocably owned by two mysterious "big Indians." Works by H.P. Lovecraft, Robert W. Chambers, M.P. Shiel, August Derleth, Vincent Starrett and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro also appear in *Friendly Aliens*, as does a 40-year-old essay, "Whither Canadian Fantasy?" by Donald A. Wollheim. In 1942 he was excited about the possibilities of Canada's future as distinct from America's or England's, but his words now seem dated.

We are left to wonder just what it is about Canada that has stimulated the imaginations of these several authors. Perhaps the wide empty spaces where anything might happen have something to do with it. In fact, the Canadian connection is sometimes tenuous, lending a certain exoticism but not germane to the story. But the mysterious power of our woods and mountains is evident in the wild creatures we still hear about — the Sasquatch, the Wendigo, the Walker of the Snow. Something must be there, and if you think you have the stomach for it, try these tales of the uncanny — but one at a time, with a cup of hot cocoa by your side. □

## REVIEW

# Rude awakenings

By CHRISTINE SIGURDSON

God's Eye, by George McWhirter, Oberon Press, 131 pages, \$15.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 394 2) and \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 395 0).

THE LAND IS rural Mexico. Disease, filth, poverty, drunkards, cripples, and murders are as much a part of the landscape as the dust and scorching sun. Into this uninviting country George McWhirter introduces the outsiders: tourists, travellers, weekenders, dissatisfied people yearning to escape the mundane. A divorced mother leaves behind the Winnipeg winter for a land where her alimony will stretch. A Montreal bank teller seeks a Latin lover. A minister turns away from the grey, comfortless rain for a place where God's face must surely shine. But the emotional and psychological baggage they carry with them cannot be dismissed by a change of scenery.

Expectation and realization lie at the heart of these 10 stories. The "stubborn docility," sullen indifference, and resentment the foreigners encounter in the Mexicans were not part of their highly stylized dreams. The pervasive mood is one of distrust, suspicion, resentment, and at times a certain hate. The minister in "Something to Grin At"

# Solidarity from the front

By PAUL WILSON

fancies himself "like the Jesuits who had founded the agricultural communities in Mexico," but the unconverted he aspires to save seem only "dirty, bad-talking little boys." Mauri, the city brother in "The Country," is "afraid of deciding that he did not like the villagers." The Mexicans are a nagging reminder to the foreigners of the failure of their own dreams, while for the Mexicans foreigners are something to be put up with:

The weekenders, the weekenders! They honked coming in through the gates. They threw their cases into their rooms, they dumped themselves in the pool with bottles of beer in their hands.

McWhirter offers little hope for any understanding between the peasants and the outsiders. And, if he takes a side, it is with the Mexicans, trapped in this impoverished land with no easy ticket out. But overall the reader draws back from the characters with an interest bordering on the academic. In "Two Travellers" McWhirter attempts to bestow honour and respect upon an aged, illiterate peasant woman, but her internal monologue is imbued with an artificial and affected style.

McWhirter's prose is the strength of the stories. His obvious empathy with the hard beauty of the land is revealed with a poetic clarity and sensitivity:

Serpentins, constantly dividing like pale amoeba through the green grass, the paths rose to these vantage points. Along these there were poorer corrugated iron and bamboo shacks fronted with small picketed gardens and short-haired tail-less dogs that lay curled up like shiny kidneys in the dust. In adjoining fields grew camomile, crabgrass, some stands of corn.

But too often the reader is aware of McWhirter's voice creeping into the characterizations. When the adolescent narrator of "The Cicada and the Cockroach" speaks in poetic metaphors, quite obviously they are the author's



words. Credibility seems sacrificed for poetic intent.

At their best — "A French Girl to Stay" and "Another Friend for Mr. Duck" — these stories possess an emotional tension that curiously builds, then quietly dissolves. At their worst, the reader is left as high and dry as the Mexican plateau. □

**Poland: The Last Decade**, by Adam Bromke, Mosaic Press, 189 pages, \$25.00 cloth (ISBN 0 88962 143 8) and \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88962 144 6).

**At the Lenin Shipyards: Poland and the Rise of the Solidarity Trade Union**, by Stan Persky, New Star Books, 253 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 919888 45 3).

LISTENING TO REPORTS of concentration camps being set up in Poland to hold the leaders of Solidarity, I found it hard to read these two books, both written before martial law was declared in December, with anything like a sense of equanimity. Far from having been made instantly obsolete by events, they throw a bright, oblique light on the tragedy there, casting it into high relief.

Professor Bromke's book, *Poland: The Last Decade*, is really a collection of occasional pieces, some written for scholarly journals, others for such newspapers as the Toronto *Sunday Star*. Together they provide a somewhat disjointed running commentary on the Gierk era and beyond, up to mid-1981. Bromke's point of view is that of a rational Western pragmatist who favours détente because he believes it will encourage a natural evolution in Eastern Europe away from the disastrous hard-line politics and economics of neo-Stalinism. Some of his articles, like the one on preparations for the Helsinki Conference, seemed dated now; others, such as his study on the growth of opposition politics in Poland, provide an excellent background to present events. But on the whole, it might have been more appropriate for someone with Bromke's depth of knowledge to have written a more coherent and reflective historical survey. As it is, the book has only a limited usefulness, not least because of its inexplicable (and inexcusable) lack of an index.

*At the Lenin Shipyards* provides a very different perspective on Poland. The author is a teacher, journalist, and trade unionist in British Columbia whose fascination with Solidarity led him to visit Poland in May, 1981, to study the reality at close range. The

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result is a brisk and detailed reconstruction, from the workers' point of view, of the Gdansk strike in August, 1980, of the negotiations that led to the creation of Solidarity, and of the union's subsequent struggle to build upon that initial victory in the face of mounting obstructionism and provocation from the regime. The narrative captures the sense of excitement and tension in the nine-month period it covers, and there are lively close-ups of the people and ideas that gave the movement its impetus and definition. It is an excellent antidote to the fragmentary coverage of events in the daily press.

As far as I can tell, the picture Persky gives us is an accurate one. To his credit, he makes no attempt to present Solidarity in an exclusively positive light.

Walesa is portrayed as a charismatic leader and brilliant negotiator, a pragmatist rather than an idealist, but also a man with a strong autocratic bent and a figure of increasing controversy within the union. There were other leaders, like Andrzej Gwiazda, for example, whose thinking was based far more on matters of principle. As Gwiazda told the government negotiator in Gdansk, "This is the key issue: are we going to live in a democratic system or a police state?" For Walesa, the key issue was whether or not the Poles would be able to work out their own solutions for themselves. This initially made it possible for him to talk to the Polish government, but it caused increasing difficulties for him as leader of a movement like Solidarity.

Everyone in the country, including the regime, knew that Solidarity was not just fighting for better wages and improved working conditions, but for a return to common decency and dignity in public life, for the radical reconstruction of a society that had been devastated by four decades of totalitarian rule. In this struggle, the question of whether or not Solidarity would be run democratically was not just a peripheral, academic one, it was absolutely central. How can an undemocratic organization revitalize an undemocratic society? Persky describes this split very well, but unfortunately he wrote his book before the Solidarity congress in September, 1981, where that issue dominated the debates.

The book has other minor shortcomings. It provides too little economic and political background, although there is an excellent brief history of popular revolt in Poland since 1956. I think it would also have been improved had Persky presented the material in a more personal way, if he had given us some idea of the impact Solidarity had on his own thinking. As it is, he appears to have gone through the experience of writing the book with his faith in unionism, as he understood it before he went to Poland, intact.

Yet Persky's book carries very clear implications for trade unions in Canada, especially those in the public sector like Persky's own CUPE. If such unions were to aspire to anything remotely resembling Solidarity's brief power and popularity, they would have first to abandon their primitive notion that the social contract exists only for their own particular benefit, and start using their

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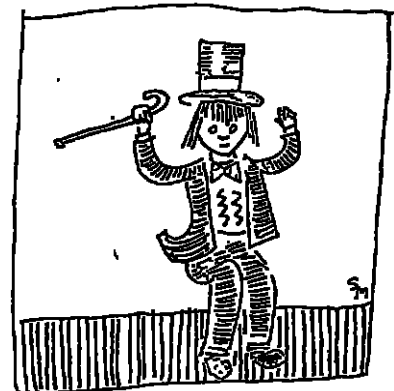
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## Four lost years

By MARIA HORVATH

**A Curious Cage: A Shanghai Journal 1941-1945**, by Peggy Abkhazi, edited by S.W. Jackman, Sono Nis Press, 143 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 919462 89 8).

"A JOURNAL to be good, true and interesting," wrote the English diarist Charles Greville in 1838, "should be written without the slightest reference to publication, but without any fear of it; it should be the transcript of a mind which can bear transcribing . . . the exercise is, I think, calculated to make a writer wiser and perhaps better." This is sensible advice and Peggy Abkhazi has followed it well. She also understood the palliative effects of keeping a journal during her years as an "enemy subject" under the Japanese occupation of Shanghai during the Second World War. "If one is not to lose the power of coherently expressing one's thoughts or recounting one's doings in writing," she writes, "one must keep in practice by means of a personal notebook, or an endless never-to-be-posted letter."

She had to be very careful, however, about what she recorded. As she explained years later, "One did not write anything down. Old letters, photographs, address books were destroyed. The fewer names, records, etc., the less frightening the prospect of possible 'questioning' by the Japanese Gendarmerie — the Kampetei, the local equivalent of Hitler's Gestapo." Despite these difficulties, she managed to draw a clear picture of what life was like in those two years before internment in 1943 and the two years at the camp. She was also able quite cleverly to indicate indirectly her antipathy toward her captors.

Born in 1902 of British parents, Abkhazi lived with her European and American friends in comfortable surroundings in Shanghai. Until the Japanese took over, they were protected by the "extra-territorial rights" enforced by small British, French, and American establishments. Beginning on December 8, 1941, however, the Japanese turned their world on its head: communication with the outside world was cut off; freedom of movement was curtailed; some of the foreigners were

arrested; money was devalued, and homes and possessions were confiscated.

Abkhazi survived by first exhausting her savings, then selling vegetables, breeding pigs for slaughter, and sharing lodgings with friends. Yet her journal reflects little bitterness. In March, 1943, as she was about to be interned, she explained:

One has travelled so far in the months since December 8, 1941, and it has been a comparatively painless, but very thorough, process of gradual stripping; first a leg and then a wing, so to speak. If one had been brought to the present state at a single blow, it would have been nearly unbearable."

The main part of *A Curious Cage* deals with the two years she spent interned in a camp with 1,708 other "enemy subjects." She was billeted in a wooden hut assigned to 51 women who had no husbands. "One can follow the intellectual struggle with the fine points of a foreign language. 'A-a-ah — so desuka! Women alone — unattached, unattached — not tied, loose — therefore: "loose women" is the correct term.' And so we were known."

In the camp she worked as a gardener, French teacher, and finally quartermaster in the hospital kitchen. She kept her journal faithfully, although the entries appear less often as the intense cold and monotony took their toll. The result is an impressionistic sketch of camp life rather than a sharply outlined portrait. Each entry, each stroke, reveals a little more colour, another detail. Since the journal was not intended for publication, Abkhazi did not feel compelled to answer all questions. This lack of self-consciousness makes the book especially attractive.

Life in confinement led to the inevitable explosions, but these never went beyond a tolerable point, and sometimes proved to be more humorous than volcanic:

The next day, more views having been exchanged on the subject of snoring, with additional exchanges about the infringement by two inches of the frontier line between their two beds, the same two worked up another fight. This time, the dirty old floor mop came into play but K., remembering that her opponent still had on her *pince nez*, gracefully bent forward and removed them gently, saying the while 'I am a lady . . .' and then she set to with the mop in her enemy's face. And really it was a very thoughtful gesture, seeing that *pince nez* would be irreplaceable once broken."

This most enjoyable book is like a visit with a well-travelled aunt whose stories about her many adventures always prove entertaining. While she's too discreet and well-mannered to gossip or to make uncharitable remarks about

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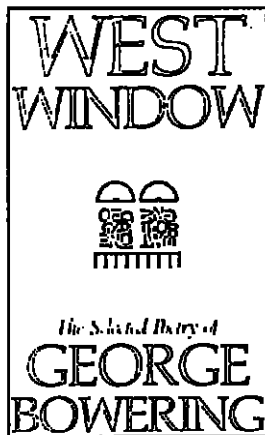
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others, Peggy Abkhazi is also no Mrs. Grundy. She knows from experience that keeping one's wits requires a readiness to laugh at one's own foibles and at those of others. □

## REVIEW

# Our man in New Delhi

By *DUNCAN MEIKLE*

Envoy to Nehru, by Escott Reid, Oxford, 301 pages, \$27.95 cloth (ISBN 19 561258 2).

INDIA HAS A special place in the Canadian imagination. We grew up with Rikki Tikki Tavi and maps on which the Empire had to be coloured red. Later we looked to India to prove that democracy was better for developing countries than authoritarianism. And, for a while at least, India enabled Canadians to play their favourite role on the international stage, that of intermediary or interpreter.

Escott Reid was the Canadian high commissioner to India from 1952 to 1957. Those were hectic years: war in Korea and Indochina, crises in Suez and Hungary, tension in Pakistan and Kashmir, the Cold War, and, not least, McCarthyism in the United States. Because of direct involvement, or because of their status as neutrals, Canada and India played a significant part in these issues, and they are discussed thoroughly in chapters four through 11. Close students of diplomacy will enjoy Reid's account, and some will undoubtedly find it an interesting counterpoint to the writings of Lester Pearson, John Holmes, Charles Ritchie, and others who have written about the same period. Many readers, however, will be swamped by the complexities and impressed only by the degree to which pig-headedness and petty pique can infect individuals at any level — often to the detriment of sound policy making.

Of more interest are the sections on such varied topics as village life, Prime Minister Nehru, V.K. Krishna Menon, India's prospects, and the poor. These are written with insight and sensitivity and leave the reader wanting less diplomacy and more Reid.

One of the major themes is the special relationship that existed between

Canada and India through their participation in the Commonwealth and the international commissions on Korea and Indochina. It was deepened by the Colombo Plan, by the repeal of certain laws in Canada that discriminated against Indian immigrants, and by Canadian cooperation in the development of atomic energy. Another aspect of this relationship was Canada's effort to interpret India and the United States to each other during a period when many Americans were excessively anti-communist and many Indians were belligerently non-aligned. The Canadian government enjoyed the role of intermediary: it provided a sense of involvement and influence, it did not involve quantities of troops, and it was badly needed. Canadians understood the left-wing rhetoric of Krishna Menon because they were familiar with its foundations in the British Labour Party and because they could sympathize with his anti-Americanism; at the same time Canadians could understand the position and principles of John Foster Dulles — after all, there were many Calvinists and American magazines in Canada.

The final chapter should give historians fits as they trace the evolution of Reid's thinking. Most of his book is based on reports sent to Ottawa in the 1950s. Two chapters were published in the 1960s, then revised for inclusion here. Then in 1978 Reid returned to India for a lengthy visit. After he came back to Canada he wrote the final chapter, "Reconsiderations," in which he points out how he erred in his estimates involving agricultural production, population control, social equality, and income. Not many authors have an opportunity like this, and not many would have the courage and integrity to reassess their work as completely as Reid does. The final chapter is easily the most enjoyable and useful part of the book.

Throughout the book Reid displays his liberalism. He returns again and again to the issue of poverty; it distresses him personally, and he believes it is in the interests of all countries to find a solution. He retains the belief that the solution lies in education, social reform, and minority rights. His liberalism was jiggled (but not shaken) in several instances. He is embarrassed that the cooperation in atomic energy resulted in India's building a nuclear bomb. He backs away from the conundrum presented by better health care, which lowers the death rate and means in turn that more people must compete for food. He struggles briefly and ineffectively with the conflict between the enlightened use of resources (cattle) and freedom of religion. Nevertheless, he retains the optimism of the true liberal,

and his book should provide a boost for all those who believe that man can prevail. □

## REVIEW

# If you can't say anything nice . . .

By W.A. MARSANO

The Second Book of Insults, by Nancy McPhee, Van Nostrand Reinhold, illustrated, 132 pages, \$7.95 cloth (ISBN 0 442 29666 1).

AS A MEMBER OF *Maledicta*, a society perhaps best known for its namesake quarterly, the *International Journal of Verbal Aggression*, how could I resist the temptation to draw upon its outpouring of scholarly research? With a headful of recorded scorn collected painstakingly from Finns, Yemenite Jews, Maoris, Cossacks, German doctors, Dutch sleep-talkers, and participants in Australian-rules football, the apt quotation can fairly leap to the tongue. Unfortunately, McPhee's book merits nothing so obscure.

This slim volume of curse is a sequel to McPhee's 1978 *The Book of Insults*, which was a success in some measure. The present attempt to meet what big business calls a "marketing opportunity" sadly smacks of a certain desperation. Not enough first-rate material was ready to hand; devotees of incivility are entitled by the title to expect a rich harvest of invective and imaginative nastiness. Whether the compiler is entitled to slide off the hook with a coy "Once again I have interpreted 'insult' as widely as possible" is something to be argued, especially when the width of interpretation admits mere cuteness.

In this fair — but only fair — selection of medal-winning pile drivers there are far too many arthritic expressions that limp and shuffle their hour upon the page. There are insignificant quips — that smug form of non-, un-, or anti-wit, to wit: "Master, mammoth mumbler" (Robert Lowell on Ford Madox Ford); and "Freud Madox Fraud" (Osbert Sitwell on same).

There are exchanges with no more to

recommend them than the creaking of the years: despite their subject (money), the letters involving Samuel Foote and Beau Brummel are innocent of insult, and otherwise unrewarding.

There are outbursts that are merely dressed-up expansions on the contemporary "Screw you, eh?": "You slawzy poodle, you tike, you crapulous, pud-dering pipsqueak!" (Christopher Fry, in stage dialogue); and "Get out, you blazing ass!" (C.S. Calverly, also for the stage).

There are too many spavined epitaphs that have nothing to do with insult, like the footstools that fill out pages in *Reader's Digest*:

*Here Einstein lies;  
At least they laid his bier  
Just hereabouts —  
Or relatively near.*

— Kensal Green

If you can't distinguish between such claptrap and genuine, memorable abuse, then you can't tell a fish from a Dutchman.

There is also (no getting around it) too much Nancy McPhee. In distinguished company, the lowly compiler does best to provide the minimum in notes and subject headings and then get out of the way, making noises-off as seldom as possible. Apparently challenged by conventional wisdom, McPhee has blundered in at every opportunity with a typewriter that ought to be registered with the police as a deadly weapon.

It is, for example, enough to quote de Lenclos on the Marquis de Sevigne: "He has the heart of a cucumber fried in snow." It is too much to insist upon introducing it with: "Cool sophistication is at the heart of this icy insult." That is what's known, in vaudeville, as killing a punchline. And that is McPhee at her stylistic best; she is also given to alliteration, or *Tabloid's Disease*: "pointed putdowns" and "contumacious curmudgeon." To McPhee, Einstein is the "esoteric mathematician," Benjamin Franklin is the "Philadelphia kite-flyer," and people who live in Hollywood are "denizens of tinsel town." Less McPhee would have made a better book, but a smaller one. What McPhee there is will wilt house plants.

More McPhee would be welcomed in the area of research. Too many quotations disguise the object of the bard, and the point is often lost. Usually the butts are decades (even centuries) dead; fear of libel cannot be the cause. Were these defaced remarks contributed by readers of Book One, and accepted with thanks but no further effort? Is that why some of the insults seem clearly no more than jokes, meant in fun (for example, Fred Allen's "When Jack Benny plays the violin, it sounds as if the strings are still

back in the cat")? An editor needs research as well as a mailbox; the best part of this book may have been lost to the postal strike.

So we don't have scholarly depth here (for that see Razvratnikov's "Latent Accusative Tendencies in the Skopje Dialect, or Where to Go and What to Do with It in North-Central Macedonia," in *Maledicta*, Summer, 1977).

Still, we don't have, at least, anything so dreary as a *500 Insults for All Occasions* airport paperback, the kind of junk-food assortment that is flung together to enable room-temperature morons to make signs to dime-brain pickups at the neighbourhood fern bar. We have, despite the toxic waste, a literate if thin sampling of heavy-duty venom. There are notable selections in every chapter, if you look for them — especially in the chapter on correspondence and even in the heap of epitaphs, which is otherwise mostly upholstery. □

## REVIEW

# West of Eden

By FRANK RASKY

*Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900*, by Doug Owram, University of Toronto Press, 264 pages, \$10.00 paper (ISBN 0 8020 6385 3).

*Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier*, by Hugh Brody, Douglas & McIntyre, 287 pages, \$19.95 paper (ISBN 0 88894 338 5).

*The Cariboo Mission: A History of the Oblates*, by Margaret Whitehead, Sono Nis Press, 142 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 919462 91 X).

BACK IN 1861, a Toronto scientist named Daniel Wilson wrote in the *Canadian Journal*: "It is an old saying that Parliament can print blue books, but it is beyond its power to make people read them." He was commenting on a report by Henry Youle Hind, a University of Toronto professor who had headed the first truly scientific investigation of the agricultural potential of the prairie region between the Red River and the Rocky Mountains. Hind's report to Parliament was of immense significance.

It shattered the myth that the Canadian West was an arctic desert gripped by winter eight months of the year.

U of T historian Doug Owrarn refers to the unreadability of such academic treatises in *Promise of Eden*, which, though not a government report, may suffer a similar lack of popularity because of its sombre title. That would be regrettable, for it's an enlightening and frequently entertaining social history that reaches the same high standards as Henry Nash Smith's classic *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*.

Owrarn has drawn upon a good many sources to show how the stereotype image of our West gradually changed — from howling wilderness to utopian garden. In both instances, the legend was more often than not concocted by Easterners who had never ventured west of Ontario. Those who painted a picture of an eternally frozen arid wasteland were largely supporters of the Hudson's Bay Company. They hated the idea of settlers invading their monopolistic fur preserve. Citing R.M. Ballantine's romantic novel, *The Young Fur Trader*, and the ghost-written journals of Sir John Franklin and Sir George Simpson, they lumped together the Prairies and the Arctic.

Those who went to the other extreme were propagandists who saw the Dominion as an extension of the British Empire and, in their attempts to lure immigrants, offered ludicrously high-flown rhetoric. One pamphleteer claimed that Manitoba's soil was more fertile than the delta of the Nile ("It drops fatness and hoards up wealth") and



boasted a climate of "unrivalled salubrity." Another maintained the earth was *too rich*, leaving the farmer with nothing to do with his fertilizer but dump it in the nearest river. As for the frontiersmen who had carried the Union Jack to this far corner of British North America, they were a patriotic breed of peace-loving he-men, responsible for "the bloodless conquest of an empire from savagery."

This distortion had its tragic side. Omitted from Owrarn's book is a com-

ment by Malcolm McLeod, a Dominion expansionist, on the pioneers who flocked to British Columbia in the 1870s seeking land and gold: "The first difficulty to cope with . . . is the Indian one. The Indian must be bought or killed, else *he will kill*."

That passage is quoted in *Maps and Dreams* by Hugh Brody, a former professor at McGill University who is also the author of *Indians on Skid Row* and *The People's Land*. His new book is a powerful blend of personalized and social history. As his title suggests, the frontiersmen who pushed west drew maps and dreamed dreams that excluded the Indians. The Indians were savages to be slaughtered or penned in institutionalized slums called reserves, and Brody's examination of how they were disinherited through the white man's treaties is a searing indictment indeed.

In the eyes of the missionaries, the Indians were barbaric heathens who were to be baptized and converted into civilized Christians. Margaret Whitehead's history of the Oblate fathers in the Cariboo region of B.C. shows how the priests were the unwitting shock troops of the white man's conquest. With the best of intentions, they turned the high-spirited Chilcotin warriors into docile victims. The rules laid down by the fanatical Father Paul Durieu were repressive to the extreme. The Indians were forbidden to sing love songs; boys and girls could not play together; and each missionary was pledged to inculcate "horror, fear and flight from sin."

Whitehead is a historian of the rigidly detached school. She refrains from commenting on the data she has painstakingly compiled, which makes for objectivity but a lacklustre narrative. Consequently, we get a factual but humourless description of the rivalry between Catholic and Methodist missionaries competing to save the souls of the pagans. She plays down the drama and colour of the Cariboo gold rush. And she saves for the last chapter of her book its one charming anecdote — about the formation of a girls' bagpipe band at the residential school in the 1940s. "We had no Indian music," declared Father Alex Morris, "so I introduced the music we had."

The federal government finally took over operation of the Oblate mission school in 1964, and Whitehead concludes her book by quoting a middle-aged Indian who had been a student there in the 1900s: "I tell you, no fooling, it was a pretty good school." Whitehead then editorializes mildly: "The younger generation, or many of them, would not agree. They resent the part played by the mission in undermining their cultural heritage." I would have preferred a more detailed analysis

of how the missionaries influenced Indian culture. Still, Whitehead's book is solidly documented. Like Owrarn and Brody, she contributes fact rather than myth to the growing literature of our Canadian West. □

## REVIEW

# The plough and the pen

By **SHELDON E. GORDON**

Massey at the Brink, by Peter Cook, Collins, 288 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 00 216857 X).

IN THE FIRST 10 months of 1981 farm bankruptcies in Canada were up 25 per cent over the same period in 1980, and "how ya' gonna' keep 'em down on the farm?" became a serious political question. Ontario hog and beef producers, the major casualties, pointed the finger at Ottawa for high interest rates, while agriculture minister Eugene Whelan replied that livestock prices were low because producers hadn't formed marketing boards. And, while the Canadian Bankers' Association claimed that only a tiny fraction of Canadian farmers were in trouble, the banks reaped their worst publicity since the Depression with seizures of collateral-cattle from bankrupt farms.

If anything, the outlook for 1982 is even worse. Grain producers, whose rising operating costs last year were offset by solid export prices, can expect those returns to soften as a result of the record wheat crop of 1980-81 in Canada and the United States. The result: a projected 15-per-cent drop in net farm income in Canada in 1982.

A survey of Ontario and Prairie farmers by the Bankers' Association found that one in 10 would quit the land if interest rates, which jumped from 12 to 25 per cent in 1981, remained in the stratosphere. Even more farmers would be forced to reduce their borrowing and buy fewer goods.

All this is grim news for farmers, but it is equally disastrous for farm machinery makers and their dealers.



International Harvester Ltd. of Chicago and Massey-Ferguson Ltd. of Toronto are teetering on the edge of insolvency, waiting for "pent up" demand for tractors, combine harvesters, and forage equipment to be unleashed in the marketplace. International Harvester reported a loss of \$297 million for their first quarter this year. Canadian farmers, already owing \$18 billion, are in no position to beat the sword of debt hanging over them into new ploughshares — especially when those ploughshares sell for \$25,000 or \$50,000 apiece.

For a multinational corporation like Massey-Ferguson, the Canadian farm economy accounts for only 10 per cent of its global agricultural market. But the Canadian downturn is typical. Massey's sales in fiscal 1981 were \$2.6 billion, down 16 per cent from fiscal 1980. The North American market was off by 25 per cent, Europe by 31 per cent. Worldwide, Massey recorded an operating loss of \$218 million last year, almost \$100 million more than in the previous fiscal year. It was a demoralizing setback in a year when Massey's new management had confidently predicted it would turn the firm around and replace red ink with black.

Financial journalist Peter Cook's *Massey at the Brink* is thus an aptly named — as well as thoroughly researched — account of how Canada's first multinat has fallen on hard times. As Cook recounts, Massey has had its back to the wall repeatedly during its 135-year history. Farm machinery makers traditionally have flourished and almost failed with the boom-and-bust cycles that characterize world agriculture. Massey faced serious difficulties in the early 1920s and was almost ruined by the Dustbowl '30s. In the late '60s and early '70s, Massey management set the stage for the current crisis with a free-spending expansion program, manufacturing in more and more locations around the globe and moving into such peripheral areas as construction machinery. It financed the spree with too much debt and too little equity.

Massey's shareholders, Argus Corp. financiers E.P. Taylor and Bud McDougald, exercised no restraint on a corporation that had become too decentralized at senior management level and too preoccupied with the question of who was to succeed its own aging president. When the crunch came at decade's end, a new team at Argus headed by Conrad Black installed a new team at Massey led by Victor Rice, and retrenchment and refinancing became the key strategies in a desperate battle for survival. Workers were laid off, assets were sold, and bankers were cajoled into con-

verting IOUs into equity, in an attempt to lessen the crushing burden of interest payments.

Toward this \$715-million refinancing the Canadian and Ontario governments chipped in \$200 million in equity guarantees: if Massey collapsed, the taxpayer would buy back the worthless shares from the company's bankers at the original price.

Cook is highly critical of Conrad Black and Argus for ditching Massey in October, 1980, rather than committing more Argus capital to its rescue. But he does not raise the question of whether government money should then have been placed at risk to effect a rescue that private money was too nervous to undertake alone. Canadian politicians were obviously reluctant to pull the plug on a venerable Canadian institution (though as Cook points out, during good times Massey had de-emphasized its Canadian heritage, hired Americans as its top executives, and almost moved the head office out of Canada).

There were 7,000 Canadian jobs at stake. Massey's operations in the U.K. held 17,000 workers hostage, yet failed to extort any kind of ransom from Margaret Thatcher. And Massey's operations in France, with 5,000 jobs in the balance, were equally unsuccessful in

persuading Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

Pierre Trudeau, though, couldn't resist a bail-out. □

## REVIEW

# Notes from the underground

By **STEPHEN SCOBIE**

*S'ney'mos*, by Kevin Roberts, Oolichan Books, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 88982 023 6).

*The Wide Arable Land*, by Carolyn Zonailo, Caitlin Press, 88 pages, \$6.00 paper (ISBN 0 920576 11 7).

*Castle Mountain*, by Luanne Armstrong, Polestar Press, 50 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 919591 00 0).

THREE BOOKS FROM small presses on the West Coast give continued evidence of

"MONA, in essence, is a contemporary epic, a tale of defiance and unpretentious continuing heroism."

Globe and Mail



This is the true story of a four-year-old girl who had leukemia. The book, written by the child's mother deals with her struggle to accept her daughter's condition, live with it, and grow from the experience. She describes the inadvertent heartlessness of friends and hospital personnel, her own feelings of inadequacy, the pressure on her marriage and her other child. Eventually Mona has a remission that lasts for an unexpectedly long time, one that allows her mother to return to a "normal" life. The book ends with the disease attacking again, but with the mother and family better able to cope with the difficulties of living one day at a time, while still believing in the future. "Ginette Bureau ... present(s) her story in a straight-forward, terse, honest manner without a trace of melodrama or sentimentality ..."

Globe and Mail



**CLARKE, IRWIN**

**\$9.95 pb**

the vitality of poetry in British Columbia. The most interesting of them is Kevin Roberts's *S'ney'mos*, from Oolichan Books in Nanaimo, which deals in "documentary" fashion with the history of coal mining on Vancouver Island. Roberts places his book firmly within the Canadian tradition implied by that word, "documentary": he uses historical facts and extracts from period documents, acknowledges Patricia M. Johnson's *Nanaimo, a Short History* as a source, and appeals to the reader with the authoritativeness of real names and dates. At the same time, he brings to bear on the objective information the full force of a subjective voice and interpretation.

Restraint is the hallmark of Roberts's style. He writes taut, short lines, and his language is hard, sparse, and direct. The poetic effect depends not upon image or metaphor but upon the tension between the plain, concise, almost prosaic tone and the rhythms set up by the line division, as in this portrait of the mine owner Dunsmuir:

*takes his tea  
in a porcelain cup  
from his fluttering  
aide says  
seventeen sick again today?  
malingerers we must  
hire more Chinese  
they take the work  
better*

Restraint is also shown in the choice of incidents, and indeed in the length of the book as a whole: at a mere 40 pages of poetry, it is certainly not a comprehensive account, and Roberts could clearly have gone on at much greater length, given the richness of his material. But the incidents, though few, are well chosen. The only point where I would quarrel with Roberts's narrative tact is when, recounting the life of one of the Chinese victims of an 1837 explosion, he pushes the sentimental point that this was to have been Mah Fung's last shift before taking his savings and returning to China. But it is remarkable to note how many frames of reference — colonial, Indian, Chinese, trade union — Roberts is able to deploy and make succinct and imaginative use of. The poem may be brief, but it is complete.

The final few pages of *S'ney'mos* bring the historical events into the ironic context of the present. Indian petroglyphs and the carving out of the mines are succeeded by lovers' initials "scratched shallow"; "a thin seam of coal" still shows "in a parking lot"; a fire-gutted Indian shack bears witness to a struggle — the eternal struggle of "Li Fire over K'un Earth" — which brings "no renewal/at this time." Except, perhaps, in the words of Roberts's poem.

Carolyn Zonailo's *The Wide Arable Land*, from Caitlin Press in Vancouver, is an uneven book, but at its best it offers poems of great lyric beauty and subtlety. Especially fine is the closing sequence, "Journey to the Sybil," in which Zonailo is able to bring together mythic or surreal symbols with the observed details of a local landscape. The Sybil's voice, which has spoken to poets from Petronius to Eliot, echoes here in the authentic sounds of the B.C. coast:

*only her voice  
high in the arbutus leaves  
a shriek, winter  
in an old wooden building  
a moan, as logs rub  
against rocks*

Against this, one must set such failures as the over-extended whimsy of "The Red Camellias," or the tendency of some of the shorter lyrics to fall off into weak, generalized endings. But with

this, her fifth book, Zonailo is clearly on the verge of becoming an important B.C. poet.

*Castle Mountain*, on the other hand, is Luanne Armstrong's first book, and it shows. Nicely produced by Polestar Press, a new small publisher in Victoria, it contains a selection of poems, and two short stories, much of which amounts to little more than competent creative writing class exercises. The poetry is at its best when it is closest to Armstrong's own experience as a farmer in the B.C. interior; but too often one comes across lines like "All day, the sun buttered the park/opposite the house," in which the strained self-consciousness of the metaphor in the first line is matched by the flat banality of the second. Armstrong's heart is in the right place, and there are some poems that show her potential for direct, honest writing, but she still has a long way to go before she comes into full possession of her own voice. □

## INTERVIEW

Erika Ritter's comedies are serious business. Like Chekhov's, they take a humorous view of middle-class despair

By BARRY BROWN

ERIKA RITTER was born in Regina and attended McGill University and the University of Toronto Drama Centre, where she completed her graduate studies in 1970. She wrote her first play, *A Visitor from Charleston*, in Montreal, where she was teaching — "the only respectable thing you can do with an M.A." — at Loyola College (now Concordia University). In 1975 she joined Toronto's Playwrights Co-op, and later participated in Tarragon Theatre's writer-in-residence program. Since then she has published four short stories, has had a 60-minute drama — *Sisters* — produced on CBC-TV, and has written six more plays that have been staged across the country: *Moving Pictures* (1976), *The Girl I Left Behind Me* (1977), *The Splits* (1978), *Winter 1671* (1979), *Automatic Pilot* (1980), and *The Passing Scene* (1982). She now lives with her two cats in Toronto, where she recently talked to Barry Brown:

Books in Canada: *You say you have a soft spot for The Passing Scene because*

*it didn't do as well as Automatic Pilot.* Ritter: Well, I don't think that's why, although it helps. I think writers have an idiot-child syndrome to their work, where you care more for the ones that



PHOTOGRAPH BY RUTH KAPLAN

don't succeed. The ones that don't need your support and loyalty can fend for themselves. So I tend to be more protective of work that doesn't hit as much

popularity with the public. I like *Automatic Pilot*: it's got its problems, but I do like it. And I haven't stopped liking it just because it became successful. But I think that the last play I wrote, *The Passing Scene*, takes a larger view of the world; it's not quite as narrow. It's got structural difficulties, because it's a more complicated play. It's trying for more things, and maybe not bringing them off. But when I go to the theatre I prefer something that's interesting and not necessarily totally successful in what it does, as opposed to something that plays it safer and is slicker and has dared less, and therefore has achieved less.

**EtC:** *In what areas did you see yourself expanding from Automatic Pilot to The Passing Scene?*

**Ritter:** First of all, *The Passing Scene* is occupied with two characters, rather than just one. In *Automatic Pilot*, Charlie, the woman comic, is the centre of the play. I like the guys in the play — I think they're well-drawn characters — but they do function in a very subsidiary way to her. They're her problems that are always under discussion. But in *The Passing Scene* the relationship between two people is the centre of the play. They both have problems that complicate the relationship or dictate the direction it takes. And it spans five years, which is a tall order. It's hard to scoop out three disparate moments in people's lives, which is what the play has done, and catch the audience up on what has happened during the intermissions. A lot of stuff maybe falls between the cracks that shouldn't.

*Automatic Pilot* takes place over a couple of months and has many scenes, so the audience can be gradually kept abreast of what's gone on. There aren't gaps and jumps. There isn't a lot of exposition that has to take place at the top of each act. In *The Passing Scene*, I wanted the problem of a three-act play, and I wanted the problem of a play that spanned a number of years — more like a movie, in a sense, where it follows a relationship over time and through different localities. It's more of a cinematic endeavour, but the method in the play is still theatrical. It's not a cinematic kind of play — it's not written in short cinematic scenes — but the attempt, the kind of analysis that's being done, is the kind of analysis that could be done in a movie.

**EtC:** *You have said that when you write you tend to begin with a character and then expand out into a story that follows this particular character. What is it about your characters that interests you? How do you view them, are they extensions of yourself?*

**Ritter:** Well, I suppose it's true that the

central characters in my plays are women who are roughly the same age as I am, who are also one way or another occupied in creative activity. So there's an obvious parallelism that wouldn't be there, for example, in a character of a different sex, a different age, with a different occupation. But I think that no matter what characters one chooses, they are in some ways extensions of yourself. Not just the central character, but all the characters. They all have bits and pieces of their writer's attitude in them. It's a way of getting close to your characters. You have to believe that people at some level have things in common, that one's own responses are perfectly legitimate to give to a character. For example, the male journalist in *The Passing Scene* in some ways is a reflection of a side of me that the woman isn't. He's got certain problems and preoccupations that come out of me — the things he says to her about "whatever happened to the best, the brightest, the best equipped generation this society ever produced; whatever happened to it?" I think those concerns are more mine than they are Kitty's, who's the woman in the play. But it's not a narcissistic exercise either. I don't write to tell the story of my life. If I wanted to tell the story of my life, which could occupy a very modest menu card, I'd write a book. I'd write, you know, my story.

**EtC:** *Well then, why do you want to tell the stories you tell?*

**Ritter:** I think one writes a play that one has never seen, that one would like to see oneself. I mean, I think one of the primary motives is self-entertainment. I write stories that interest me. I don't consciously look for situations that would be a good thing to write a play about: what haven't we seen this season, what's up and coming and current that would work well in a play. Sometimes it happens inadvertently. In *Automatic Pilot* there were two themes that turned out to occupy at least half of the audience. One was a marriage where the husband becomes homosexual, and the other was the relationship between an older woman and a younger man. Now, I didn't cold-bloodedly decide that these were money topics, these were going to be good box office topics to talk about. I thought they were interesting social problems of the day that I could see happening around me, and as far as I could see would happen more and more. I started basically with something that interested me as an idea.

I suppose the kinds of things that interest me are reflected in the style of the things I write, which are essentially serious subjects being dealt with, for the most part, comically, or at least with a fair amount of humour. And it does

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interest me that most of life is occupied with people feeling quite bad about a number of things — being worried about work and worried about relationships, which is what my characters tend to worry about. This is what most people I know tend to worry about, those two areas.

Most people tend, when they talk about their lives, to take a comic, ironic attitude. I don't know too many people who bleat and cry and rend their garments; they tend to make jokes about themselves. And that doesn't mean they don't take it seriously. I think comedy is a way for people to signal their concern about something in a socially acceptable way. That's the kind of stuff I write. To me it is a serious business. I see no incompatibility or conflict by expressing it comically. I don't think that makes the stuff of the play trivial or not serious. I think that's a problem some people have with comedy. People refer to something as being "just a comedy." Because it's comic, by necessity it's slick, trivial, fluffy, any number of adjectives. I think they're wrong. I think some of the most serious statements about life have been made in plays that are, theoretically at least, comedies. Chekhov's plays are comedies, and they are very funny. But they are a real statement of middle-class despair.

**BiC:** *I met a woman at The Passing Scene who levelled exactly that criticism at your work. She felt it was too full of one-liners.*

**Ritter:** I've been plagued in the last while or so by people accusing me of writing one-liners. I'm not sure what a one-liner is. I think it means that when I look at a page of dialogue, usually there's the character's name and a sentence, and then another character's name and a sentence, and people tend to speak to each other in single sentences, rather than paragraphs. I like that kind of writing. I like dialogue that moves rapidly. I like it when people parry with each other and probe each other's weaknesses, and figure each other out, circling each other through words. It's not a conscious decision, though. I think that the style is dictated by the kind of characters I write about, who tend to be fast on their feet. And there tends to be a kind of contrast in their humour that works well in couplets. Kitty and Dan in *The Passing Scene* are natural sparring partners. Her humour is sharp and his is blunt. She needles him, and he hammers her back. For me it's a nice by-play to watch two different kinds of people, from two different ethnic backgrounds and two different points of view, zing each other and look for each other's weaknesses. It's comedy, but it's also

character analysis. I can't help it if some people don't like that.

**BiC:** *Do you have any thoughts on the present state of Canadian theatre?*

**Ritter:** That's an awfully large question. There are a number of developments. One is just in terms of the brutal practicality of the business. Theatre is becoming more commercial. I don't use that term pejoratively, necessarily. I don't think it's bad for a play to be a commercial hit. That means there's a large number of people willing to pay money to see it, and how bad can that be? But when entertainment is the chief value, it usually means there is less grant money and less opportunity to take fliers on chancy material. I think we're mov-

ing more toward "safe" theatre, which worries me on some level.

The business of creating a native drama in this country is a relatively recent development. The craft is improving as more people are writing and having their work produced, and more people have had more productions and a chance to improve their work. At one time a Canadian play meant something that took place in a farm house in Saskatchewan. I don't think that's true now. When you think of a Canadian play do you think of *Billy Bishop*, do you think of *Automatic Pilot*, *Leaving Home*? If so, what are the common threads that couldn't be true of a play from anywhere else? □

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

## Indian summers: the exile of a veteran of the Riel Rebellion and a young man's fantasy about the enchanted north

By DOUGLAS HILL

ONE OF THIS month's novels is stylistically and structurally unexceptionable, with a serious message to deliver and correct sentiments to accompany it. It's also dull and slow. The other novel is messy and flawed, but it has a vitality that keeps one turning the pages. The first book was excruciating, and I feel guilt at my discomfort. The second was fun, and I feel guilt at my enjoyment. Oh, the cosmic dramas of the book-reviewer's day.

*Summer of the Hungry Pup*, by Byrna Barclay (NeWest Press, 304 pages, \$14.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper), presents an important subject, organizes it scrupulously, but fails to come up with an effective, convincing way to make a novel out of it. Everything in the book is denoted, explained; nothing is suggested, implied, left to the reader. It works better, perhaps, as history or anthropology than fiction — the facts, the details, are certainly all in place.

The main story — the 10-year exile of the Cree who took part in the Riel Rebellion — is narrated by Old Woman, the "other-grandmother" of Annika, a young woman who takes her in and cares for her on the Saskatchewan farm she has inherited from her real grandmother. Chapters describing Old

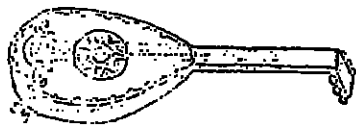
Woman's youth — she was 16 at the time of the Rebellion — alternate with chapters unfolding the relation between Old Woman and Annika, who comes, by the end of the novel, to a better understanding of herself and her own connection to the land and its meanings.

There is much good writing in *Summer of the Hungry Pup*, and passages that are first-rate. The method Barclay chooses to represent Old Woman's speech is certainly poetic; in large doses it can be exhausting. ("Moons change. Winds change. I pull on ropes anchoring my lodge. I close smokeflaps. Without ropes lodge will sway before wind and crumble.")

Many readers, I'm sure, will find the book's lyrical intensity and firm convictions quite moving. I don't mean to jump up and down on anyone's feelings, just express my own. I respect Barclay's novel for its intentions, but I found reading it to be tedious. Too much message, not enough originality of imagination.

*THE HERO OF Indian River*, by Jake MacDonald (Queenston House, 205 pages, \$16.95 cloth, \$8.95 paper) is a young man from Winnipeg, Dom Chambrun, who like Barclay's Annika is trying to sort out his life and come to terms with

his future. As long as Dom could remember, the author tells us, "he'd had a dream about disappearing into the far north, marrying an Indian girl and building a log cabin way back in some enchanted valley." By accident more



than design, a good deal of the fantasy starts to come true.

Dom falls in with a group of fishing guides, is talked into taking a job at the fly-in camp where they work, meets Elena, an Indian woman who cooks at the lodge, starts to shape up, get in step with the north, shed his bad (gambling, drugs) city ways. The larger, topical plot has to do with pollution from a paper mill (something called Acid Red), guides

who eat too much contaminated fish, the government's attempt to shut down or buy off lodge owners and protect big business. Stir this up with some Indian-white confrontation and add the filming of a fishing movie.

MacDonald has a good sense of how to move a story fast and fluidly. There's humour in the writing, and characters — the guides especially — do come alive. There's plenty of gusto and rough energy here, plenty of rough edges.

Parts of the book are awful. The prose is often flabby; it could be cut, pared, sharpened. The need for tougher editing is frequently apparent. But there seems to be a strong talent behind *Indian River*, and the ability, despite limitations and inexperience, to create some people and scenes that stick in the mind. It's by no means as well-managed a production as *Summer of the Hungry Pup*, but it also smacks less of the paint-by-numbers approach. □

### ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Metre readings: why the semantic menace of metrication prompts an icy, if not virulent, critical response

By **BOB BLACKBURN**

"WHEN I USE A WORD," Humpty Dumpty said, "it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less." (There is a law that requires people who write about language to use that quote at least once every two years. That's it for now.)

Possibly Humpty Dumpty was manning the rewrite desk at Broadcast News the day that two consecutive items raised interesting questions of diction. One, referring to the Ocean Ranger tragedy, said the "the oil rig slipped into the *gelid* Atlantic." The other reported that Menachem Begin "*virulently* opposes the plan."

To object to these uses comes close to nitpicking, but I think they're worth arguing about. *Gelid* does, indeed, mean extremely cold or icy, and I presume that that's what Humpty Dumpty chose it to mean. It also means refreshingly cold, however, and was hardly appropriate in that sense. Furthermore, *gelid* is not an everyday word, and it makes many readers think of gelatin, with which it shares a common ancestor.

Broadcast News is an arm of the Can-

adian Press news service. It furnishes the lifeblood of "rip-and-read" newscasters, and its reports can be seen printed out on the news channels of many cable television services. It is no place for fancy synonyms. The writer obviously meant *icy*, and that's the word he should have used.

There may have been some justification for the quoted use of *virulently*. While *virulent* primarily means poisonous, it can also be used to denote extreme bitterness. It's a strong word, though, and it has a connotation of evil that brings its use in this context under suspicion of editorializing. *Vehemently* would have served very well in this context. Perhaps the writer did mean *virulently*, but anyone who would say *gelid* when he meant *icy* must be suspected of being a show-off who probably spends far too much of his time in search of what Fowler scornfully calls elegant variations.

IN THE BARS in which writers gather there is much loud discussion these days over

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The nature of things: from a disappointing jumble of comic strips to tiny perfect bats and birds

By CHRISTOPHER HUME

what to call one of the things Trudeau is doing to us. Is it *metrification* or *metrification*? I know of no authority to which we can turn on this one. I favour *metrification* simply because I can't find it in any dictionary. I can find *metrification*, and it means the putting of something into metrical form, *not* into metric form. *Metrification* is almost the same as *versification*. It has to do with the metre of language, not the metre of 39.37 inches. And since *metrification* already does mean something, it seems far more sensible (and justifiable by precedent) to coin *metricate* and *metrication* than to mess up the clear meaning of *metrify* and its forms. (I am also vaguely hostile to changing the spelling to *meter*, but I can't call up any powerful arguments, and it's a lost cause, anyway. However, I still say kiLOMetre, and will continue to do so, at least until everyone else stops saying therMOMeter, baROMeter and speeDOMeter.)

SOMEONE RECENTLY wrote: "Othello was the *paragon* of the jealous man." That sounds ridiculous, but it's a tough one to shoot down. Jealousy is a flaw; paragons are flawless. But if I say that *paragon* means model of perfection, the writer might say, "That's what I mean; he's a perfect model of the jealous man." However, I say, no matter how you play around with words, that a perfect model is not a model of perfection (unless, perhaps, you're talking about Cheryl Tiegs), and it was a wrong use of *paragon*. He might have said *epitome*. He still would have been wrong, but *epitome* is so widely used to mean what he was trying to say that I'd have let it slide. Anyway, Othello sure was one jealous guy.

FOR SOME REASON, a lot of funny statements come from hospitals. I've always loved the sort of headline that reads, "Shut three times by robber, policeman critical," to which the only possible answer is, "Well, wouldn't you be?"

On a TV newscast, a striking (in more ways than one) nurse told a reporter, "The critically ill will not suffer." That certainly beats aspirin, I guess, but what about the aches and pains of those with lesser ailments?

That same week, a news story on a doctors' strike in Toronto read, "A hospital spokesman said the doctors' walk-out will not have much effect on operations." I wonder who was performing those operations in the absence of the surgeons. A team of highly skilled spokesmen, perhaps. Surely one could expect someone who is paid to speak for hospitals to be a little more careful about the way he flings around such ambiguous words as *operations*. □

WHEN IS A BOOK not a book? When it's a work of art, when it's not so much written by an author as created by an artist. The main difference is in the distinction between form and content. The artist seems primarily concerned with the book as a form, as a context in which to place his ideas. It is also a sort of starting point; the artist sets out to make a particular statement, and suddenly the book itself becomes the focus of attention.

Not everyone would accept the notion that a book deserves attention simply because it has been produced by an artist. The realm of the artist is presumed to be visual, and unless we are presented with a volume containing reproductions of his work we are probably wasting our time. Once he leaves his chosen field, the artist becomes just another mortal whose thoughts and feelings may or may not be of interest. A similar situation exists in the area of video. In Toronto, for example, several video production centres are available to local artists. It is a nice idea and often an extremely successful one. At the same

have *A Book Working* (A Space, unpaginated, \$18.95 cloth). Included in this volume are six "bookworks" by six artists: Jo Percival, Andy Patton, Miles DeCoster, Michael Duquette, Bruce Barber, and James Dunn. The manuscripts were chosen from nearly 200 submitted during an open competition sponsored by Toronto's gallery, A Space.

Despite its richness and vitality, *A Book Working* is ultimately a disappointment. Andy Patton's work, "The Real Glasses I Wear," in many ways typifies the anthology. Patton has taken cartoon strips (Beetle Bailey, Superman, Blondie), cut out parts of the captions and reordered their sequence. The concept is not hard to appreciate. Ian Murray demonstrated just how brilliantly this sort of thing can be done in his 1974 bookwork, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* by *Schilder*. A-Space cadets describe Patton's opus as "an informal examination of narrative conventions with a deliberate jumbling of language, projecting the comic confusion of being lost, dislocated, or struck by amnesia." Perhaps. It struck me more as a good idea gone wrong. Somewhere between the initial concept and the final product there was a lapse of sensibility. Good ideas don't necessarily make good art.

Bruce Barber's "Audience Arrangements" is an altogether different work. It consists of 14 arrangements of audience and performing space. The rather elegant constructions are prefaced by a short essay that examines audience (or crowd) psychology. Jo Percival's "Journeys of J: The Pegmatite Dikes" does not quite live up to its title. Nevertheless, there is a strange poetic quality in Percival's work not found elsewhere in the book. Using geological diagrams and terminology, postcards, excerpts from a diary, and numerous quotations, Percival follows J's journey as she (?) discovers geology as a metaphor for human activity. "We are rock-bound," quotes the artist. "We seek to fall."

There are numerous examples to prove that book art is a rich and exciting medium: *A Book Working* has not



time, however, any number of banalities have been served up in the name of art. Clearly the artist with training in either painting or sculpture cannot be expected to master the demands of another medium. The same holds for book artists.

Late last year we saw *Books by Artists* by Tim Guest, which documented some of the most successful work currently being done in this genre. This year we

added to the evidence.

From the Porcupine's Quill comes *The Graphic Art of Paul Fournier* (unpaginated, \$11.95 paper) edited by Greg Peters. A superb print-maker, Fournier is at his greatest when dealing with animals, particularly small animals. His miniature black-and-white studies of moles, bats, and birds are tiny perfect masterpieces. In its science-book accuracy, Fournier's work has something of da Vinci in it: the text is straightforward and helpful, and although it seems modest it is really a lovely book to behold.

George McLean is the latest in a series of wildlife painters from the Great White North to make it big in bookdom. David Lank's *Paintings from the Wild: The Art and Life of George McLean*

(Brownstone, unpaginated, \$35.00 cloth) has become the "other" wildlife art book this winter (*The Art of Robert Bateman* being the one). And of course McLean gets full marks for technique and accuracy. Everything is there, every detail exactly as it appears in the natural world (hard to believe any still exist). So why does the book have such a washed-out quality to it? Every reproduction looks as if it has been overexposed. The colours give the impression of having faded.

McLean's style lends itself best to the rendering of birds. His portrait of the bald eagle is a fine work, clean in its lines and simple in its composition. In the years to come this book will serve to remind us of the animals that no longer exist. □

### ON THE RACKS

War and peace: from the adventures of a  
bloodthirsty Canadian flying ace  
to a quiet morning tea in Northern Ireland

By ANNE COLLINS

I AM USUALLY ABLE to impose some sort of order on the unruly outpourings of the paperback industry or sniff out unlikely bridging themes to tie thriller to romance to pot-boiler to work of art. Not this month. April is one disorderly month. So here we go, in groups of two and three. And sometimes one.

War stories are first. I am unable to judge how much of a mystery Major-General Richard Rohmer has actually solved in *Patton's Gap* (PaperJacks, \$3.95), which deals with one of those oversights that haunts those who think about the battles of the Second World War. Rohmer says not only that it was British General Montgomery's fault that George Patton and his Third Army did not move to close the Falaise Gap — through which the entire German Seventh Army made its escape on August 12, 1944 — but that the gap was left unplugged on Montgomery's specific orders. Ego was his problem, and apparently he couldn't bear the thought of the Americans stealing such a piece of glory. One judgement I can make is that Rohmer is much better at this than at thriller-writing, no matter how many copies of *Ultimatum, Exoneration, Balls!*, etc., have been sold.

A book-length biography is a bit oversized for the life of Second World War hero and flying ace Buzz Beurling. Even though he was Gary Cooper-esque, with ice-blue eyes that could see mystically farther than the other pilots. Even though he was so fanatical about his mission and his talent, killing and flying, that he "wore only the silk inner lining of his flight gloves to better feel the pulse of the Spitfire."

Beurling was only 21 when he performed the feat that would mark him: shooting down 27 enemy planes in 14 days flying out of the Royal Air Force base in Malta. But eventually the air forces of both Canada and Britain didn't know what to do with such a single-minded killing machine, and after the war was over Beurling didn't know what to do with himself. He couldn't get a job as a commercial pilot. He survived nine out of 10 plane crashes, and the one that killed him was in Rome on his way to fight for the new state of Israel. He was 26.

Therein lies writer Brian Nolan's problem. Writing about Buzz Beurling is like writing about Wayne Gretzky — he was so young that nothing was formed about him but his amazing skill. Unless

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he is put into some sort of context, or understood, all one needs to know about him are the bare-bone facts cited above. Nolan hints at other mysteries in *Hero: The Buzz Beurling Story* (Penguin, \$3.50), but figures out neither them nor the central one: how such a good kid from Verdun grew up to become the man who said, "It was a great sight anyway, the red blood down the white fuselage. I must say it gives you a feeling of satisfaction when you actually blow their brains out."

LESTER & ORPEN DENNYs have now got three of their International Fiction List out in a quality paperback format (\$9.95 each). My favourite of the three is *Obasan*, a first novel by poet Joy Kogawa. "Novel" is a hybrid term in Kogawa's case; her book is made up of prose poetry and documentary as well as the usual narrative. Her subject is the dispersal of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, first to detention camps and then to resettlement outside the province of British Columbia, so they would not make noise after the war about the new owners of their confiscated property, their houses and fishing boats. Silence is what the book is all about: the people who maintained it

in the belief that if they didn't say it, it didn't happen; the ones who raged so hard they were pulled back into their nightmares and stayed there forever; the ones who tried to escape. Kogawa herself performs the most important act of memory.

The other two are Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, gloriously self-conscious about the pact between reader and writer and (I think) for addicts of books only, and Marie-Claire Blais's *Deaf to the City*, for addicts of Marie-Claire Blais.

The next books are tied only by virtue of their ineffectual heroines — ineffectual in that no matter what they do they make no impact on the reader. This may not be a fair judgement to make on David Gurr's second thriller, *A Woman Called Scylla* (Bantam-Seal, \$3.25), because his female searcher is just the mechanism to get the pieces of his plot in place, someone to travel from Montreal in November, 1976, to Washington, to London during the royal Silver Jubilee, to Rhodesia to be attacked by black guerrillas, and so on. Jane Montigny, Reuter "hotspot" correspondent on a search for the truth about her long-dead mother lost on a wartime mission of British security, does have a few good

moments, as when she silently regards her nude, well-exercised, well-kept, nearing-40-years-old body and wonders what she's keeping it all up for. I guess I'm just tired of the modern-style thriller, which too often substitutes exotic travel, international crisis, paranoia, and cynical insights into how power corrupts for the solid development of human character under siege or at war.

*Preparing for Sabbath* (Bantam-Seal, \$2.95) is one of those novels that is not badly written or badly structured but somehow just isn't. No there there, to paraphrase Gertrude Stein. Nessa Rapoport is on overworked turf, for one thing: girl deals with her middle-class Jewishness, the demands of orthodoxy, sex, Jewish summer camp, sex, Jerusalem, sex, God, kibbutz, family, friends, sex. Will passionate Jewish girl find all-inclusive, exclusive love in God or man (or woman) or combination thereof? It's not the kind of question to keep your breath suspended to the final page.

Two odd anachronistic wonderments from Rebecca West, who seems to have spent some of the teens and all of the 1920s worrying about love. Hard to reconcile with one's image of Dame Rebecca. In *Harriet Hume* (Virago Modern Classic, \$7.95) pure male principle meets pure female principle in a war that almost ends in the murder of one by the other. It's more parable or fairy-tale than novel, written in a distinctly over-rich and artificial style but full of little observations like this one, wherein the male principle regrets female insights: "He would show no mercy to her whom he now hated so much that he could not speak. . . . For she had come between him and every human being's right not to know quite what he is doing."

The male is an unprincipled politician who wants to rise in the world no matter the human cost; the female, Harriet of the title, is all softness and succour, porcelain-hued with flushes of cheeks and the unquantifiable artistry of the talented musician. West seems to propose a necessary mix of these qualities in each of the principles for peaceful relations.

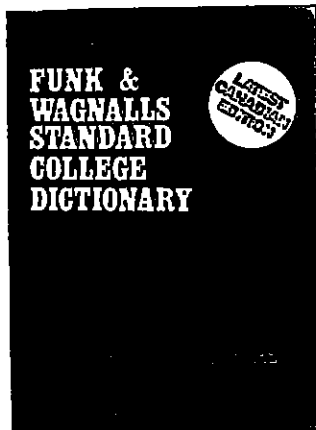
In her very first novel, *The Return of the Soldier* (Virago Modern Classic, \$7.95), West is more serious about the subject, though the plot turns on a rather unlikely and melodramatic case of amnesia. The soldier in question, Chris Baldry, is shell-shocked in the trenches of France and forgets his too-beautiful wife and stylish life for the sake of a truer first love, a country girl from whom circumstances and pride had

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separated him. His wife thinks that when he sees the girl, now ugly and roughened and working-class common, he'll be jolted into remembrance. When that doesn't happen it's left to the country girl, who loves him still, to hand him back: the dubious present of his adult life in an act of selfless giving that West never lets drift into mawkishness. Beautiful and small, the way first novels can be.

THE GROUP OF ONE is Brian Moore's *The Temptation of Eileen Hughes* (Bantam-Seal, \$2.95). I have never been able to figure Moore out, though I've tried again and again, driven by the opinions of my betters, like Graham Greene, who thinks that Moore is simply the best contemporary novelist. In this book I was struck by his sheer skill, as in the understated chapter in which Agnes Hughes sits and worries about her daughter Eileen, on a trip to London with her rich employers Bernard and Mona McCauley, throughout an ordinary morning in Northern Ireland: tea and her library book, factory whistle at 8, at 8:15 "the special high whine" of the regular British army patrol, at 8:30 the milkman.

I confess it is the male principle I have problems with in Moore: I can't understand Bernard McCauley or his "spiritual" obsession with the untouched Eileen. The goddess-whore split has never seemed real to me, and neither do men who, like Bernard, build their lives around fantasies of it. □

## LETTERS

### Removing the labels

Sir:

It was interesting to note the inconsistencies in Cyril Dabydeen's letter concerning Douglas Hill's review of Joy Kogawa's book, *Obasan* (January). He objects quite rightly to the term "ethnic fiction" to describe Kogawa's important novel dealing with the shameful treatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. He doesn't like "the inchoate tendency of categorizing Canadian literature." So why then does he use the half-baked generalization "Wasp-Canadian literature"? Maybe

Mr. Dabydeen could explain why he feels the work of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants constitutes a "mainstream" in Canadian writing. Are there, for example, no prominent Canadian writers of French, Jewish, or Irish origin who aren't Anglo-Saxon? How many writers in this country could accurately be described as Protestant?

It may be news to both Mr. Dabydeen and Mr. Hill, but there are a great many people who resent any popular slang label being applied to them, and "Wasp" is just one of them.

Robert Eady  
Kanata, Ont.

*Editor's Note:* In fairness, we should point out that the words "ethnic fiction" were not Douglas Hill's. They appeared not in his column but in a heading, for which he was not responsible.

### Topic of cancer

Sir:

Has Theresa Kishkan been reading the same novel by Margaret Atwood that I read (Letters, January)? Kishkan may not like *Bodily Harm*, but that is no reason to attack Atwood, whom she accuses of cynicism and dilettantism. On the contrary, Atwood's work is thoughtful and perceptive, and never sentimental and simplistic.

Atwood's "enlightened social conscience" is neither new nor opportunistic; it has been evident in her work for a long time. And she has paid her dues as a member of the human community by being active in Amnesty International. Her use of torture as a theme in *Bodily Harm* is come by honestly. As for cancer, I'm sure that Atwood's life — like most other lives — has been touched by that dreaded disease. *Bodily Harm* shows that none of us are exempt when it comes to diseases of body and spirit; and when Atwood has her protagonist overcome her repugnance to reach out to her cellmate, the reader experiences a moment where the human spirit is victorious whether the women live or die. This shows Atwood to be neither a cynic nor a dilettante and certainly not a writer who strives for "literary titillation."

M.G. Osachoff  
Saskatoon

### Nuclear disasters

Sir:

Many thanks, once again, to Bob Blackburn for his lively English. Our English column — one of the continuing delights of *Books in Canada*.

His reference (February) to Dwight Eisenhower's habit of saying "nucular" for "nuclear" reminds me that Ike also said "modren" for "modern," as in "modren times."

It also reminds me of a radio feature on nuclear energy I wrote and directed for the United Nations in the '50s, with the late Gary Cooper as narrator. Coop belonged to the Eisenhower school, and simply could not get his tongue around the necessarily oft-repeated word "nuclear." Eventually I managed to get him to say it *once* on tape — and then had to splice that one correct effort into the 63 other occasions where he had said "nucular."

Coop told me he'd always thought it was the same as "molecular."

Mavor Moore  
Toronto

## CANWIT NO. 72

A BRIEF REFERENCE to the Stars and Stripes in the essay on film by Gerald Pratley in this issue reminded us of something (something else?) that Canada lacks. The United States has Old Glory, Britain the Union Jack, Japan the Rising Sun, but what is the name of Canada's flag? Old Nothing? The Maple Grief? We'll pay \$25 for the nickname that best sums up the Canadian character, whatever that is. Deadline: May 1. Address: CanWit No. 72, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

### Results of CanWit No. 70

OUR REQUEST for misfiled Canadian books brought not only a landslide of entries but also an outraged letter to inform us that the library at the University of New Brunswick does *not* keep Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolable* on its science shelf. ("Regrettably, we have no print copy of the title," says the library's Suzanne F. Chaney, "but do have two copies in our microform collection.") All the same, the idea clearly tickled our readers, especially Helen R. Tench of Clinton, Ont. whose list of misfiled titles includes:

Agriculture: *Thirty Acres*  
*Mostly in Clover*  
Anthropology: *The Fire-Dwellers*  
*Life Before Man*  
Astronomy: *Close to the Sun Again*  
*Lunar Attractions*  
Biography: *Lives of Girls and Women*  
Biology: *Bear*  
*The Peacock Papers*  
*The Eagle and the Raven*  
*The Butterfly Plague*

**Etiquette and Fashion:** *Basic Black with Pearls Small Ceremonies The Many Coloured Coat*  
**Gardening:** *White Narcissus*  
**Geology:** *Under the Volcano*  
**Law:** *The Disinherited*  
**Occult:** *The Diviners Lady Oracle*  
**Pets:** *A Bird in the House*  
**Religion:** *More Joy in Heaven Communion The Book of Eve*

**Honourable mentions:**

**Forestry:** *Whiteoaks of Jalna*  
**Architecture:** *The Thirty-Nine Steps*  
 — J. Montgomery, Scarborough, Ont.  
 \* \* \*  
**Genetics:** *Blood Ties*  
 — A.R. Brás, Montreal  
 \* \* \*  
**Meteorology:** *Who Has Seen the Wind Barometer Rising*  
 — Gerry Gouthro, Delhi, Ont.  
 \* \* \*  
**Religion:** *Joshua Then and Now Mrs. Job*  
 — Claire Anderson, Lucan, Ont.  
 \* \* \*  
**Home Improvements:** *As for Me and My House*  
 — Michael P.J. Kennedy, Vanscoy, Sask.  
 \* \* \*  
**Psychology:** *Crackpot Lunatic Villas*  
 — Kate McCutchen, Tavistock, Ont.  
 \* \* \*

**Ornithology:** *What the Crow Said*  
 — Ryo Rikkonen, Calgary

**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**

**Lives of Short Duration**, by David Adams Richards, Oberon Press. A long meditation on the human condition from one of our best regional novelists. Richards tempers Hardy's dark view of existence with a humour that is reinforced by a characteristic flair for the Gothic.

**POETRY**

**The Impossible Promised Land: Poems New and Selected**, by Seymour Mayne, Mosaic Press/Valley Editions. Mayne's poems elevate mere observation to the level of a life-affirming act. They place him firmly in the gnomic tradition of Klein, Layton, and Cohen.

**Evening Dance of the Grey Files**, by P.K. Page, Oxford. Page displays a visual exactness, a delicate and intricate acuity that is always sharp and cutting. She is a poet who can be justly arrogant about the truth of her own perceptions.

**BOOKS RECEIVED**

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

**Be Restored to Health**, by Lou Coffey-Lewis, Bestsellers.  
**The Bee Book**, by Ann Rosenberg, Coach House Press (1981).  
**Being**, by W.F. Westcott, Blue Heron Press (1981).  
**Bitter Shield**, by Dennis Adair and Janet Rosenstock, Avon.  
**Bloody Harvest**, by Graeme Woods, New Canadian Library.  
**Blue**, by Geraldine Rahmani, Coach House Press (1981).  
**The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhism**, edited by Leslie S. Kawamura, Wilfrid Laurier University Press (1981).  
**Brothers Beyond the Sea**, by Jonathan F. Wagner, Wilfrid Laurier University Press.  
**The Brower's Opal L. Nailons**, edited by Frank Davey and Jarl Brodie, Coach House Press (1981).  
**Brush and Trunks**, by Liliane Welch, Fiddlehead (1981).  
**The Camera Always Lies**, by Hugh Hood, New Canadian Library.  
**Canadian Facts and Figures**, compiled by Nydia McCool, Hurig.  
**Computer Studies**, by Dave Garth and George Millbrandt, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.  
**The Crow Sits High in the Lilac Tree**, by Keitha MacIntosh, Kateri Press.  
**Down: A Beginning**, by Karin Kratz, Initiative Publishing House (1980).  
**Days Are Where We Live and Other Poems**, compiled by Jill Bennett, illustrated by Maureen Roffey, Breakwater (1981).  
**Dead Ends**, by Keith Harrison, Quadrant Editions (1981).  
**The Delaney Report on RRSFs**, by Tom Delaney, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.  
**Emails**, by Claude Gauvreau, translated by Ray Ellenwood, Coach House Press (1981).

**Etudes Françaises: Musique et Textes**, Les Press de l'Université de Montréal (1981).  
**Everything in the Window**, by Shirley Faessler, New Canadian Library.  
**Federal-Provincial Relations: Education Canada**, edited by J.W. George Ivany and Michael E. Manley-Casimir, OISE (1981).  
**Financing Canadian Universities**, edited by David M. Nowlan and Richard Bellaire, OISE (1981).  
**Gardens, Covenants, Edles: Loyalism in the Literature of Upper Canada/Ontario**, by Dennis Duffy, U of T Press.  
**Genius at Work: Images of Alexander Graham Bell**, by Dorothy Harley Eber, M & S.  
**Gleebos of Wimbob**, by K.H. Wirsig, illustrated by Enrico Renz, Pilouale Publications (1981).  
**Golng Gmnd**, by Jack MacLeod, M & S.  
**The Great Train Ride**, by Paul Vasey, Black Moss Press (1981).  
**Her Light Was Like Unto a Stone**, by W.F. Westcott, Blue Heron Press (1981).  
**How to Teach Your Children About Money**, by Chris Snyder, Macmillan.  
**Human Secrets: Book II**, by Crad Kilodney, Charnel House.  
**In the Wake of the War Cause**, by William Henry Colfison, Sono Nis (1981).  
**Inside Out**, by Robert Bogdan and Steven J. Taylor, U of T Press.  
**Kremlin**, by Efron Lupescu, Vesta Publications (1981).  
**Lady Oracle**, by Margaret Atwood, Avon.  
**Legal Sex**, by L.E. and F.A. Rozobsky, Doubleday.  
**The Little English Handbook for Canadians (2nd edition)**, by James B. Bell and Edward P.J. Corbett, John Wiley and Sons.  
**Long Lances: The True Story of an Imposter**, by Donald B. Smith, Macmillan.  
**Lost Seasons**, by Peter Baltesperger, Three Trees Press (1981).  
**The Maps of Canada**, by N.L. Nicholson and L.M. Sebert, Archon Books (USA).  
**Miranleth Lightening**, by Alfred Bailey, Fiddlehead (1981).  
**Mungo Martin: Man of Two Cultures**, by The B.C. Indian Arts Society, Gray's Publishing.  
**The Neighbour and Other Stories**, by Naim Kattan, New Canadian Library.  
**Nightmare in Apeopolis**, by J. Kit Miller, Emanation Press (1981).  
**No Clothes**, by Daniel Wood, Annick Press.  
**Nobody's Daughter**, by Aviva Layton, M & S (1982).  
**The Ordering of Justice**, by Richard V. Ericson and Patricia M. Baranek, U of T Press.  
**The Other Natives: The Meris, Volumes I — III**, by Antoine S. Lussier and D. Bruce Scotey (1978-1980).  
**The Pacific Empresses**, by Robert D. Turner, Sono Nis Press (1981).  
**Paul-Emile Leger**, James Duggan, Fitzhenry & Whiteside (1981).  
**Pauline**, by Betty Keller, Douglas & McIntyre (1981).  
**The Pebble and the Peacock**, by Lynne Mundel, AKHT Publishing (1980).  
**Poems of the Chateauguay Valley**, by Keitha MacIntosh, South Western Ontario Poetry (1981).  
**A Reader's Guide to the Canadian Novel**, by John Moss, M & S (1981).  
**The Right Mix: The Report of the Commission on Foreign Student Policy**, Canadian Bureau for International Education (1981).  
**Royal Commission on Newspapers, Volume 3: Newspapers and the Law**, by Walter Tarnopolsky et al, Canadian Government Publishing Centre (1981).  
**Royal Commission on Newspapers, Volume 4: Newspapers as a Business**, by Eugene Hallman et al, Canadian Government Publishing Centre (1981).  
**Salk and Analek**, by Keld Hansen and Catherine Maggs, Breakwater (1981).  
**Salk and the Big Ship**, by Keld Hansen and Catherine Maggs, Breakwater (1981).  
**Salk and his Father**, by Keld Hansen and Catherine Maggs, Breakwater (1981).  
**Salk and the Summer of the Song Duet**, by Keld Hansen and Catherine Maggs, Breakwater (1981).  
**Secret at Westwind**, by Joan S. Weir, Scholastic-TAB (1981).  
**The Seneca Tree**, by Patricia Joudry, New Canadian Library.  
**Stage Left: Canadian Theatre in the Thirties**, by Toby Gordon Ryan, CTR Publications (1981).  
**Stonfish and other poems**, by Kevin Roberts, Oofichan Books.  
**A Study of Anti-Gnostic Polemics**, by Gerard Vallee, Wilfrid Laurier University Press.  
**Teenage Mothers, Teenage Fathers**, by Anne Ross, Personal Library.  
**These are the Women**, by Joel Miller, MacLeods Books (1981).  
**They're All Afraid**, by Leonard Peterson, Book Society of Canada (1981).  
**The Toothpaste Genie**, by Frances Duncan, Scholastic-TAB (1981).  
**Two in the Bush and Other Stories**, by Audrey Thomas, New Canadian Library.  
**Turned Clay**, by Cheng Sait Chia, Fiddlehead Poetry Books (1981).  
**Watchers at the Pond**, by Franklin Russell, New Canadian Library.  
**Wednesday's Child**, by Gilbert Choquette, translated by David Lobdell, Oberon (1981).  
**What can I do this summer? (1982 edition)**, by Carl L. Bedal, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.  
**What's So Canadian about Canadian Educational Administration?**, edited by Richard G. Townsend & Stephen B. Lawton, OISE (1981).

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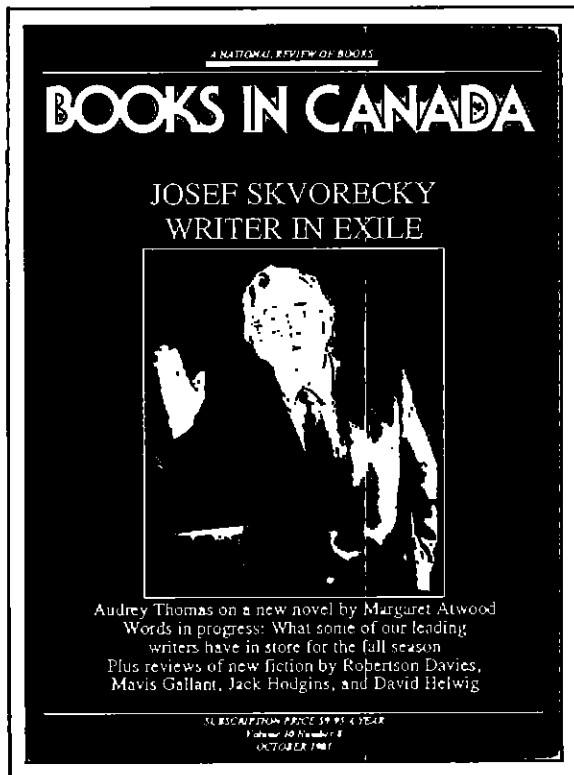
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