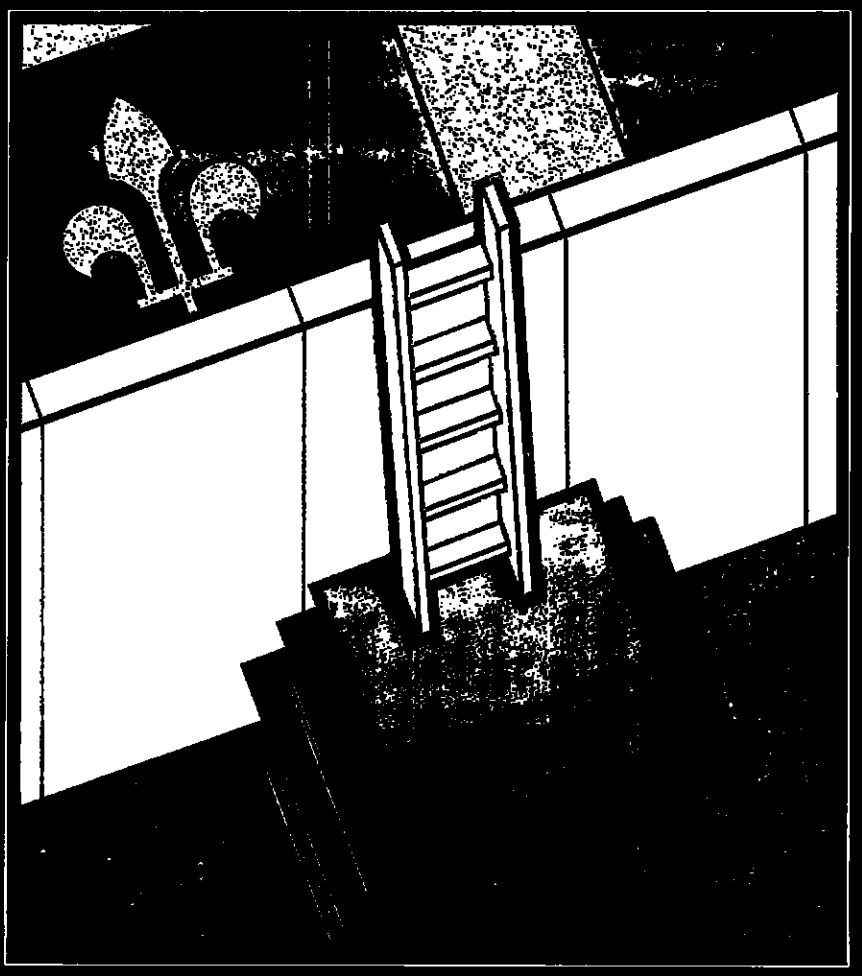
A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

KS IN CANADA

BEYOND THE QUEBEC WALL



The autobiography of George Woodcock
Reviews of new books by Margaret Atwood,
Paul Quarrington, and Leon Rooke
And an interview with Léandre Bergeron

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE $12.95 A YEAR
Volume 12 Number 5
MAY 1983

CONTENTS

Volume 12
Number 5

BOOKS IN CANADA

FEATURES

REVIEWS

DEPARTMENTS

CONTRIBUTORS

Bob Blackburn writes frequently about English usage in these pages. **Anne Collins** also writes about books for *Maclean's*. **Sharon Drache** is a freelance writer in Ottawa. **Cary Fagan** is the author of *Seeing* (South Western Ontario Poetry). **Daniel Francis** is a freelance historian in Ottawa. **George Galt** is the author of *Trailing Pythagoras* (Quadrant Editions). **Bob Hambly** is a Toronto artist. Writer-translator **David Homel** writes on the Montreal scene from both sides of the Boulevard Saint-Laurent. **Brian D. Johnson's** articles also appear in *Maclean's* and the *Globe and Mail*. **David Latham** teaches English at Erindale College, University of Toronto. **Alberto Manguel's** anthology of fantastic literature will be published this fall by Lester & Orpen Dennys. **Jeff Miller** also contributes to *Verbatim*. **I.M. Owen** is a Toronto editor and translator. **K.G. Probert** teaches English at the University of Regina. **Mary Ainslie Smith** writes frequently about children's books in these pages. **David Stafford** teaches history at the University of Victoria. **Paul Stuewe** is the proprietor of Annex Books in Toronto. **Fraser Sutherland** teaches English at David Thompson University Centre in Nelson, B.C. **Toronto artist Adam Vaughan's** drawings appear throughout the issue. **Barbara Wade** is the editor of *News-weekly*. **Paul Wilson** is a Toronto translator. **Morris Wolfe** teaches film history at the Ontario College of Art. **Note:** A review by **Fred Wah** in last month's issue was incorrectly attributed to **Robert Kroetsch**. *Books in Canada* apologizes for the error.

Books in Canada is published 10 times a year, with the assistance of the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council, by the Canadian Review of Books Ltd., 366 Adelaide Street East, Suite 432, Toronto, Ont. M5A 3X9. Telephone: (416) 363-5426. Available to the public free in subscribing book stores, schools, and libraries. Individual subscription rate: $12.95 a year ($15.95 overseas). Back issues available on microfilm from: McLaren Micropublishing, P.O. Box 972, Station F, Toronto, Ont. M4Y 2N9. Indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index, Member of the CPPA. Member of the Bulk Distribution Audit Division of CCAB. Material is commissioned on the understanding that both parties are bound by the terms of the standard PWAC contract: The editors cannot be held responsible for unsolicited material. Second Class Mail — Registration No. 2593. Typesetting by Jay Tee Graphics Ltd.
ISSN 0045-2564

Cane-banging and camaraderie 30 years after the dawn of *CIV/n*

Waiting for Leonard

let's start a magazine

to hell with literature
we want something redblooded

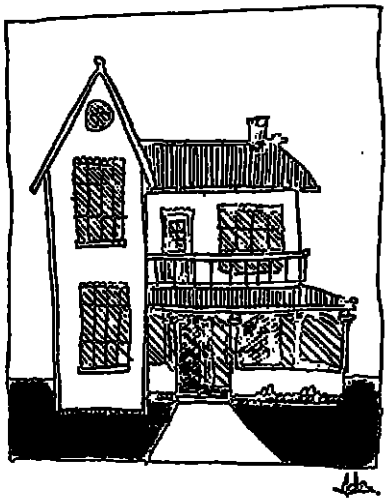
TAKING e.e. cummings's advice to heart, a little magazine called *CIV/n*, whose title was drawn from Ezra Pound's anagram for "civilization," was launched. The place was Montreal, the year was 1953, and the participants included Irving Layton, Louis Dudek, Aileen Collins, Frank Scott, Leonard Norman Cohen (who later dropped his middle name), Phyllis Webb, not to mention contributors like the Black Mountain poets — Olson and Creeley and Cid Corman — Eli Mandel, Doug Jones, and so the list continues. They launched the magazine because, according to Dudek, "Canada needed a good goosing, and got it in *CIV/n*."

Those old grey goosers gathered together not long ago at Simon Dardick and Nancy Marrelli's house on amiably run-down Roy Street in Montreal, just down from Waldman's fish market and its distinctive neon trout. Dardick, the publisher of Véhicule Press, decided to pay homage to the Montreal poetry scene of the past — a scene that is still thriving today with different and new names — by publishing a book on the magazine that those times produced. The Véhicule book, entitled *CIV/n: A Literary Magazine of the '50s*, is a handsome volume with a laminated silver cover, a contrast from the magazine's original mimeo format with hand-painted covers by artist/designer Buddy Rozynski. *CIV/n* perished from lack of funds in 1955 after making the transition from mimeo to print, but each of its seven issues in its two-year existence is preserved in the book.

Added to them are retrospective essays by Aileen Collins, the magazine's original editor; Irving Layton; and an academically tinged piece by Ken Norris on the historical significance of the little mag. Of course, no flashback would be complete without old snapshots. Especially nostalgia-inspiring is the cover photo showing a young Leonard Cohen in a lumberjack shirt, serenading a gathering of poets in a cottage (complete with stuffed moosehead) in the Eastern Townships of Quebec. The introductions do their job: Collins's is a short and light-hearted history of the magazine from birth to bankruptcy, a cycle familiar to many a successor to *CIV/n*. Layton's contribution ties in the review and the literary movement in Montreal in general with the political scene at the time. "Illusions were manifold and generous," he recalls — but better they should be generous than stingy. And Norris puts *CIV/n* in relation to Souster's Toronto-based *Contact* magazine.

The heart of the Véhicule book is the reprinted issues of the original *CIV/n*. After 30 years, they read surprisingly well. There is good writing, daring, and humour, as in Louis Dudek writing under the pseudonym of Alexander St. John-Smith, calling himself a "disillusioned Canadian poet" in the contributors' notes. There is also critical spirit; the Black Mountain poets are read with respect, but not awe. And there is international breadth with translations from France and Italy, as well as from Yiddish writers.

At the book's launching Simon Dardick made sure to have the new generation of Montreal poets on hand to salute



the forefathers there assembled: Robyn Sarah, John McAuley, Seymour Mayne, Fred Louder, and Ray Filip, who organizes the *Pluriels* reading series in Montreal that has seen Gaston Miron on the same podium as Al Purdy. "It was one of the better parties we've had," Dardick declared the following day.

The stars of the evening were, of course, the elders. Supported by two canes, cautioning guests not to shake his hand too warmly because of his arthritis, Frank Scott hobbled in with his wife Marion, a painter. (It's a commonly overlooked fact that Marion Scott helped change the face of Canadian painting in the 1930s and 1940s, and that at 75 she's still working.) He joined Louis Dudek, 65, and Irving Layton, 71, in the living room, and the flashbulbs popped. There was a sense that these three might not meet again, and the cameras were very busy. Dudek, at the end of the evening, remarked, "Next it's our tombstones that will be talking to each other."

There was camaraderie, but little drama, so little as to prompt one of the original *CIV/n* group to say that the party was a worthy reflection of the Puritan atmosphere of the '50s. There was just one incident of cane-banging, when Leo Kennedy, self-acknowledged owner of a "garbage bag full of unpublished poems" (at 74 he hasn't published a line since 1933), accused Seymour Mayne of having booted him out of a poetry anthology. But Dudek was there to soothe Kennedy with a little quatrain, a Clerihew that held out the promise of a comeback to Kennedy, harkening back to his first and only book, *The Shrouding:*

Leo Kennedy could make a comeback
Any day
With a small book of verse
About a coffin or a hearse.

Otherwise, it was business as usual. There were jokes about whose hairline had receded furthest, whose had receded entirely; Layton proclaimed that Frank Scott was "tottering into immortality"; and Marion Scott engaged Marie-Louise Gay, a Quebecoise artist 45 years her junior, in a discussion about the problems of having a husband, children, and still keeping time for painting. *Plus ça change. . . .*

Other contributors were present too, like Dominique Clift, the political essayist who, under the anglicized name of Don Clift, published poems in the magazine. Like a latter-day Lefty, everyone was waiting for Leonard Cohen. "Where's Leonard? I wouldn't mind seeing Leonard," Irving Layton

thundered, but Cohen did not show. Apparently he was *en voyage*.

During its short life, *CIV/n* worked, according to Dudek, because the poets involved were still flexible and willing to cooperate with each other. Everyone was in his 30s; vision was supple, and career directions had yet to be determined. These were people aware of their mission, which began with *First Statement* and Scott and A.J.M. Smith: to make Canadian poetry modern. The way to do that was through bold statement and "bad" taste. "We were the boys that introduced the four-letter words," Layton said. He has an explanation of why it all happened in Montreal. That city has an "unbroken record of poetic vitality" because of the distinct groups of people inhabiting it and the social tensions they create. "And one way of resolving tensions," Layton relates, "is to write poetry." The Jewish poets were more effective and eloquent in Montreal than in Toronto, he adds in cautionary tones, because the assimilative pull was stronger in the second, newer city.

Jewish and McGill Wasp, those good grey poets put out a magazine that bears rereading 30 years later, and Véhicule Press, in an act of honouring the community from which it sprung, has given us a rich treasure. Together, they prove that, as Pound said, civilization is "not a one-man job." —DAVID HOMEL

A terrible intimacy

BEHIND A red door on a quiet Outremont street of apartment houses, painted balconies, and steep iron stairways is the home of Villeneuve Publications. On this quiet Sunday the three-year-old girl has an awful cough, and the five-year-old boy is busy littering the living room with hand-me-down shirts from a family friend. The kettle whistles, and tea is poured by the proprietors of one of the few English literary presses in Quebec, Fred Louder and Robyn Sarah.

Villeneuve has published just five small books of poetry: *The Sausage Master of Minsk* by August Kleinzahler, *Signs and Certainties* by A.F. Moritz, *The Space Between Sleep and Waking* by Robyn Sarah, *Points North of A* by Jack Hannan, and Brian Bartlett's *Cattail Week*. As well, there was a short-lived magazine called *Versus* a few years back, and now a new one, *Four by Four* (each edition features four poems by four poets), the third issue of which is about to appear.

That's not a lot for a press that has been in operation since 1975. Yet Villeneuve has gradually developed a reputation not only for good poetry by strongly individual voices, but for the simple beauty of their hand-set, hand-printed books. One of my cherished possessions is a folded broadside by Villeneuve of two poems by Kleinzahler, printed (as the colophon says) in Caslon and Goudy open on hand-made paper called "salt & pepper" by Twinrocker of Brookston, Indiana.

Fred Louder, who comes from Indiana, is a natural printer, with a precise eye for clean, elegant design and a finickiness that demands perfection. His father was a journalist, and Fred spent his early years in and out of print shops, but it wasn't until years later that his dormant interest began to stir. In the 1960s he came to Montreal to study at McGill, and although he wasn't happy there he stayed to avoid the draft.

At McGill Fred met Robyn, a Montreal native. In 1975 they spent the summer on Vancouver Island where they made friends with a man named Vernon Bender who owned a print shop. Bender gave them and a couple of others (including August Kleinzahler, who would become their first author) a two-and-a-half-day crash course in printing.

Back in Montreal they began saving for a press of their own. "The original idea," Robyn recalls, "was not to print books but to finance our expensive habit of writing." They bought a table-top hand-worked platen press made by the Kelsey Company of Meriden, Connecticut. Their press name was taken from the street they lived on at the time, a short distance from their present apartment.

"I describe it as being first stage Hogarth Press," says Fred, referring to the more famous operation run by Leonard and Virginia Woolf. Fred and Robyn experienced some of the same early difficulties as the Woolfs, and the lessons in Leonard Woolf's autobiography have served as their own. "The man says time and time again, don't expand, keep small, keep particular. Make sure that the work is good and the writing is good."

As for their editorial stance, Fred says simply, "I still hang very heavily on the three imagist rules: directness, economy of language, and musicality." There is a certain exactness to the language of Villeneuve's poets that no doubt reflects Fred and Robyn's taste in printing as well as poetry. Besides, poems being set by hand had better stand up to close scrutiny. "Hand-set composition of type gives you a kind of terrible intimacy with the material."

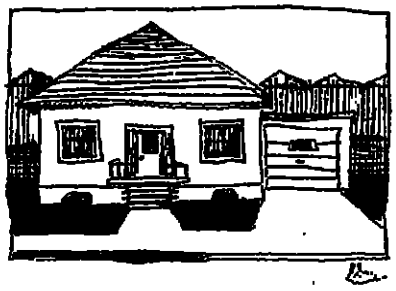
Now Villeneuve has two Kelsey

presses, bolted side-by-side onto a wooden table in a narrow room off the hallway. Wooden cases of type and other equipment are arranged with almost frightening neatness. But it's a warm, inviting place, more the shop of a hobbyist than a printer who also produces notices and business cards for money as Louder does. Beside the presses, neatly tied with string in printer's fashion, are blocks of type ready for printing; they are pages of the next issue of *Four by Four*.

Not that smallness doesn't have its frustrations. Poor distribution, few reviews, hardly any money (not even to replace worn-out type). Fred is negotiating to exchange one of the presses for a flatbed press that will allow them to print four or eight pages at a time, instead of one. But even then the size of their books, usually about 30 pages, won't change in the near future.

"I really don't believe that a poetry book should be longer than the ones we do," says Robyn. Most poets in their 30s haven't produced many good poems, she contends, and Villeneuve is rigorous in its selection. A.F. Moritz, for example, handed them a manuscript twice as long as the book they finally published. After the weekend-long process of reading the poems aloud and haggling over which to include, Moritz conceded that the experience taught him what a book should be.

The peculiar nature of the English writing community in Montreal also has created problems. "An English poet in Quebec is writing, working, performing on the fringe of the Quebecois milieu, and also on the fringe of what's going on in English," Fred says. "It can begin to feel very lonely and very isolated unless you make an effort to stay in contact. On the positive side, it makes people very individualistic. But there's always a



danger of becoming very provincial.

"One very nice thing that's happening now," he continues, "is that there's a new and fresh contact between English poets and Quebecois poets." But Robyn points out that there has been more than one attempt in the past to bridge the chasm between the two camps. "Lasting ties weren't made. Whether they will be now is anybody's guess." — CARY FAGAN

Elysium's lap

. . . I have oft heard
My mother Circe with the Sirens three,
Amidst the flow'ry-kirtled Naiades,
Culling their potent herbs and baleful drugs,
Who as they sung, would take the prisoned soul
And lap it in Elysium; Scylla wept,
And chid her barking waves into attention,
And fell Charybdis murmured soft applause.
Yet they in pleasing slumber lulled the sense,
And in sweet madness robbed it of itself . . . .
— John Milton, *Comus*, 11.252-261

YEARS AGO, when my friend Sean and I were enrolled in Northrop Frye's Literary Symbolism course, we would sit near the back of the auditorium at Victoria College, and a lunatic would regularly accost us there, before class began. He would speak earnestly of Pound or Yeats or Eliot, sometimes repeat to us whatever remarks on the subject we had just made to him, and then — with sudden vehemence — demand if we had seen someone named Eileen Silverman, or declaim that he had just spent three weeks watching television. When it turned out that the fellow also habitually conversed *ad libitum* with companions not visible to the prosaic eye, Sean became disgusted and began telling him that thé seats in our row were all taken. "Ignore him, ignore him," he would mutter if the man should appear in his peripheral vision — advice that Sean himself strictly followed, no matter how amicably the man sought our company.

But the man bothered me profoundly. In fact, I remember (with incredulity) spending one very cold morning outside Student Health Services debating whether I should enter and ask what could be done for such people. I was dissuaded, to begin with, by the fear that they would lock him up. Finally, it occurred to me with some force that they might assume I myself was seeking help, obliquely. Numb and depressed, suddenly distrusting my own mind, I trudged over to the Robarts Library cafeteria and doctored myself with soup before preparing for afternoon classes.

I was relieved that when Frye began lecturing that afternoon the man was absent. We were taking up "To Juan at the Winter Solstice," by Robert Graves — a favourite of the professor's, probably because its first stanza provides a sort of skeleton key to his own vision:

There is one story and one story only
That will prove worth your telling,
Whether as learned bard or gifted child;
To it all lines or lesser gauds belong
That startle with their shining
Such common stories as they stray into.

As Frye read these lines in the monotonic singsong he accorded all writing, ancient and modern (presumably to preserve the objectivity of his analyses), the lunatic walked in and took the seat directly in front of me. I glanced at Sean, beside me, who blinked but stared unsympathetically ahead, annoying me beyond reason. I began privately to conjure his own instabilities, which I contemplated rehearsing for him after class.

Sean counted himself a poet, his preferred method of courting the Muse being the ingestion of hallucinogenic drugs, questionable of origin and pedigree, both. This recently had led him to the adamantine belief that he had bedded the White Goddess herself, after meeting and sharing some psilocybin or LSD with her in Queen's Park. He claimed that sometime during the tryst (*in medias res*, no doubt) he caught fire to write, arose from his couch, and went to his typewriter — his Pierian companion in some state of dishabille at his arm, or ear.

He awoke the following morning,

clear-headed for the first time in days; there was of course no trace of the woman. Sean went anxiously to his typewriter, to savour what remained of their meeting. On the paper rolled onto the platen there, he found (he swore to me more than once) a couplet:

etaoinshrdlu,
etaoinshrdlu . . .

the most common of typographer's errors.

Frye was drawing his charts on the blackboard:

Heaven	God	Zeus
Paradise	Adam	Prometheus
Experience	Man	Odysseus
Hell	Satan	Pluto

All the time he wrote, he spoke — of Chanukah, Ovid, Hallowe'en, Geoffrey of Monmouth, the Song of Roland, Blake, Spengler, Vico, Yeats, antithetical multiform influx, the one story of man. Someone, inevitably, asked about Jung, and Frye made a characteristically non-committal reply: it is perhaps the professor's one evident weakness that he will not entertain the clear psychoanalytic cast of his methods.

Then, the lunatic raised his hand, and Frye called on him. Sean fell gently back in his seat and gazed at the ceiling before closing his eyes resolutely, without further movement. I myself was on the verge of intemperate sobs or intemperate laughter, I couldn't tell which. "What about Dylan?" the man wanted to know, having to shout it to be heard from the back of the room. There was a lot of muttering and shuffling and turning of heads our way. I wanted to run. Cupping his ear, Frye responded immediately.

"Yes," he said, "you get the same kind of thing in Dylan Thomas." And then he led us deftly through the genealogy of *Fern Hill*, addressing the lunatic with great and careful deference.

— JEFF MILLER

ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Reader discretion recommended: the following article, albeit an amiable one, is being presented uncut and in its entirety

By BOB BLACKBURN

I SEE BY the newspapers, as Will Rogers used to say, that "the Queen chatted amicably" with somebody on her recent visit to the West Coast. That's hardly news, but it illustrates the point that when reporters are forced to write at length about newsless events, they are more likely than usual to say something stupid.

When you chat with someone, you are, by definition, making light and pleasant conversation in a friendly manner, and that's all there is to it. You cannot chat in a hostile manner.

There remains the question of whether the Queen was indeed conversing amicably rather than amiably. These days, one cannot rely on writers to make such fine distinctions. *Amicable* refers to something done with good will. *Amiable* refers to a person's nature or expression or attitude. It is entirely possible that the Queen was inwardly seething with rage at the necessity of conversing amiably, in which case she would not have been conversing amicably, although she might have given the impression that she was. Amiability is readily observable by a reporter. Amicability is not. "Chatted amicably" is a double fault.

Then there was the reporter who informed us that "the bomb was defused before it exploded."

It's not likely that anyone would spend much time wondering how it came to pass that the bomb exploded despite having been defused. We know it did not explode. We know the reporter should have said "before it could explode" or some such.

Suppose, though, that he had said something like "the bank robber was arrested before he made his getaway." That's the same construction, and, in this case, we would have to assume that the robber had been arrested and then escaped, because that's what the writer said.

ONE OF THE pay-TV services I subscribe to warns viewers that the upcoming movie is being presented "uncut and in its entirety," in order that "viewer discretion" may be exercised. This has been going on for many weeks, and I'm sure it will go on for many months. The warning is not only spoken but printed out as part of a graphic display that must have cost thousands of dollars. I'm sure (well, *reasonably* sure) that someone at that network must have spotted the redundancy by now and decided not to go to the cost of correcting it.

I merely would like to know how it came to pass that such a big corporation paid so much money to have such an imbecilic phrase put into such an expensive format without anyone noticing (or caring) that it was an imbecilic phrase.

Does it matter? I may be in the minority, but I think it does. When someone is trying to sell me something, especially something having to do with communications, and I notice that someone is not quite, or perhaps not even nearly, literate, I think twice about trusting my money or my need for goods or services to that company or person.

For example, consider this newspaper ad, a clipping of which was sent to me by Mrs. Margaret Burdsall of Kingston, Ont. It is headed "SATURDAY, SATURDAY" and reads as follows:

> The Whig-Standard is one of Canada's only daily newspapers to produce its own Saturday magazine, which is filled with feature stories, in depth reporting, thoughtful essays, book reviews, puzzles, movie reviews, popular and classical music, and more. It's part of our special Saturday package, which also includes colored comics, TV Times, People in the Limelight, and other features on top of our regular daily news package.

There isn't space here to tear that apart. It's not the worst piece of writing I've seen this week, but when you consider that its purpose is to promote the sale of a newspaper that has at times produced some excellent writing, it is astonishingly bad. My point is simply that I would not feel encouraged to subscribe to any publication that advertises itself with sloppy prose.

It may be, as a result of the mid-century decline in the standards of language education, that precise communication in the communications business is less important than I like to think it is. Maybe the as-long-as-you-get-the-idea-across dictum is something we have to live with. The most depressing aspect of that possibility is that today's writers, if they wish to be understood by a mass audience, are sometimes forced to write poorly. To be clear, they must be unclear. A precisely expressed thought will be misunderstood by a "reader" who has learned English by watching TV commercials.

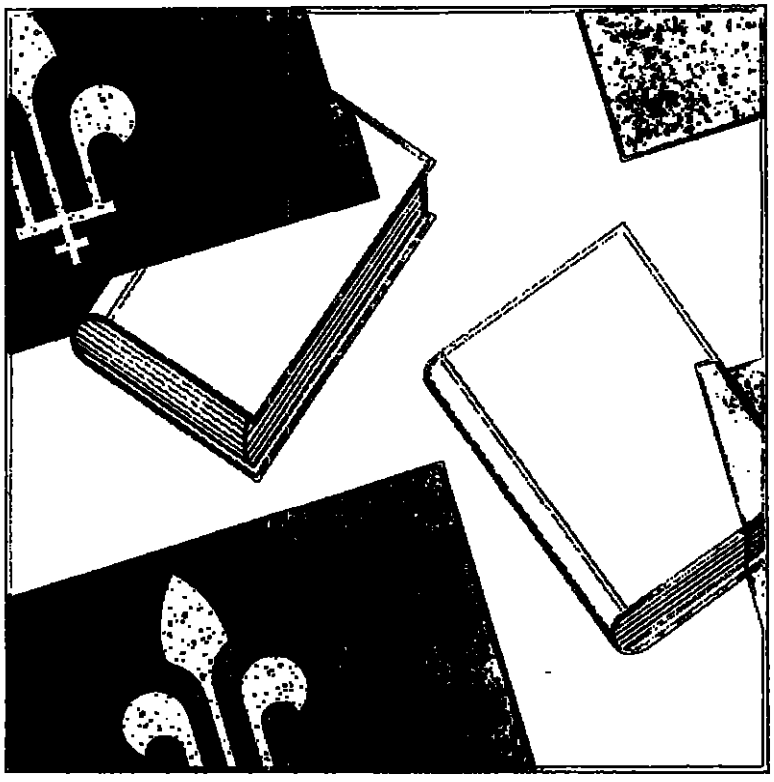
I despair. I shall not be able to communicate with a generation growing up to believe that "uncut and in its entirety" is a perfectly good English phrase meaning "It's time to go upstairs and do your homework, dear." □

THE OTHER SOLITUDE

An outsider surveys French-Canadian fiction, and finds in it some of the most venturesome — and successful — writing today

By ALBERTO MANGUEL

YOU MAY NOT believe it, but there are vast numbers of people who quite seriously think of Musical Chairs as an infallible system for deciding what someone should be. Their method is this: they jot down where, after nine months' gestation, you happen to find yourself; they decree that this chance occurrence shall determine your fate for the rest of your days; they proclaim with a straight face that if you happen to be born, for example, in Buenos Aires, you should feel moved by the poems of Evaristo Carriego (the knowledge of whose existence most human beings have been spared) and that you should consider Jorge Luis Borges a portion of the national territory, like the Malvinas. I don't know that I approve of this law. There was a time when a person could travel the earth and find, rationally and emotionally, a place he chose to call home — something few are fit to do at the tender age at which birth registrars decide such issues for them. I have lived in Argentina, in Europe, and in the South Pacific. I now live in Canada, but I wasn't born here. For that reason, according to the Law of Musical Chairs, I have no right to talk about things Canadian as if they were my own. I propose therefore to talk about things Canadian as if they were part of the rest of the world.



ILLUSTRATIONS, INCLUDING COVER, BY BOB HAMBLY

As an outsider, the first thing that strikes me is the existence of two languages and two literatures to describe one and the same country, like a set of confronted mirrors. (I say "the *same* country" bearing in mind Yves Beauchemin's dictum, "Quebec is part of Canada as much as a cat in the mouth of a crocodile is part of the crocodile." But then I've heard the same idea expressed by Southern writers about the South being part of the United States. Corsican writers don't feel French, Catalan writers don't feel Spanish, Sicilian writers don't feel Italian. For an outsider, however, Beauchemin's *Le Matou (The Tomcat)* is as Canadian as Tomasi de Lampedusa's *The Leopard* is Italian.)

It is true that one mirror seems to reflect more than the other. The influence of the French language on English-speaking writers in Canada is not noticeable and probably non-existent. The influence of the English language on French-speaking Canadian writers is clear and almost deliberate; it makes the language richer; it has the effect of music played on instruments other than the ones one is accustomed to hear. In France, André Gide's discovery of James Cain and Faulkner stirred French prose out of its rococo bed-linen; in Canada the changes have gone further, and some of the most original writing in French today is done by French Canadians.

An outsider's view cannot be comprehensive; my own view may not even appear surprising: most of the authors I have "discovered" are well-known in Canada. Unlike English or French readers, Canadians seem to know their authors. For many Englishmen John Collier is the shop-window to watch, and in France Chateaubriand is a steak. Even a general impression of a particular literature — French-Canadian literature in this case — is difficult to obtain. There is not enough distance in time between the authors and their readers, and what now seem essential differences will probably be, in a century or so, clearly defined common traits. For some future critic perhaps Anne Hébert and Antonine Maillet will be sisters in style.

Until such time I can only comment on a few individual books. Last year was a good year: I read the Australian Hugh Atkinson's *Billy Two-Toes' Rainbow* (a moving, passionate masterpiece), the English-Pakistani Zulfikar Ghose's *A New History of Torments* (a brilliant tale of adventure), the French Michel Tournier's *Melchor, Gaspar et Balthazar* (a book one wishes would go on forever). Yet better than all three, better in fact than any novel I have read in a very long time, is Yves Beauchemin's *Le Matou*. The Faust-like story of a young man

tempted into accepting injustice — and refusing to yield — unravels like a magic carpet over 600 pages. Beauchemin uses a language studded with brilliant turns of phrase, highly elaborate yet seemingly simple. His characters have a Russian complexity (Beauchemin has not read in vain the Russian classics — Dostoyevsky, Turgeniev, Bulgakov) but retold in a modern idiom that is entirely Beauchemin's own. No French, certainly no English or American writer (since Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*) has created such real yet timeless characters: this is literature at its most enjoyable.

But not all can be pleasure. Perhaps the least satisfactory novel I read last year was Robert Lalonde's *Le dernier été des Indiens (The Indians' Last Summer)*. The myth of the good savage somehow doesn't work anymore, not even after Carlos Castaneda. From the Lone Ranger's Tonto to Nanook of the North, the kind and knowledgeable native has been done to death, and someone should have told Lalonde that Indians have other, more serious occupations than to muse on metaphysical problems, such as the essence of existentialism and the true nature of ecology. Lalonde's Indians could remind him of a quotation a friend of mine pinned up in his office: "Anthropology is to me as ornithology must be to the birds." Lalonde is published in France by Editions du Seuil, the sophisticated publishers of a few very good authors (García Marquez, Günther Grass) and of a lot of post-structuralist dribble. Presumably this novel was chosen by a would-be post-structuralist anthropologist.

Anne Hébert is also published by Seuil. Her novel *Les fous de Bassan (The Gannets)* obtained for Seuil the Prix Fémina in 1982. (One should really say that Seuil obtained the prize for her: it is an open secret that French publishers are given the prizes in turn; an author's luck depends largely on whether his book is published in that particular publisher's year.) In spite of the prize, Hébert's book is excellent. Her old poetic voice is there, the voice of her early novel *Les chambres de bois (Wooden Rooms)*; also the closed atmosphere, and even parts of that early plot. The plot of *Les fous de Bassan* is not as slight as in *Les chambres de bois* nor as haunting as in *Kamouraska* (with its unforgettable lady "intoxicated with dreams"), but the language in which it is written is astounding. Nothing quite like it is written in English today: perhaps John Hawkes comes close to Hébert's dark obsessions; perhaps parts of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*. Certainly Hébert is a master craftsman: her prose closes on her images with the swift preciseness of a trap.

More than the Prix Fémina, the Prix Goncourt guarantees a large sale in France, though not necessarily a large readership — many people buy the Prix Goncourt novels out of a sense of civic duty. But Antonine Maillet's *Pélagie-la-Charrette* deserved — and got — both. The sequel, though prizeless, is an even better novel. *Cent ans dans les bois* (the title echoes García Marquez's *A Hundred Years of Solitude*) is a folk-tale (like the Colombian saga) in the real sense of the word: the history of a people. Acadia in the 18th century is Maillet's Macondo. "A hundred years," she says, "are not a long history for China or perhaps for the Hebrews of the Bible, but for a people who never left their families and remained huddled up between the sea and the woods. . . ." The sentence is left open. Her plays (*La joyeuse criée* for instance) I find too topical to be interesting, but *Pélagie-la-Charrette* and *Cent ans dans les bois* are wonderful frescoes of a world as magic as the Amazon with the added spell of winter. Outside Canada, Maillet's language has an old-fashioned flavour; to a French ear her Acadian French brings back a sense of classic but not pompous speech, of a time when there were kings in France.

The Victorian three-volume novel (of which I will not speak slightly) seems popular in French Canada. Antonine Maillet is writing another Acadian episode; Michel Tremblay has just published the third book in his Montreal series, *La duchesse et*

le rouurier (The Lady and the Tramp). For some reason, French literature does not wallow in novels such as *Princess Daisy* or *Scruples*; its popular fiction is better written, more sophisticated. It has a tradition of city-and-family sagas that can be traced back to Balzac, Jules Romains, and Marcel Pagnol. Balzac is quoted at the beginning of Tremblay's novel — "If you keep on making fun of yourself, soon you will be able to make fun of everyone else" — thereby defining the style of the whole series. These "Chronicles of the Plateau Mont-Royal" began introducing lovable, neighbourly characters — Tremblay's own mother, for one — in *La Grosse femme d'à côté est enceinte (The Fat Woman Next Door Is Pregnant)* and now have expanded to form a vast picture of Montreal in the 1940s. A Tino Rossi recital that brings together the novel's entire cast gives it its grand finale.

Antonine Maillet's language seems to serve a mainly poetical purpose; in Tremblay the purpose is political, more aggressive. Both succeed in establishing the individuality and character of the people they are describing. Tremblay's humour is tempered by a permeating sense of outrage: he feels he and his people are ugly ducklings (another of the quotations that introduce the novel); he feels that even in Heaven he and his people will be "wallflowers at the party, because God himself is also ashamed of them." Ugliness, Tremblay seems to say, is in the eye of the beholder. But from outside no ugliness is apparent: his characters are superb comic creations, credible and self-justified.

I surmise from the critics that the television adaption of *Les fils de la liberté (Sons of Freedom)*, Louis Caron's turn-of-the-century saga, was a disaster. The books themselves, however, are immensely readable. The first, *Le canard de bois (The Wooden Duck)* was a well-written historical novel; *La corne de brume (The Fog Horn)* is better — the characters are better defined, more interesting. Quebec at the beginning of the century seems — through Caron's eyes — no less torn than Ireland is today. In that sense, Caron's two books are comparable to Julia O'Faolian's superb Irish novel, *No Country for Young Men* (a title also applicable to Caron's saga). In both cases the conflict is seen through the imagination of a fanatic: Caron's main character is an exalted patriot, O'Faolian's an aged nun. Both see the land painted in harsh colours, torn by a fight they don't try to explain because they fail to understand it.

Interior monologues, long convoluted sentences, writing that requires creative reading, these and other fictional artifices were codified by Joyce, acknowledged by the next generation, and then respectfully put aside by most writers in English today. The French have a *penchant* for this sort of writing, which usually becomes a vaguely interesting but boring indulgence. Though Marie-Claire Blais's novels sometimes have this sort of "experimental" appearance, after a few pages the story begins to unravel and one finds that the device is actually a requirement of the story. I admired the carefully plotted structure of *Le sourd dans la ville (Deaf to the City)*; I found her new novel, *Visions d'Anna (Anna's World)*, less engrossing. The existential doubts of an adolescent are the book's main theme, the tone being set by the first line: "It felt neither warm nor cold in Anna's heart, neither cool nor fiery, just empty. . . ." However, Blais's writing is, as usual, as precise and deliberate as a musical notation.

Margaret Atwood, in her introduction to the English edition of Blais's *Un joualonais, sa joualonie (St. Lawrence Blues)*, called the characters "Baudelairian" and pointed out that behind the apparent satire lurked "the threat of revolution." The same can be said about *Visions d'Anna*. Behind her Baudelairian drifters lies the sense of a force about to strike, a punk-like urge to break something out of despair in order to bring on a change, any change, for better or for worse.

This feeling of an underlying current pushing ideas to the

surface — a feeling that vividly overcomes an outsider arriving in Canada today — is nowhere as comprehensively described as in these French-Canadian writers. There seems to be among them a hyper-sensitivity toward change, much more clearly defined than among English-Canadian writers, perhaps because the French Canadians feel that their position is more precarious, more dangerous; that their survival depends on their language and that their language is encroached upon from all sides. They need to be aware of any new scents in the wind, of the slightest cracking of twigs around the corner.

Curiously enough I find Japanese writers today stressing the same point: that in change may come hope or destruction, but that whatever it may be, they must be on the lookout for it. Ryu Murakami — the brilliant young author of *Almost Transparent Blue* who resembles Marie-Claire Blais both in tone and in subject — sees the times to come as his world's last chance. I think Marie-Claire Blais, Yves Beauchemin, Michel Tremblay would agree. Through them an outsider gets a sense of a country at a turning-point, restless with new ideas, in a setting of fantastical architectures, Gargantuan winters, confronted voices, and American sounds humming in the background.

Bringing to life their own country, French-Canadian writers have produced some of the best writing today. They investigate small pockets in the past and discuss their particular future. They have shaped their language into effectiveness: it is sound and sharp, and allows them to tackle the portion of the world they have chosen to see. By describing it they have laid open their notions and dreams and fears that, though seemingly limited to their own backyard, have, in their craft, expanded. By being provincial they have become universal. □

FEATURE REVIEW

Less than conquerors

The transfer of Canada from French rule to British — the beginning of a distinct French-Canadian people — was less a case of conquest than betrayal

By I.M. OWEN

The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec, by Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, Macmillan, illustrated, 352 pages, $22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9730 4).

A GLANCE THROUGH the thorough and useful bibliographies provided by Susan Mann Trofimenkoff confirms that a history of Quebec, from the founding of New France to the Lévesque régime, was badly needed. There was until now nothing of the kind in English, and not much in French. Hence we must be grateful to her for filling this surprising gap. To me the book she has produced is unsatisfying in some ways; still, it's a book, and a great deal better than nothing.

The awkward, unidiomatic phrasing of the title gives fair warning: Susan Mann Trofimenkoff writes clumsily, though Macmillan's blurb-writer prefers the adverb "elegantly." Sometimes I had to read a sentence three times to extract a meaning from it; and sometimes it turned out to say something she couldn't have meant, as when she describes New France as "a society where women were at first scarce and subsequently often alone, and where people themselves were even more scarce." A society where people were scarcer than women was clearly getting off on the wrong foot.

The history of Quebec up to the Constitutional Act of 1791, which created the separate province of Upper Canada, is essentially the same as the early history of Canada, so that she is right to deal with it quite briefly. Her opening chapter is less a narrative than a commentary on the history of New France, leading to the conclusion that "the colony lacked so much — money, people, talent, enterprise, peace, leadership, luck — that it was surprising it lasted as long as it did." True enough. But somehow, in all this unlucky history, a people was created, took root, and grew. In 1763 it would have been reasonable to doubt whether it had a future. Now there can be no doubt at all: whatever the extent of its territory, whatever name it goes under, whatever form of government it may adopt, French Canada is for keeps. It's the function of such a book as this to tell how this came about.

Trofimenkoff's chapter on the Conquest is brisk, efficient, and right. She's right especially, I'm sure, that it was the historians of the next two centuries who made it into a deep psychological trauma; and she almost — but not quite — expresses my favourite thesis: that it wasn't a conquest at all. Many people forget that the campaign went on for a year after those questionable generals Wolfe and Montcalm had their *mauvais quart d'heure* on the Plains of Abraham. The following spring Lévis won a distinguished victory at Sainte-Foy, which would probably have been decisive if France hadn't neglected to get ships into the St. Lawrence as soon as the ice broke up.

And this episode was just one campaign in a worldwide war, between two professional armies from Europe. The invading army won, more or less by default, and the result was merely a military occupation for the rest of the war. The transfer of Canada from the French crown to the British happened at the peace conference in 1763, when the French negotiators decided after due consideration that they'd rather have Guadeloupe. The event should be known as the French Betrayal, not the English Conquest. In many ways, it was the beginning of the French Canadians as a distinct people.

Trofimenkoff shows three forces beginning to dominate French-Canadian society in the first half of the 19th century. The first was nationalism. Nationalism was very much in the air at the time, of course. We were all taught at school — at least I was — that nation-

alism began with the French Revolution, was spread through Europe by Napoleon's troops, and eventually caused the nations to rise and crush those troops. This is probably a half-truth at best, but it's a handy formula for interpreting 19th-century history. And it's interesting that nationalism spread to Canada without the help of an invading army.

Nationalism went hand-in-hand with liberalism. And it's a really curious fact that, in all the British North American colonies, liberals in the 1830s adopted as their main aim the principle that the executive should be responsible to the elected legislature, not to the Crown — a principle that was only just becoming established in Britain at the time, helped by the accession of the young Victoria in 1837; she was a respectful girl, and when her prime minister told her that that was the way things were she believed him.

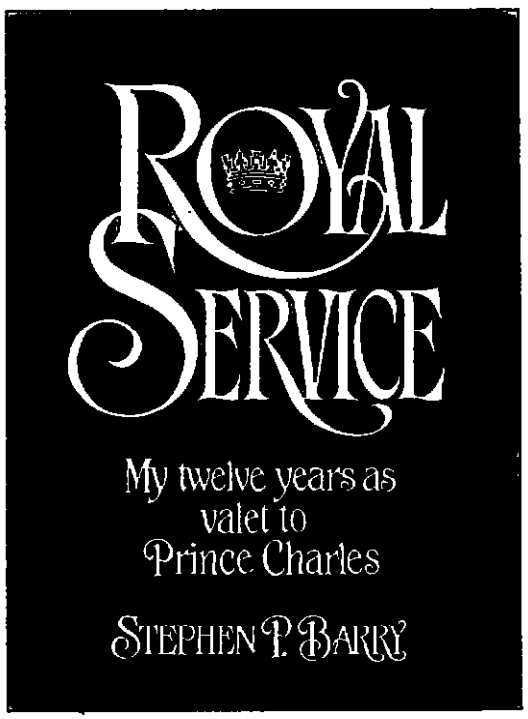
The third major force was far removed from liberalism: the ascendancy of the Church. Probably most of us on this side of the language line picture Quebec as having been priest-ridden from the beginning. Trofimenkoff shows that this is not so. In 1759 there were barely 200 priests in the colony, in 1840 fewer than 500; many parishes had no resident curés. But that was the year the change began, with the consecration of Ignace Bourget as bishop of Montreal. An ultramontanist of the extreme right, he not only increased the secular clergy but brought in orders and founded new ones. He successfully fought the liberal nationalists and took over Quebec nationalism, giving it the emphatically clerical stamp that it retained until the 1960s.

Bourget increased the number of nuns as well as priests, and made them a powerful force in the provision of social services. Trofimenkoff, who is professor of women's history (among other things) at the University of Ottawa, throughout gives more attention to the position of women than other historians have, and while she may make the matter more prominent than it would have seemed at the time it's a welcome redressing of the balance. She shows how woman, whether as mother or as nun, was in fact given an important part to play — in her own separate sphere, of course.

It wasn't obvious at the time, but the age of Duplessis and his Union Nationale (1935-59) was the last stage of clerical nationalism. I find Trofimenkoff's treatment of this period rather too muted. She makes it neither as appalling nor as funny as it actually was, and she fails to convey the real horror with which the generation of Trudeau, Hébert, Pelletier regarded him. To say that a "group on the . . . intellectual left questioned" his attitude to organized labour is too cool altogether. The more sinister aspects of conservative nationalism in this period are so obscured as to suggest that she isn't fully aware of them. The advocacy of corporatism is mentioned, but not its origins in Fascist Italy. Anti-Semitism flickers for a moment in part of a sentence, and later the Créditistes appear suddenly and disappear immediately, without explanation.

For this reason the changes of the 1960s are made to seem much less dramatic than they were. She's right in saying that the term Quiet Revolution (she wittily changes it to "noisy evolution") is an exaggeration as applied to the record of the Lesage government. But to me it means more than that — surely the transformation of Quebec as a whole, not just in politics, was nothing short of astounding. With a single shrug of the collective shoulders, the power of the Church disappeared. As just one symptom, the birthrate went from the highest in the country to the lowest in the Western world. It still baffles me, and I'm still waiting for a historian to explain it. Trofimenkoff excellently demonstrates the role of television as a contributing cause, but surely there was more to it than that.

Her treatment of the present régime is too hasty to be recommended to anyone



who hasn't been following events closely; though, as might be expected, she is good on the "Yvette" issue. The fine choice of illustrations at the beginnings of chapters culminates with Aislin's splendid cartoon on the referendum, in which Lévesque is in bed with Yvette, and she is saying "Non."

The book is billed as a social and intellectual history, so I shouldn't complain of the sketchy treatment of electoral politics. But I'd still like a book that would give me the dates, issues, and results of all the provincial elections.

And while the author is good on communications generally, literature and the press get short shrift. The total lack of them before the Conquest is something I've wondered about — the first printing-press was set up in 1764, the first French-language paper was started in 1778. Conversely, some discussion of the outburst of poetry in the second half of the 19th century would have been relevant, especially the poets like Octave Crémazie and Louis-Honoré Fréchette, once described by Northrop Frye as "the official-communiqué mon-pays-ma-patrie school." □

REVIEW

Edifice complex

By DANIEL FRANCIS

Quebec, the Fortified City: From the 17th to the 19th Century, by André Charbonneau, Yvon Desloges, and Marc Lafrance, Parks Canada, 491 pages, $45.00 paper (ISBN 0 660 10974 4).

AS CANADIANS travel around the country visiting the various tourist attractions, we are often struck by the fact that an overwhelming number of our historic sites are military installations. From coast to coast it seems more forts have been refurbished for modern visitors than any other type of historic building. Aren't we a peace-loving people? What do all these museums of war have to do with us?

When one stops to consider, however, Canada has had a very violent past. For the first two and a half centuries of our existence somebody was always trying to invade our territory and kill us off. Whether it was the Indians or the British or the French or the Americans, our forefathers were constantly living in fear. Diffident as we are about our importance in the world, it's hard for Canadians to believe in a time when major world powers fought over us like hungry dogs over a scrap of meat. But such was the case.

Parks Canada is the agency charged with designating and maintaining national historic sites, and with all this blood and thunder in our past it is quite natural for Parks to have an absorbing interest in forts. This interest is reflected in a new book, written by three staff historians and published by Parks, that describes in minute detail the evolution of defence works at our most important fort, Quebec City.

Right off the top general readers should be warned that this is not a history of Quebec City; it is instead a history of military structures in the city. Obviously the military presence made itself felt in all aspects of urban life. But it is the citadels, walls, bastions, and towers that are the focus of this study.

The narrative begins with the construction of Champlain's habitation in 1608. Quebec was fortified in a primitive fashion right from the start, but for more than 100 years plans for substantial fortifications were delayed. Colonial officials lobbied actively for something to be done, but in Paris these requests were thought alarmist and expensive.

After the Conquest the British occupants of Quebec followed the same pattern of indifference. Then the American Revolution created an independent and hostile United States on the southern border and finally the threat to Quebec's security was strong enough to prompt action. Between 1779 and 1783 a temporary citadel was built atop Cape Diamond, and in subsequent years further extensive fortification took place, culminating in the construction of a permanent citadel during the 1820s.

Interestingly, after Confederation many of the fortifications were allowed to deteriorate and some were even torn down at the request of the city to make way for parks and wider streets. If it wasn't for the initiative of Governor-General Dufferin, who worked to have the structures preserved for their historic value, much of what we value today in Quebec City likely would have disappeared.

The authors tell their story in immense detail. There is an account of strategic theory in the 17th and 18th centuries, assessments of every plan to fortify the town, and a wealth of material on the financing and actual building of the structures. Wage rates, construction techniques, hiring procedures — nothing is excluded from these close to 500 densely packed pages. The authors have performed an awesome job of research and produced a study of great interest to historians and military specialists. If at times it is a bit heavy going, well, this is not a book intended to replace the latest Ruth Rendall on your bedside table.

Quebec, the Fortified City represents an interesting publishing decision on the part of Parks Canada, since it is not immediately apparent how extensive the readership might be. The text of the book is too scholarly for the coffee-table market. Yet it is lavishly illustrated in colour and printed on glossy paper, with the result that its price — $45 — puts it beyond the means of all but the most dedicated military enthusiast. Such opulence from a government dedicated to six and five is surprising.

One other point. Like all government publications, the book was published in both official languages. The English version is a translation, yet nowhere is this made clear or credit given to a translator. I would think that scholars using the book might like to know that they are working with a translation.

Quibbling aside, *Quebec, the Fortified City* is a substantial contribution to scholarship and a visual treat. Anyone with a thick wallet and an interest in militariana will not be disappointed. □

REVIEW

Lessons in *la différence*

By BRIAN D. JOHNSON

Le Pouvoir? Connais pas!, by Lise Payette, Editions Québec-Amérique, 210 pages, $12.95 paper (ISBN 2 89037 120 4).

THE MARRIAGE of Lise Payette and the Parti Québécois, consummated with the PQ's historic election triumph in 1976, at first appeared to have been made in heaven. A home-made media star who had become the darling of every Quebec household and a home-made party held aloft by a nationalist dream were suddenly knotted to a single destiny. Together the PQ and Lise offered the best of two worlds: a daring future could coexist with a warm and reassuring intelligence. The rapid disintegration of this

ideal marriage, a process that began almost with the exchange of vows, served as a dramatic prelude to the disillusionment that would surround the Lévesque government in the years ahead.

Lise Payette's memoir of her political trials, *Le Pouvoir? Connais Pas!* (which could be roughly translated as *Power? Beats me!*) will probably not appear in English translation. However, it is written in such a straightforward, crisp style that anyone interested in the juncture of Quebec politics and feminism who has only a fair knowledge of French would enjoy reading it. Payette documents her entry into the political process from the highly personal viewpoint of an ingenue in an alien world. The result is an emotional and humorous story about power — the irony of being on the inside and still feeling on the outside. Bustling with metaphor, her vision is not what one would expect from a politician.

Only two or three days after being elected she felt a *différence*. . . "The difference between dreaming about having a child and getting up at two in the morning to feed one who is already there. There are no regrets, but one quickly notices that something in us no longer belongs to us." Later, in a Quebec City hotel, she waits with other future cabinet ministers as Lévesque calls them in one by one to announce their portfolios. "It's like being at the dentist," she writes.

Naiveté gradually gives way to resentment. Payette is the token woman Lévesque needs to complete his cabinet, his "club of navy suits and Hush Puppies." Charged with consumer affairs, cooperatives, and financial institutions, she is relegated to the same pink marble office her token Liberal predecessor Lise Bacon occupied. (Before finally resigning from the government in 1980, she becomes minister in charge of the status of women, but meanwhile takes on the burden of reforming automobile insurance and creating a consumer protection bill.) At first it's all a mystery. She studies frantically, learns all the facts. Yet all her colleagues seem to care about are the fickle nuances of public opinion — "the cabinet functions like the hit parade."

The author's wit becomes especially caustic in describing the personal demeanour of her partners in power, especially Lévesque, "this eternally dishevelled" man who makes women want to mother him. "For him a woman is a 'creature.' His examination of a woman is always conducted when she turns her back. His glance begins with the legs and climbs slowly. . . . If he doesn't whistle, it's because that's not done, but he whistles in his mind. He just has a more timid way of being macho."

Payette dwells on the *insidious* aspect of politics, and the force of her candour may be a reaction to having to watch her words so carefully while in power. Her baptism of fire came during the "Yvette" scandal of the 1980 referendum campaign. Addressing a public meeting, Payette said every woman has been socialized into being an Yvette — a passive female character in a school primer — and that Liberal leader Claude Ryan's wife was one of them. The Liberals, not about to miss an opening, rallied the support of thousands of women who were Yvettes and proud of it. Some journalist countered with the notion of "Lisettes," but the damage was done.

Now unshackled from politics and working in television again, Payette has left us with a vivid memento of a crucial moment in Quebec history. Her book amounts to a curious form of anthropology — an emotionally guided excursion into a domain she eventually discovered she wanted no part of. Her lack of objectivity is only too welcome. □

REVIEW

Tempest in a stewpot

By FRASER SUTHERLAND

Fear's Folly, by Jean-Charles Harvey, translated from the French by John Glassco, Carleton University Press, 178 pages, $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88629 004 X).

IF IN 1934 J.-M. Rodrigue Cardinal Villeneuve had placed *Les Demi-civilisés* on the Index of badly written, as opposed to morally bad books, a civilized reader could have raised only mild objections. John O'Connor devotes several pages of his thorough introduction to the book's artistic sins: "Episodic and uneven in its vacillation between trite sentimentality and angry polemic, the novel repeatedly offers us poorly motivated action, shallow characterization, and clumsy plot construction. . . ." He quotes Gérard Tougas: *"Les romans de Jean-Charles Harvey sont parmi les plus indigestes de la littérature canadienne."* When he was translating the original, John Glassco told me that it was abominably written. He was right. Such copious dispraise might promise what Glassco once called the unintentionally hilarious "Great Bad Book" but, alas, *Les Demi-civilisés* is simply a dreary read.

The principal ingredient in Harvey's stewpot is Max Hubert's self-portrait: born poor, rural, and church law-abiding, Max is transported young to the wicked and hypocritical city of Quebec. After an unhappy period in a seminary, Max considers taking up law, politics, or journalism, until he is taken up by the independent-minded Dorothée Meunier, a rich man's daughter. With her loving aid — and her father's money — Max founds a successful liberal review, *The Twentieth Century*. The review, though, is ferociously attacked by church and subscribers after it publishes an assault on the materialistic clergy. Simmering along with the romantic plot — too silly and ill-connected to relate further, except to state that Dorothée flees to a convent, but regains her lover in the best melodramatic tradition — are hard lumps of satire interspersed with social analysis, visions, and perfervid nature descriptions.

A bouquet garni for this *pot au feu* is provided by Max's sage friend and adviser Lucien Joly:

> Our social structure is like a triangle. The farmers are the base, the working-class are the sides, and the half-civilized, backward ones are at the peak. The few really civilized people among us are outside this triangle. A day will come, however, when there will be enough of the latter to pry open the vise that pinches at the top and make a fourth line so that we'll have a proper rectangle. But until then, we'll go on cutting a sorry figure — a sick people.

Early in the novel, a journalist remarks, "In a career like ours, my dear Max, irony is the last refuge of talent." Harvey was a life-long journalist, and one who evidently perceived himself as a social physician. The sick people fought back. Quebec's church leaders not only condemned *Les Demi-civilisés* but got him fired from his editing job on *Le Soleil*. Moreover, Harvey — a medieval touch, this — was made to withdraw his book publicly, though by then the first edition had been sold out. It was not to be republished for 28 years. In the 1930s, there was no arguing: the Church was *"un État dans l'État."*

Today, with church divorced from state, and Quebecois priests practising liberation theology across authoritarian Latin America, it's difficult to understand the contemporary fuss. After all, Harvey's novel was not stridently anti-clerical, much less pornographic or Marxist. Harvey preached only the humanistic virtues of tolerance, intellectual honesty, and the will to read, write, and think without dictation. Yet that was enough to make him what Jean Paré terms a *"Bootlegger d'intelligence en période de prohibition."*

However many his flaws as a novelist, Harvey was a gutsy and honourable man, and a resilient one. In 1937 he launched an influential reformist weekly, *Le Jour*, which lasted until 1946; he lectured extensively, and later directed *Le Petit Journal* and *Le Photo Journal* almost until his death in 1967. For many he was the *"précurseur de la révolution tranquille,"* a quiet revolution that would branch itself into the noisy politics of both the Parti Québécois and the greatly increased French presence in Ottawa. If Harvey may be considered a spiritual father of the PQ, this constitutes another irony: he was always, O'Connor tells us, a staunch federalist.

For the social background to Harvey's book, O'Connor's long introduction is helpful, indeed indispensible. Certainly, Glassco was the right man to prepare a new translation — an early inadequate one had been published by Lukin Barette — of a novel concerned with ecclesiastical folly: one delightful footnote to Glassco's long poem *Montreal* refers to "a powder placed in the bathwater in convents and seminaries. It renders the water opaque, thus concealing the bather's genitals."

Fear's Folly, Glassco's first posthumous publication, makes a welcome addition to the Carleton Library's social sciences list — a novel whose significance, O'Connor observes, "rests primarily on external impact rather than internal merit." I can't help speculating that the same may one day be said of many English-Canadian novels now accepted as literature. □

REVIEW

What's on first

By BARBARA WADE

Home Game, by Paul Quarrington, Doubleday, 412 pages, $17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 385 18422 0).

THE "HOME" in Paul Quarrington's *Home Game* consists of a troupe of what are unkindly called "circus freaks," together with a wandering ex-baseball player, fighting for their territory in a baseball game against The House of Jonah, an equally strange collection of religious freaks who also happen to be terrific baseball players. In this novel the phrase "there's no place like home" takes on an entirely new meaning.

The story begins with Nathanael Isbister, once known as "Goldenlegs" for his running ability on the baseball diamond, now wandering the country on his mysteriously crippled limbs. He is crossing a valley in Michigan after descending from a hitch-hiked truck ride when he meets up with a two-headed dog. Nate "screamed, doubted his sanity, got up to run, turned back to double-check his eyes, and whispered, 'Oh, my God,' all in the space of a breath." He soon realizes the dog (which he has named Fido and Rover) just wants to play fetch. Nate throws a stick to the dog until he feels the point of a gun in his lower-spine and wheels around to find himself the prisoner of a 22-inch-tall man. Not just any man, we are told (of course!) but Major Mite, once the toast of the showtime circuit

but too old to perform much anymore. Mite is convinced that Nate wants to kidnap the dog, and so takes him home for his freak-show friends to pass judgement.

These friends are a vivid collection as described by Quarrington: Doctor Sinister, the tiny prestidigitator overly fond of long words, who is searching for Magic with a capital M; Ally the Alligator Man ("What did you want us to call him?" Doc Sinister demands of Nate, "The Man with the Hideous Skin Condition?"); the promiscuous Hisslop sisters (with whom Ally is in love), exceptionally pretty and permanently *joined at the hip*; Davey Goliath, "The Tallest Man That Ever Lived," so tall he cannot support his height and walks with canes; Tanya the voluptuous bearded lady, and others.

Across town lives the bearded, solemn members of The House of Jonah. This religious sect, says the author, "was against everything. All the things which you and I might consider joyful, like booze and sex and big cigars and thick steaks and funny jokes and movies and songs and literature, all of that was out." Except baseball. So the leader of The House of Jonah, Tekel Ambrose, decides that "Doctor Sinister and his troupe of misshapen outcasts" are an abomination to the Lord and the townspeople of Burton's Harbour, and must therefore be challenged to a baseball game. The loser will pack up and leave. When the challenge is issued to Doc Sinister he promptly asks Nate Isbister to stay around and help.

As the narrative progresses toward the baseball game each "misshapen outcast" engages our concern as a vibrant, ordinary human being. Major Mite, for example, induces his best friend Angus ("The Biggest Man in the World") to return to the troupe, ostensibly to play baseball but in reality to relive past memories in Mite's frantic attempt to deny his encroaching old age. He is dismayed to find Angus, now a farmer, comfortable with his mortality and with life as an average (though exceptionally large) citizen. Mite's stubbornness extends to the baseball diamond: when he comes up to bat, he refuses to take advantage of his inches-high strike zone and swings desperately at every pitch.

The narrative that binds the characters together is in itself another story, that of Quarrington held captive by his grandfather, a scam operator who collected bets and then served as umpire at the baseball game. He is forcing Quarrington to write down the decades-old story "because I saw your name on a book one day, and found out you were my grandson. . . ." Quarrington's entrapment provides both amusement and a sense of growing pace for the novel, as we can feel his impatience to finish:

> But in case you're interested, I haven't been outside now for three weeks, except for excursions to Becker's to buy food. I used to have a girlfriend, but she has become convinced that I am shacked up with another. When I tell her that my grandfather won't let me go out she produces a variety of strange noises and hangs up the telephone. As for my other friends, they're convinced that I have snapped, gone to Flip City. Most of them felt I wasn't far from it to begin with.

Doubts about his sanity aside, Quarrington is an excellent writer with a great sense of humour. With considerable deftness he creates that willing suspension of disbelief that enables us to absorb ourselves in the antics of a rather unbelievable baseball game. It might be argued that, with a cast of characters straight out of a circus, Quarrington would be hard pressed *not* to make them appear colourful and interesting. And, indeed, your suspended disbelief does reappear occasionally and react to a particularly incredible passage. Perhaps this is partly because Quarrington, for all his Vonnegut- or Irving-like interest in the oddities and outcasts of life, does not share their bleak outlook on life as a whole. He believes in happy endings. However, he certainly manages to provoke a lot of thought along the way. □

IN BRIEF

The Little Drummer Girl, by John le Carré, Hodder & Stoughton (Musson), 430 pages, $18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 340 32847 9). The central dilemma in le Carré's previous novels has usually been that of the moral man defending with his life a cause in which he no longer believes. Leamas in *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold* (1963) was defeated by this dilemma. George Smiley, in the Karla trilogy (which is in fact not a trilogy but one long, long novel with two false endings slotted in for the publisher's convenience), saved himself only by substituting for his faith in "Western democracy" a personal, fanatical vengeance on one man — Karla. Le Carré's crux has never been the mindless see-saw of twin titanic figures — East/West, MI5/KGB — but the moral struggle between a man and his conscience, trapped in a play in which moral niceties are not only irrelevant but potentially fatal. Both East and West in le Carré's novels are tarred with the same brush; the conflicts between them truly looking-glass wars.

With *The Little Drummer Girl*, which deals not with spies and counter-spies but with terrorists and anti-terrorists, the morality at least comes clearer. Bombing babies, whether on the West Bank or in Israeli embassies, is wrong. Innocence, in other words, is presumed to exist, and it is innocence, rather than some government's egomaniacal espionage network, that is being defended.

Kurtz, as head of the Israeli anti-terrorist group, recruits an English actress named Charlie to help him find Khalil, the head of the Palestinian terrorists in Europe. (Kurtz and Khalil share an initial letter with Karla, and Charlie is an anglicism of the same name, for what *that's* worth.) Kurtz and Khalil stand firmly on either side of the looking glass, and Charlie is the tiny Alice who passes freely back and forth between them. Her recruitment in Greece is somewhat reminiscent of Nicholas Urfe's ordeal in John Fowles's *The Magus*. Le Carré doesn't have Fowles's scope or depth, but there is a parallel between Charlie's confrontation with Kurtz and Urfe's interrogation by Conchis that suggests le Carré's purpose: to create a scenario in which the principal actor — the reader — is brought face-to-face with his own inadequacies as a human being. The attraction in a le Carré novel (and the reason he has so often been compared to Graham Greene) is in the fact that he doesn't suspend moral judgements, he imposes them.

Unlike Greene, however, le Carré has to exaggerate his characters. Kurtz (like his Conradian namesake) remains larger than life despite le Carré's attempts to humanize him, to make him a Prospero with a touch of Caliban. We don't *want* to be like a Greene character (though we suspect we already are); we *want* to be like Kurtz. This is perhaps necessary in Greek tragedy, in which there can be a saving flaw, but it is an illusion in romantic fiction. Charlie's control agent, Becker, is more like the old Leamas. He suffers from doubt and compassion and damn near blows the mission. But even he finally takes refuge in perfection.

Charlie has the spotlight for most of the novel, and it is she who brings off the play. There are several hair-raising echoes in her of le Carré's disastrous foray into "straight" fiction — *The Naive and Sentimental Lover* — but this time the book is saved by its plot, which has at least a beginning and an end. Much is made of le Carré's notion of life as "the theatre of the real"; all the world's a stage, and so on. If the story sags a bit in the middle — well, that too is life.

— WAYNE GRADY

BookNews: an advertising feature

Canadian Writers and Their Works

"A vast critical history of Canadian literature."
— *University of Toronto Quarterly*

Volume One (fiction series):
Covers Brooke, Moodie, Traill, Richardson, and Other 19th-Century Writers.

Volume Two (poetry series):
Covers Campbell, Carman, Lampman, Roberts, and Scott.

ECW PRESS

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
79 Garden Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

"Every page is an adventure. The concepts come at you like laser beams. A thoroughly provoking book."—Roger A. Caras

Promethean Fire

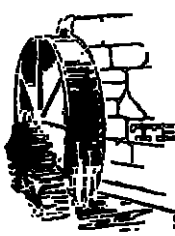
Reflections on the Origin of Mind

Charles J. Lumsden &
Edward O. Wilson

Illustrations by Whitney Powell

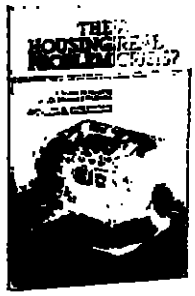
CANADIAN SOCIAL HISTORIES

I Remember The One Room School
Anecdotes and stories from the teachers and pupils of rural one room schools.
6x9 softbound $7.95



On The Homefront
Collectables and memorabilia of Canadian life on the homefront during World War II. Profusely illustrated.
8x11 hardbound $19.95

THE BOSTON MILLS PRESS
98 Main Street, Erin, Ontario N0B 1T0
Telephone: (519) 833-2407
SEND FOR OUR COMPLETE BROCHURE



THE HOUSING PROBLEM A REAL CRISIS?

A Primer on Housing Markets, Policies, and Problems

Michael A. Goldberg

This informative and topical book will equip readers with the basic tools of housing market analysis and will be especially useful for the prospective house buyer. p/c $8.95 Tr.

UBC press | The University of British Columbia Press
303 – 6344 Memorial Road
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W5

PULP PRESS BOOK PUBLISHERS ANNOUNCES:

ARSENAL EDITIONS SPRING TITLES

The Voice of Emma Sachs by D.M. Fraser. The long-awaited 2nd book by the author of CLASS WARFARE. $6.95

The Men There Were Then—Work poems by well-known publisher, RAINCOAST CHRONICLES editor and heavy equipment operator Howard White. $5.95.

The Portable City—Fictions in the fabulist tradition of Garcia Marquez and Barthelme, by Vancouver writer Don Austin. $6.95.

Anhaga—A contemporary rendering of the Anglo-Saxon WANDERER, by poet Jon Furberg. $6.00

DIVISION OF ARSENAL PULP PRESS BOOK PUBLISHERS LTD.
572 BEATTY STREET VANCOUVER V6B 2L3 (604) 687-4233

Spring List Literary Titles from

SONO NIS PRESS

George Woodcock	$14.95	*Collected Poems*
J. Michael Yates	5.95	*Fugue Brancusi*
Robin Skelton	5.95	*Wordsong*
James Harrison	6.95	*Flying Dutchman*

... an Honours List of Poets ...

SONO NIS PRESS
1745 Blanshard Street
Victoria, British Columbia V8W 2J8

Life on the margin

As his autobiography reveals, George Woodcock's commitment to anarchism is founded on personal frustration

By DAVID STAFFORD

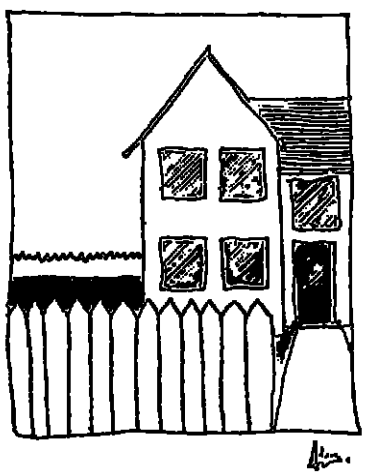
Letter to the Past: An Autobiography, Volume 1, by George Woodcock, Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 329 pages, $21.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88902 715 3).

FOR A MAN with a significant reputation as one of our most prolific writers, George Woodcock remains a shadowy figure posed ambiguously on the edge of Canadian consciousness. This is no accident. He is a tireless biographer, editor, journalist, historian, essayist, and critic, and his writings have ranged generously over a broad sweep of subjects, from Canadian poets to early British explorers in Tibet, from George Orwell to Gabriel Dumont, from Aphra Behn to Hugh MacLennan, and from Doukhobors to Incas. He thus escapes easy categorization by our specialized academy, while at the same time he eludes the parochial bounds of current cultural obsessions. It must give him great satisfaction. It is not just that he has denounced the cult of the nation and its accompanying compleat nationalists and would therefore refuse formal entry into the cultural pantheon. As this finely crafted autobiography reveals, he is quintessentially a man who belongs to the rich and ambivalent margins of cultural, social, political, and geographical life.

His mother began it all when she gave birth to Woodcock in 1912 in Winnipeg, during a brief interlude when she joined the husband who had preceded her from England in an attempt to escape the heavy hand of parental disapproval at his desire to be a musician. More practical and Victorian, they wanted him to join the family coal business. Too obstinate to comply and too gentle to rebel, he had retreated to the colonies, thus betraying a character trait whose influence Woodcock readily acknowledges in himself, and which he makes a major theme of this reconstructed life. After experiencing one prairie winter the family returned to their native Shropshire. Here followed the decisive experiences of childhood and youth that moulded Woodcock's temperament and profoundly influenced his lifetime emotional and aesthetic commitments.

Growing up in the march lands between England and Wales he became aware of and later identified with Welsh grievances against English cultural imperialism. He lived, too, on the edge of modernity, and has ever since showed a preference for the vanishing past. Traditional patterns of rural life were rapidly disappearing, but Shropshire during and after the First World War was still a pastoral, archaic, and largely pre-mechanized world where the rhythms of daily life were modulated by the changing of the seasons and the ancient regularities of weekly markets and annual fairs. Remnants of customary rituals were still to be observed, such as the awesome Romany funeral where both gypsy caravan and horse were burned on a huge pyre under the unseeing gaze of their former owner.

Woodcock's was a marginal childhood in yet another way, for it was largely conducted between the poles of the separate households of his grandparents, so different in character and situated at opposite ends of the small world of Market Drayton. The pattern was intensified when the family left



Shropshire so that his beloved father, now fatally stricken with Bright's Disease, could take a job with the Great Western Railway. In the mean little house in Marlow that was to be his home from 1918 to 1940 Woodcock and his parents were isolated in a world outside their own class. Shabbiness turned into soured gentility. Social life atrophied, and the sensitive only child joined the walking wounded of England's class wars.

His escape came during school holidays when he returned to his grandparents. Shropshire became utopia, and in nature Woodcock found a setting for emotional and aesthetic peace. In long solitary excursions he developed a powerful inner eye and ear that in later years produced visionary experiences transfiguring the real world and transcending its temporal bounds. In recalling these early days Woodcock writes at his very best, combining his acute eye for ethnographic detail with a lyricism for the magic memories of childhood that has great poetic force.

Within the confines of the real world Woodcock soon learned evasive obedience. At school, for example, hating team sports in general and cricket in particular, he avoided confrontation with the hard ball by deliberately knocking down his own wicket. Later, trapped in the hopeless clerical job he took during the Depression to support himself and his widowed mother, he learned the subtleties of job supervision. He even joined a union in the vain hope that he might be fired. Long before he read Kropotkin he had learned to detest authority and restriction, and it was largely as an extension of personal frustration that he came to espouse the anarchism of which he has since become such an articulate exponent.

Woodcock provides some intriguing vignettes of the people he came to know in London's literary and Bohemian fringe: the thin and angular George Orwell, always reluctant to refuse and anxious to be friendly; Caton, the humourless publisher of avant-garde poetry, whose real business was lucrative pornography; the young and astringently witty Muriel Spark, slapped in public by a quarrelsome poet; and the

beautiful and enigmatic anarchist Marie Louise Berneri. But while it was a milieu rich in personalities and action Woodcock is disappointingly elusive. We learn little about his personal relationships with these people and nothing at all about the apparently nameless woman whom he married in 1943.

This evasiveness and detachment, of course, is part of the essence. Woodcock tells us that as war approached his anarchism was fuelled by a pacifist refusal to kill in defence of the system that had created the Depression. In a revealing letter to a friend he said that "I shall do my best to keep the neutrality, spiritual and intellectual, which the poet should maintain in conflicts between ordinary people." This inner aesthetic imperative is both Woodcock's great strength and his great weakness. It has given him rare moral courage and a clear eye that penetrates the posturings and pretensions of the powerful. At the same time it leads him to a disconcerting refusal to engage the real world, and hence to judgements that are both striking and yet empty.

To equate Hiroshima with Auschwitz, and thus Churchill and Truman with the Nazis and Stalin, as Woodcock does here, is to ignore crucial distinctions of meaning and intent, and thus to lead ultimately to a fatalism about political affairs that is one of our greatest present dangers. Purity of moral outrage about megadeaths may itself be part of our problem. Orwell pointed in a similar direction many years ago when he and Woodcock disagreed about Woodcock's wartime pacifism. Objectively, Orwell said, it assisted fascism. The discrepancy of view did not prevent the men from becoming friends. On the contrary, Woodcock found in Orwell his alter ego. One of his most successful early essays, and later the book for which he won the Governor General's Award, was on Orwell, the "crystal spirit."

The patterns continued after the war. Woodcock left the anarchists because commitment would damage his detachment as a writer, and he left England to escape its post-war claustrophobia. Searching in 1948 for yet another edge, he returned not merely to the land of his birth, but to its literal limit, the southwest corner of Vancouver Island. Here he hoped to recreate the rural idyll that had nourished his poetic vision, and here he leaves us. Woodcock tells us that of all the arts, he most loves music, and especially ballet, the non-verbal counterpart of poetry. This elegant dance to the music of his own time is beautifully choreographed and has great romantic power. We have reached the interval. Can he sustain us in the second half, and will the music change? □

REVIEW

Nothing like the bard

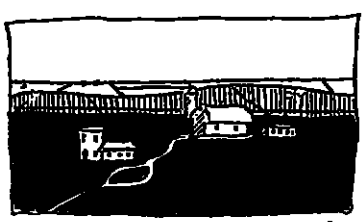
By GEORGE GALT

The Birth Control King of the Upper Volta, by Leon Rooke, ECW Press, 160 pages, $8.95 paper (ISBN 0 920802 48 6).

Shakespeare's Dog, by Leon Rooke, Stoddart, 144 pages, $14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7737 2011 1).

LEON ROOKE'S LATEST collection of stories is not so much post-modern as post-mortem. With few exceptions the characters in *The Birth Control King of the Upper Volta* move magically through an afterlife world where imperatives of mind and complexities of flesh seem a dim memory. This afterworld, or otherworld, when it resonates with inklings and echoes of our own, is totally absorbing. Most of it, however, I found deadly dull.

The title story exhibits the sense of inventiveness gone awry that characterizes this book. What a brilliant stroke — creating a white supremacist whose life work is selling birth control to the natives of Upper Volta. Adlai, his son, teller of the tale, remains at home defending "his spot" against black takers. His mam, who may have invented the birth control king to provide a poppa where there was none, materializes out of the walls to chide Adlai for not living up to his father's racist hopes. There's a fine crackpot reality to some of this, but the story raises expectations of poignancy and hilarity that are never fulfilled, and it fails to carry its own weight, 30 pages long. Mergentoire,



Adlai's landlady, and Hedgepolt, her idiot son, are cartoon characters who contribute little more than their bizarre names.

"The Birth Control King" and at least four of the other seven stories here are ultimately attempts to portray a dazzling narcissism. To carry a story alone, whether in Rooke's world or yours or mine, a character must have either spectacular energy and charisma or such an insight into humanity that we are captivated. Rooke's people, for the most part, have neither. Unconnected, many of them seem to live in a bubble of their own blowing, talking to an outside world that may or may not exist. In "Gin and Tonic" Rebecca spends the day visiting her friend Estelle, who remains a phantom throughout. "Hitting the Charts" features the aging, self-congratulatory stud in disco-land, looking to score. He is a man of lunatic detachment, though he does chat distantly with another old loser and makes occasional contact on the floor:

> The platter spun anew and I quivered in my tracks, going solo for a while. Two or three of those I bumped gave me dirty looks and one in a feather-duster skirt and a strontium 90 smile murmured in my ear, "You better slow down, Pops, your face is snow-white, you definitely got lily-pad gills."
>
> "I'm cooking with gas," I told this smiler.

It's a relief when, after pages of solipsistic prose, this guy finally goes home — alone, of course.

In "A Nicer Story by the 'B' Road," Agnes is married to God. They met secretly in high school, and one thing led to another. A reader is hard pressed to decide whether, if God does not exist, the story is narcissistic, or if he does exist, it is merely nihilistic, or whether it's just plain trash however you slice it. By the A road or the B road (the author provides alternate endings) you'll be glad when you cross the finish line.

An articulate simplicity, something like Richard Brautigan's, graces some of these pages, and a delightful taste for the quirky and cock-eyed, something like Donald Barthelme's, informs them too. I wish Rooke would distil these finer elements: his best passages are brilliant. At his worst, though, he is sophomoric, breezy, and cute. The only entirely successful story for me in this grab-bag is "Hat Pandowdy," a resonating parable touching on intolerance, dissent, sex, and death in the lives of characters we are encouraged to love.

Anyone interested in conventional novels with character and plot will want to let the neighbour's mongrel chew on *Shakespeare's Dog*. Hooker, the bard's mutt, tells how a dog's life was 400 years ago. He gives us a great deal of snorfling, drooling, whoofing, humping, much bawdiness and bragging, and I do believe if one could imagine the bard's mutt writing a book, this might be it. But let me declare my bias outright: I am opposed to the notion of publishing dogs, at least until our better manuscripts are exhausted. Perhaps Rooke

thinks they have been, or perhaps he would argue that this book is really an intimate portrait of William Shakespeare by one of his best friends. I would say it's a free-flowing stream of Elizabethan sensuality filtered through the eyes, ears, mouth, and balls of Leon Rooke, a dream-romp, a word-party, and perhaps a monumental self-indulgence, depending on your point of view, point of view being particularly relevant in this case. Witness Hooker, at book's end, about to leave for London with Will:

> I dabbled off into sleeptime, dreaming of great standing bowls packed with meat. I dreamed of soothy hawks with their breasts ripped open and helpless in my paws, dreamed of grey buzzardry bones choking my throat, dreamed of deer chasing across new-fallen snow. I pugged onto tough spiny pigs and letched them clean. I bayed at the moon and sniffed worms in the bowels of a dead horse and ate what was good, in my fierce night rule, I chased cluckers off their sitting poles and bit off their heads . . . .
>
> I saw Marr and in my dream contemplated her virtues and defaults. As virtue, she was first and foremost a dog.

By that penultimate page some readers will want to throw Hooker a meaty bone. Many others, I feel sure, will want him put away. □

REVIEW

Small wonders

By ALBERTO MANGUEL

Murder in the Dark, by Margaret Atwood, Coach House Press, 64 pages, $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88910 258 9).

IN AN ESSAY on John Wilkins, Jorge Luis Borges mentions "a certain Chinese encyclopaedia" where animals are categorized as "(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) stuffed, (c) trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) mythical, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in this classification, (i) that wriggle around like mad, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camel's-hair brush, (l) etcetera, (m) that have just broken the vase, (n) that seen from the distance look like flies." Any classification is arbitrary, but I am nevertheless surprised to see that no one has yet classified the literary genre I am about to describe. I propose to call it the nugget.

An anthology of nuggets would include, among others, selections from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Notebooks* (according to Henry James, one of the strangest books in literature), Kafka's *Reflections on Sin, Pain, Hope and The True Way*, Max Frisch's *Sketchbook*, Valery's *Monsieur Teste*, Somerset Maugham's *A Writer's Notebook*, Borges's *The Maker* (mistranslated as *Dreamtigers*), Samuel Butler's *Notebooks*, Gerard Manley Hopkins's *Journal*, Julio Cortazar's *Cronopios and Famas*, and Margaret Atwood's brilliant new book, *Murder in the Dark*.

The dictionary definition of nugget would read "A small literary piece; a quotable fragment of knowledge or information; a short extract from a book; odds and ends. A nugget must be brief and to the point; it must illustrate a thought or comment on an experience; it must have a touch of humour." Nuggets are by no means a minor genre: they are comparable to doodles made by a painter or a sculptor (Henry Moore's sheep come to mind).

Because of their immediacy and urgency (there is something in the nature of a nugget that makes it look hasty and yet long-reflected) nuggets seem conclusive, snappish answers to lengthy questions. Nuggets are less epigram-

matic than epigrams, less sententious and contrived — but just as unexpected.

Murder in the Dark is subtitled "Short Fictions and Prose Poems." It consists of brief texts, most of them about one or two pages long, each the snapshot of a moment of experience. They pinpoint memories, impressions, and sensations. They capture and analyze fleeting thoughts, best defined in the last sentence of "Strawberries" (one of the last nuggets in the book): "I forgot what things were called and saw instead what they were." This memory of things as they really are is apparent in "Raw Materials" — seven pages of a writer's travel notes in Latin America. Looking at a carved throne inside a pyramid, the writer-tourist says: "Once they played a game here . . . If your team lost they cut off your head. That's what the carving is, the body of a man with a fountain in place of the head: the blessed loser, making it rain. Metaphor," Atwood warns, "can be dangerous." The piece ends: "We walk back down the corridor, touching nothing, knowing that we have intruded, blundered upon a child's serious and profoundly believed game, and we have spoiled everything." (This conclusion brings to mind D.H. Lawrence meeting a snake at a water-trough, and frightening it away: "And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords/Of life./And I have something to expiate;/A pettiness.")

Several texts are concerned with literature, or rather with the writer's craft. "The Page" for instance: "The page waits, pretending to be blank . . . . Touch the page at your peril: it is you who are blank and innocent, not the page." Others show Margaret Atwood at her comic best, "Liking Men" for example: "It's time to like men again. Where shall we begin?" and sets off on a guided tour of the male *homo sapiens* (well, not very *sapiens*) from the back of the neck (the nape, not the scruff) to the boots, and on to that moment in which his foot, sticking out from under the sheets, reminds you of the day on which — innocent babe — he was born.

The piece I like best is "Murder in the Dark," the nugget that lends its title to the book. It is a classic, probably condemned from its birth to the grim immortality of anthologies, but nevertheless superb. It explains a child's game, traditionally a writer's favourite (witness Graham Greene's short story "The End of the Party"). "The thing about this game," says Atwood, "is that you have to know when to stop." The concluding paragraph has the quality of prose that should be learned by heart, like a poem:

> In any case, that is me in the dark. I have designs on you, I'm plotting my sinister crime, my hands are reaching for your neck or perhaps, by mistake, your thigh. You can hear my footsteps approaching, I wear boots and carry a knife, or maybe it's a pearl-handled revolver, in any case I wear boots with very soft soles, you can see the cinematic glow of my cigarette, waxing and waning in the fog of the room, the street, the room, even though I don't smoke. Just remember this, when the scream at last has ended and you've turned on the lights: by the rules of the game, I must always lie. Now: do you believe me?

Murder in the Dark is one of those books one wishes one could quote from cover to cover. It has been written to read to a friend over the phone, or to chuckle over in the streetcar under the eyes of more sober citizens. It is clever and witty, told with the humour of *The Edible Woman*, with the sense of secret childhood found in *Dancing Girls*, with the wisdom of *Life Before Man*, with the uncanny feeling for memorable scenes apparent in Atwood's best poems.

Because of its nature — similar to that of a journal or a sketchbook — *Murder in the Dark* is a very personal collection. Here are the writer's thoughts, fears, giggles, precise conclusions, and impressions — an intelligent interview with an intelligent person done by that person herself. In an early poem, "This is a Photograph of Me," Atwood writes: "But if you look long enough,/eventually/you will be able to see me." In these pieces, unobstructed by the plot of a novel or the framework of a poem, the writer's voice — amused and wise — becomes most certainly visible. □

REVIEW

Dance of the dialectic

By DAVID LATHAM

Captain Neal MacDougal & the Naked Goddess, by Milton Acorn, Ragweed Press, 52 pages, $6.50 paper (ISBN 0 920304 16 8).

MILTON ACORN'S NEW collection of 38 poems is a sonnet sequence allegedly culled from the log of the *Maplewood Mae*, a wooden ship skippered by Captain Neal MacDougal, the son of a pirate from 19th-century Charlottetown. In his introduction, Acorn raises his fictional ancestor to the status of a folk hero whose poetry is often quoted on the streets of Charlottetown: "I'd rather go down the street with the arse/Out of my pants than meet a man I owed." What follows this disarming humour is a mythical voyage of a poet navigating his course toward his visionary ideal.

Poetic vision is dialectical for this captain, whom Acorn once calls MacJanus. The poet must explore his ancestral heritage as the source for songs that will inspire future generations. The first sonnet presents the conventional invocation to the muse. As sailors court the wind, so poets court the breath of inspiration. At the helm of the ark, circled by a gull, stand the tall, bearded Dougal and his wee son Neal MacDougal. The gull's tragic cry only strengthens the father's resolve to "steer her safe." The theme is as epic as the invocation:

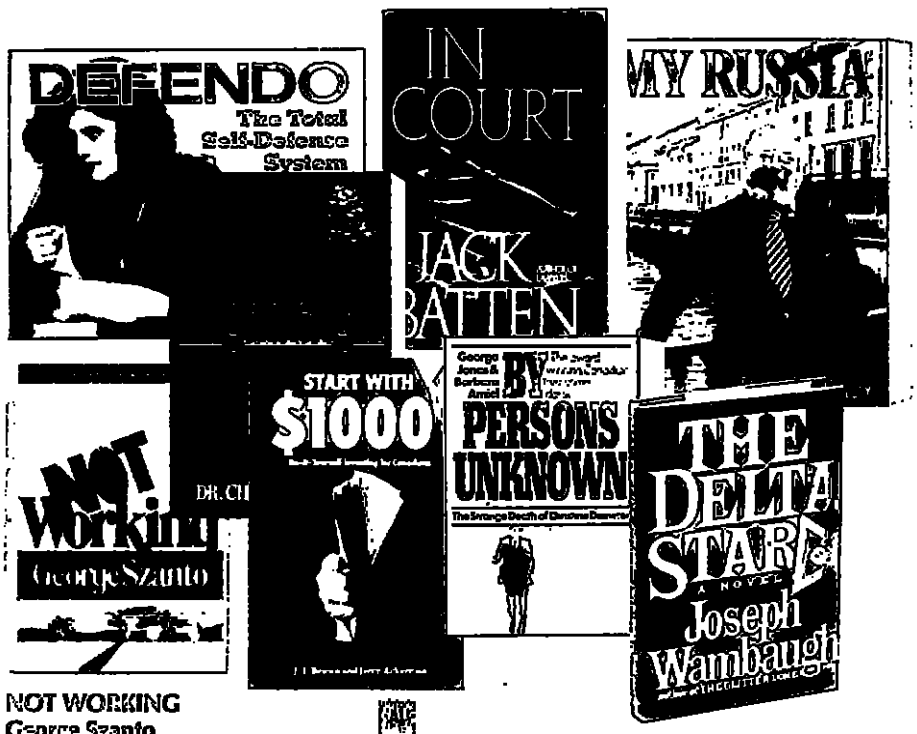
> *So you've amended time on my ship—*
> *Set a mark to last while men stretch sails!*
> *What kind of wind let you do that?*
> *One breath's whisper more and she would have tipped!*

The temporal/eternal, history/prophecy, poet/goddess dialectic is resolved in the last sonnet, "The Completion of the Fiddle," as the naked goddess guides the poet to the sweet harmony of the spheres.

In his previous collection, *Jackpine Sonnets*, Acorn defined the sonnet as a "short poem with a dialectical play of argument." This dialectical play is the source of Acorn's strength and weakness. It charges the words and dreams of a feisty sea-captain with dramatic tension as he suffers denials of his words and awakens from his dreams. But the dialectic too often is reduced to the polemical rhetoric of a white/red world of good and evil when Acorn is content to portray the captain condemning an act rather than stirring our own indignation. While some individual poems thus appear to suffer from Acorn's tendency to bluster, they will serve the dramatic structure of the sonnet sequence. Following "The Bull Trots In and Puffs," the penultimate sonnet presents the captain as Old MacDougal appearing to lapse into a mundane conclusion:

> *"I've got a feel of something past the skyline*
> *That'll be a mark for our next passage."*
> *Afterward when asked,*
> *"Well did you see it?"*
> *He said, "Yes something. I can't say just what."*
> *"It's death the old man wants!" the mate muttered:*
> *But MacDougal's ears were not all that dull.*

The Quality Touch — Macmillan of Canada



NOT WORKING
George Szanto
The first novel by Canadian playwright, George Szanto, is a stunning achievement. "...not a conventional story... (Szanto) handles some literary problems he has posed himself with real virtuosity." — *New York Times Book Review*
$16.95 cloth

IN THE BEGINNING...
A Scientist Shows Why the Creationists are Wrong
Dr. Christopher McGowan
A no-holds-barred rebuttal to Creationism. In this important contribution to the Creation versus Evolution debate, a Canadian zoologist meets the Creationists head on and systematically demolishes their arguments with a wealth of documentary evidence from the fossil record. This controversial book will attract a wide variety of interested readers.
$18.95 cloth

DEFENDO
The Total Self-Defense System
Grips Self-Protection Services
Self-confidence through self-protection! *Defendo* is a startlingly effective, easy-to-learn system of self-defense for young and old, male and female. This step-by-step photographic guide clearly demonstrates the Defendo techniques — immobilizing an attacker, blocking blows. Easy-to-follow directions enable readers to practise on their own or with a partner.
$9.95 paperback

NOW AVAILABLE IN QUALITY PAPERBACK!

START WITH $1000
Do-It-Yourself Investing For Canadians
J.J. Brown and Jerry Ackerman
A bestseller in hardcover last fall, this sensible and readable investment guide discusses the rewards and pitfalls of various types of personal investments. "...interesting, well-written and instructive."
— *Ontario Business*
$12.95 paperback

IN COURT
Jack Batten
This absorbing look at the Canadian legal profession hit the national bestseller lists last fall! "...enthralling reading...(Batten) seems to get inside the very psyche of great courtroom lawyers." — *Toronto Star*
$9.95 paperback

BY PERSONS UNKNOWN
The Strange Death of Christine Demeter
George Jonas and Barbara Amiel
The trial of Peter Demeter was the longest murder trial in Canadian history and revealed a bizarre tale of sexual intrigue and murder. A Canadian true-crime classic, this enthralling book won the Edgar Allan Poe Award from the International Congress of Crime Writers. "Lucid, lively, absorbing." — *Toronto Star*
$9.95 paperback

JEANPAC
Five new novels of excitement and adventure in this original paperback fiction series for the 9- to 12-year-old reader.

I WISH THERE WERE UNICORNS
Karleen Bradford
For ages 10 to 12.

SKATE LIKE THE WIND
Joan E. Ford
For ages 10 to 12.

RACE AGAINST THE DARK
Elfreida Read
For ages 10 to 12.

CHAMPIONS
Marjorie Holland
For ages 9 to 11.

SKI FOR YOUR MOUNTAIN
Sharon Siamon
For ages 10 to 12.

$2.95 paperback each

MY RUSSIA
Peter Ustinov
An entertaining and informative book filled with anecdotes, national history, personal experiences and the famous Ustinov license for semi-historical storytelling. Ustinov, because of his Russian ancestry, has maintained a passionate, life-long interest in the country.
$27.95 cloth

THE DELTA STAR
Joseph Wambaugh
Joe Wambaugh, author of THE CHOIRBOYS and THE GLITTER DOME, is back with his cops-gone-crazy brand of humour and a cast of unforgettable characters. With its extraordinary power and vividness, this fascinating novel follows in the tradition of his previous bestsellers... but with a new scientific twist.
$23.95 cloth

Available at bookstores and libraries across Canada.

Macmillan of Canada

"No ... Life!" he snapped: "One last ingredient
Into the cup to make the flavour full.
Remind me to remember to fire you
When we're tied at dock, undrowned as usual."

But the sonnet is rich with colloquial allusion to Tennyson's "Ulysses" which enforce the irony of self-assertions proclaimed from the deck of a funeral barge.

Dialectical play literally pervades this book from cover to cover. Following the last sonnet — which celebrates the renewal of harmony achieved through the union of the fiddle and the dance, of the poet and the goddess — is a haunting portrait on the back cover. It is a photograph of Acorn looking like death's angel staring from the shoreline.□

REVIEW

Echoes of a dream

By K.G. PROBERT

Night Travellers, by Sandra Birdsell, Turnstone Press, 182 pages, $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88801 072 9).

Fifty Stories and a Piece of Advice, by David Arnason, Turnstone Press, 155 pages, $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88801 071 0).

In the Blood, by Helen Rosta, NeWest Publishers, 141 pages, $16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920316 30 1) and $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 920316 28 X).

From a High Thin Wire, by Joan Clark, NeWest Publishers, 150 pages, $14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920316 51 4) and $6.95 paper (ISBN 920316 53 0).

FOUR FIRST collections from already-mature Manitoba and Alberta writers. Let us earnestly pray that Turnstone and NeWest continue to prosper and publish fiction.

The most consistently accomplished is Sandra Birdsell's *Night Travellers*. Although she too often concludes stories with sententious tags, just in case the reader has not grasped the point, the book satisfies as a whole. It confirms the old saw that good universal art is firmly rooted in the regional. The stories comprise a history of the Lafreniere family, which, because the father is Metis and the mother is of Mennonite stock, also becomes a meditation on racial heritage and regional history.

Both archetypal and purely local associations abound in the first story, "The Flood," which introduces the collection's running metaphor — the boat big enough to contain the family and all its memories — in a situation created by the recurrent southern Manitoba problem, spring flooding. The ghostly presence of glacial Lake Agassiz provides a background for the stories and finally contains all the memories and their vehicles.

The impressive thing about this collection is that these pan-historical reverberations are generated by stories about the rather ordinary, sometimes even tawdry, lives of a small-town barber, his wife, and their daughters. Birdsell's uncanny eye for illuminating detail and her evocative style make these stories about marriage problems, small-town class and mores, sexual curiosity, and choices between sexual, familial, and racial allegiances and identities transcend their immediate situations. Like a tantalizing dream, this book echoes.

The grey skies over Lake Winnipeg and the Icelandic communities that live by it provide the regional flavour for much of David Arnason's *Fifty Stories*. "The Body" is in tone a Valgardson-like story about a boy who murders his father while hunting on the lake. "The Sunfish" is a tale about a lonely fisherman who is granted a wish by a sunfish he nets one day. And the title piece is a series of anecdotes narrated by a persona who is utterly convincing as a young native of a town that feels like Gimli.

The thread that runs through the collection, however, is not a sense of place but Arnason's attempts to find the appropriate forms to embody the tremendous variety of tales he has to tell. Most of the stories are transformed by his sophistication as a story-teller whose craft is informed by a narrative self-consciousness that startles the reader of Canadian writing, even at this late date. The title story, with its 50 short vignettes and speculations, none of which is made into a narrative, is an appropriate opening piece. Each of the fragments could serve as a Jamesian donné for a familiar kind of story about life in a typical ethnic prairie town. But in the remaining stories Arnason takes such situations and does some very un-Jamesian things with them.

Because he tries so many kinds of stories and ways of telling them, he is not always successful. Technical pyrotechnics such as intrusive and fallible narrators and multiple points of view sometimes seem merely heartless. And his editor should warn him away from pain-of-love stories: his are contrived and self-indulgent. Arnason hits his stride when he doesn't try to move the reader — when instead he allows the playful side of his story-telling full rein. If he had lived a hundred years ago, he would surely have earned his living as a spinner of tall tales.

That impulse is refined by technical playfulness, an apparent affection for

marvels, and a wittily self-conscious narration. In "Binary Lovers," for example, the narrator-protagonist, an English professor named Arnason, sends up modern scientific theory, contemporary criticism, and histories of thoroughbred racing as he recounts/creates the beginning of an affair with a doctor's wife, his student. The story is a teasing delight, as are a half-dozen others from which he is distanced enough by his narrative self-subversions to allow the reader enough space to exercise his own imagination and have some fun as a collaborator.

The reader enjoys no such freedom in the most powerful stories of Helen Rosta's *In the Blood*. Her imagination is sympathetic and compelling when she writes about women who ineluctably find themselves in painful relationships as wives, daughters, and sisters. But the most impressive feature of the volume is Rosta's achievement of an inside view of these and other situations, some of which are starkly terrifying. Whether narrated in first or third person, her stories of cruel children, desperately trapped women, and psychopathic misfits compel the reader to share her open-eyed perception of what she reveals once she has rent the fabric of everyday life.

Occasionally mere melodrama takes over: the story about an independent would-be woman farmer who is threatened by hunters and intrigued by a Sasquatch-like creature, and the one that describes a futuristic society of women who ceremonially eat male children, are thesis-ridden and unconvincing. But these are exceptions. Two male narrators — the slow learner who seems to have matter-of-factly killed a little girl, and the boy who will probably set fire to the house in order to kill his stepmother — are terrifying in their innocence. And the terrible entrapment of the mother who must constantly attend to her retarded son in a small apartment as she fantasizes about winning an exotic vacation in a contest, or about throwing her child off the balcony, arouses a sympathetic gut-

wrenching in the reader. Rosta is a shudder-maker of a most sophisticated kind.

Those who prefer gentler insights and more familiar ground will enjoy Joan Clark's *From a High Thin Wire.* Her most characteristic stories feature middle-aged women making allowances in the present and recalling formative influences from the past. Her ability to create atmosphere and vivid situations with precisely defined details is impressive; yet most of the stories finally disappoint because of her apparent urge to make them too shapely, too accessible perhaps.

Clark's fondness for fairy-tale motifs and allusions points to the primary weakness of this very pleasant collection. The structures of the stories are too neat: one can almost see the chart — situation, conflict, resolution — imposed on each one. That grid works in a highly artificial piece such as "Historical Fiction," in which an episode in the social career of a young woman at college is told as a chivalric fairy tale, but it makes stories with a more realistic surface too formulaic.

The problem is reinforced by Clark's meticulous attention to obvious running metaphor. One of two daughters, described as gulls casting large shadows, chases old vulture-like ladies from the casket of her mother, who sang two notes from the high thin wire of the title story, but at least taught her girls how to fly. This is excessive craftsmanship. Clark's created situations can speak volumes by themselves: we do not require the assistance of a patiently patronizing guide as we listen. □

REVIEW

Hybrid vigour

By PAUL WILSON

Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch, by Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson, NeWest Publishers, 246 pages, $17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920316 41 7) and $7.95 paper (ISBN 0 920316 39 5).

ROBERT KROETSCH writes prose and poetry that are alive with vigorous contending energies. He delights in the detail of language and life and his books, with their epic sense of metaphor, convey a vivid experience of the West and the people who live in it. But particularly in his "skinny novels," like *The Studhorse Man* and *What The Crow Said,* there is an almost wilful abstruseness that leaves me feeling somewhat cheated.

Now, after slogging through *Labyrinths of Voice,* I have a better understanding of why Kroetsch writes the way he does, but I'm still not convinced that in the tug-of-war between the creative and critical faculties in his work, the best side is winning.

As literary criticism, *Labyrinths* is its own Minotaur, an ungainly hybrid of two essentially different "talk" forms — conversation and interview. The editors and interlocutors, Robert Wilson and Shirley Neuman, do not believe in making things easy for their readers. Their only concession to anything like conventional order has been to divide the discussion into four thematic chapters dealing with influence, game, myth, and narration, but within those chapters, the focus is split between talking about those notions as critical categories (with capital letters) and applying them concretely to Kroetsch's work.

As conversation, the book fails because the tone is so self-consciously academic that only serious students of Kroetsch will dare go near it. The entire discussion takes place within the context of critical modes that are never adequately explained, so that readers like myself, who have only a nodding-off acquaintance with the buzzwords, are left to infer what words like "deconstruction," "difference," "intertextuality," "signification," and "post-modern" (this last expression appears to be a key to the book) really mean as the speakers use them here.

Furthermore, the conversation is continually being interrupted by other "voices." The editors say they are doing this to give the text an "informal allusiveness," but the result is simply annoying. To follow the thread of what Kroetsch is saying, you have to keep leapfrogging over aphoristic asides (which themselves are torn out of other contexts) by the likes of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Jorges Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Northrop Frye, or William H. Gass. By my estimate, less than half of the text is actually Kroetsch speaking.

The dialogue becomes somewhat more bearable and readable when the interlocutors ask straight questions, as they would in a normal interview, or when they let Kroetsch run on about himself and his writing. His answers

tend to swing naturally towards concrete things — his childhood, his sense of landscape and history and community, his evident love for the West and what makes it different from the East. He is drawn toward large metaphors that can contain and explain both his delight in writing and his need to spin theories about what he has already written. One of his most striking and suggestive images is that of the archaeological site, where meaning is discovered through a painstaking recovery and reconstruction of fragments, during which the site itself is destroyed.

Kroetsch talks well about his major influences like Cervantes, Conrad, Nabokov, and contemporary South American writers. He has a genuine dislike for the kind of popular literature that trades on predictable conventions of form and language. He distrusts writers like Kerouac and Bukowski because, he says, their popularity is "a reaffirmation of the hope that language does signify something besides language." He talks frequently of "the temptation of meaning," sometimes as though it were one of the seven deadly sins, sometimes as though it were essential to his writing. He is occasionally given to arresting generalizations like "the Canadian writer is in a very exciting predicament . . . there's a profound sense in which we have nothing to write about," and he elaborates this later on by saying, "As a child I had that really strong feeling that I was living in a place that had no story to explain it and so I suppose one of the things I wanted to do was tell that story of nothing to tell." Statements like these are illuminating, but they are also bordering on nonsense.

Does Kroetsch really believe everything he says? Unfortunately, like so many literary interviewers, his interlocutors almost never challenge him, so for all the talk, there is little sense that real discourse is taking place.

At the very heart of this labyrinth lies something disturbing. It is not just that Neuman and Wilson treat traditional notions of human identity and integrity as outmoded and naïve; the book blurs over crucial distinctions between criticism and creation. As long as art and criticism remain separate and even contending activities, the artist is free to lead the way, to create according to his own best instincts. When criticism is allowed too much authority, it can usurp the artist's role and start constructing models for artists to follow. The results are almost always dreadful. What makes Kroetsch interesting is that the two forces exist within the same person, but my own feeling after reading *Labyrinths of Voice* is that it would be even more interesting for the rest of us if he were to give the artist in him more leeway. □

REVIEW

Ghosts of the Holocaust

By CARY FAGAN

Generations: Selected Poems, by Rachel Korn, Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, 60 pages, $12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88962 186 1) and $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 8896 185 3).

"WHEN ROCHL KORN died," said American critic Irving Howe at the Toronto Jewish Book Fair last year, "there was no replacement." Not only was Korn, who died last September in Montreal, a fine poet, but she was also a member of what may be the last generation of Yiddish writers.

"I am the gravestone of my people," she writes in a poem included in this selection ("The Words of My Alefbeyz"). She is a poet of grief, and to read her work is to feel her pain. Whereas many Jewish writers have recently used the Holocaust merely as a narrative device, Korn's whole literary consciousness has been formed by its direct impact on her life. Even when she writes about other subjects the ghosts of her murdered family, her People, fall over the words like a shadow: a naturally loving nature has learned to feel rage, a rage that in time has subsided into permanent sorrow.

Rochl (or Rachel) Korn was born in Podliski, an East Galician village, in 1898. Her first writings were in Polish, but soon she switched to Yiddish, a language then considered unliterary, a mere jargon that took a special commitment from a writer. After spending some difficult war years in the Soviet Union she emigrated to Canada and settled in 1948 in Montreal, a city that became a major centre of Yiddish writing after the annihilation of Polish Jewry.

Although Korn's poetry and fiction have been published widely and anthologized in translation, her work is, like that of most Canadian Yiddish writers,

largely unknown in her adopted country. This edition then, edited by Seymour Mayne and well translated by Mayne, Miriam Waddington, and others, is most welcome and, I hope, is the forerunner of other translations of Canadian Yiddish writers.

Some of Korn's best poems are anecdotal: they resonate with a deep sense of a folk past. "Crazy Levi," for example, tells of a man who wanders from village to village, suffering over a girl he loves but has been forbidden to marry. He endures the teasing of the women who ask him why he does not marry:

"Because my uncle wouldn't give me
his daughter for a wife.
I carry my heart around
like a cat in a sack,
and I want to leave it somewhere
so that it won't be able to find its
way back to me."

These early poems are undated, but I suspect they were written before the war, and if so then Korn's mournful tone has been part of her poetic voice from the beginning. They also seem more obviously influenced by such early Yiddish writers as I.L. Peretz.

Korn's sensibility is not feminist but womanly. Her greatest values are family; she displays a woman's passion for both her children and her own mother. Even a subtly erotic lyric entitled "I'm Soaked Through With You" has something maternal about it, and in another poem she tells her lover, "I'd love to meet your mother once/and kiss her hands." Mothers "always know far more than other women" and deserve love and veneration. Korn's own mother was killed by the Nazis, a death to which she responds with frail, domestic images, and tears.

Poetry is Korn's torment and saviour. "I fear that first line of a poem," she writes, but how can she resist it when a poem can bring back her beloved family? In "A New Dress," dated 1947, she uses a garment as metaphor for a poem and says it is "too short for my grief, too narrow for my sorrow . . . ." And yet the unsolvable irony is, of

course, that she continues to write poems.

Some of the other poems in *Generations* are too unfocused to generate the intended feeling. Those that deal directly with the Holocaust are less successful than those that skirt around it, leaving the unspoken truth hovering in the air. Korn is also — and this isn't really a criticism — a very limited poet. She makes no attempt to understand the Holocaust as a man-made, historical event. Such detachment is simply beyond her, as it must be for someone who experienced such a direct loss. The sense of fatalism and the natural imagery create a kind of autumn of the soul: the Holocaust becomes not only oddly inevitable, but insurmountable. It is from this perspective of her wounded life that we must read Korn's poems. Although Elie Wiesel's introduction to the book is not very useful, I understand what he means when he says, "Yes, I do love Rachel Korn." □

REVIEW

Back to the bottle

By SHARON DRACHE

Bacchanalia Revisited, by James H. Gray, Western Producer Prairie Books, 192 pages, $16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 088833 093 6).

SINCE HIS FIRST book, *The Winter Years* (1966), James H. Gray has been the official social historian of the Canadian West. His success is based on two assets: his ability to mythologize and his reporter's eye for fact (Peter Newman's *The Bronfman Dynasty* owes much to the painstaking, colourful research found in Gray's 1972 book *Booze*), and he has remained sensitive to the low guy on the totem pole, handicapped because of race, religion, or socio-economic status.

In *Bacchanalia Revisited*, Gray returns to a theme close to his heart. Born of an alcoholic father, he writes of temperance and prohibition with unbridled zeal. By his own admission his best childhood years were 1916-1920 — Prohibition years — when his father brought home his paycheque every week, instead of spending it on booze.

Gray's concern is still addiction. Everyone, he says, is drinking — from high school students to housewives to lawyers to politicians. It's like a Roman orgy, a sort of worship of alcoholic elix-

ir. The lowering of the drinking age in the Prairies to 18 in 1972 was an open invitation to 15- and 16-year-olds. In the first quarter of the book, Gray presents startling facts about middle-class teenage brawls in manicured suburbs, the parents and police powerless. It's all in an evening's entertainment . . . bacchanalia.

Primarily the book is concerned with the increase since Prohibition in alcoholism. Gray points out that "dry" years were never totally dry. Thanks to the mail order booze business, the Bronfman brothers, the Diamond brothers, and Nat Bell, liquor in the Prairies was available during Prohibition for anyone who could afford it. It was also during Prohibition that rum-running and bootlegging got their start, and the Bronfman boys turned Yorkton, Sask., into the blended whisky capital of the West. Throughout both "dry" and "wet" years the Calgary *Herald* clamoured against stringent liquor laws, shaping public opinion on booze more than any other Canadian newspaper.

The first politician to run on a booze ticket was Manitoba's Steven Juba. He was responsible not only for the integration of male and female drinkers in Manitoba bars in the 1950s, but was also the political harbinger of the Manitoba Bracken Commission, which saw the cocktail era firmly entrenched. It also brought the problem of alcoholism out of the closet. In an upsetting chapter on alcoholism among Canadian Indians, Gray cites Kenora, Ont., as the key place to observe the Indian drinking dilemma.

Gray has given Canadians a careful documentation of the rise of alcoholism not only in the Prairies but in all of Canada. He has pointed out that Canadian society is geared to alcohol in order to consummate virtually every act of social intercourse. Gray is not only documenting; he is warning. The harsh facts he presents are about a very real problem in Canadian society. □

INTERVIEW

Léandre Bergeron on linguistic purity in Quebec: 'Language is often a screen to prevent people from interacting with reality'

By DANIEL FRANCIS

LÉANDRE BERGERON was born on a farm in southern Manitoba in 1933, and studied in France before moving to Montreal, where he taught Quebecois literature at Sir George Williams University. Active in the left wing of the independence movement, he became known in English Canada in the early 1970s with the translation of *The History of Quebec: A Patriote's Handbook* (NC Press). His latest English publication is *The Quebecois Dictionary* (James Lorimer), originally published in French in 1980, while in the other official language he has just written *Petit manuel de l'accouchement à la maison*, a manual for home childbirth. No longer committed to an independent Quebec ("Separation implies that we have to go through an independent statehood and since the state is not a means of liberating the people it is no longer a goal of mine"), he now lives on a farm in the Abitibi region of Quebec with his wife Francine and their daughter Déirdre. On recent visit to Ottawa he was interviewed by Daniel Francis:

Books in Canada: *Why did you leave the city?*

Léandre Bergeron: For quite a few reasons. I was completely neutralized politically. On the left I had the Marxist-Leninists at me because I hadn't joined

Léandre Bergeron

their movement, and on the right I had the PQ, which I had severely criticized in a book called *Pourquoi une révolution au Québec*. After the publication of that book I was caught between the two. Of course, both used the worst smear tactics to ridicule me and make me lose all credibility. And professionally I felt I was starting to repeat myself. I had reached 42 years of age, and I felt if I stayed longer I would just tread the mill and think of my pension. So I said, "No, no, I'm not dead yet, I'm quitting."

Also because in Montreal I felt completely dependent on what I call the networks of the city. You rely on electricity, the postal system, the transport system; you are so dependent on so many networks, like a rat in a maze. So I said, "I'm going to get out of here and try to live as independently as possible."

BiC: *Was there a change in your political views at this time?*

Bergeron: Oh yes, absolutely. I considered myself in 1970-72 as a Marxist. Of course, the real Marxists told me I wasn't. They were possibly right, maybe I was never a Marxist. I was certainly against exploitation, against capitalist exploitation. But in Abitibi I started cleansing myself of all this ideology, which was very strong in me, and realizing that Marxism was in fact a 19th-century theory, that the countries that had tried to put this into practice were proving that it didn't work, that those countries were turning into totalitarian states. So I really got rid of that ideology. Now, if you ask me what I am politically, I just call myself an ecologist in all fields. I am still against the capitalist system, but my way of fighting it is not through class war. I don't follow those patterns anymore.

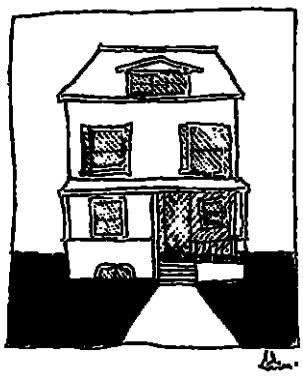
BiC: *How are you fighting the system now?*

Bergeron: It's not just capitalism I'm fighting. I'm fighting all powers that be. They manifest themselves in different ways. In my last two books I'm undermining quite a few things. In the *Dictionnaire de la langue québécoise* I am attacking the Quebecois elite of today that is promoting French French in Quebec. This elite, and the PQ is part of that elite, is trying to impose on the Quebecois a very retrograde conception of the language, and in fact sort of snuffing out the real living culture of Quebec. If they managed to Frenchify Quebec, as they would like to, the Quebecois would lose all their identity. But they won't.

BiC: *What do you say to people who tell you that Quebecois is not a language, it's simply an inferior brand of French?*

Bergeron: That is the official linguistic approach in Quebec. I tell them that if

the Quebecois are a people, then they are a living community with their particular traditions, their background, and their language becomes the language they speak. In Quebec most of modern French is part of our language, but it is much more than that. Frenchifying Quebec would be reducing the language of Quebec. I do not like the language to be used as an ideological tool to reduce



the interaction between a given people and the reality they are living. Language is often a screen used to prevent people from interacting with their reality.

BiC: *So you don't think it's a criticism of the language when people complain that it has adopted a lot of anglicisms?*

Bergeron: Of course not. That's its richness. English has borrowed 40 per cent of its vocabulary from French. Has it been polluted by French? Of course not, because English is a living language. In France they are caught up in a linguistic ideology that is still 17th-century. In France, and in an elite in Quebec, you still have the notion of the purity of the language. That's fascism in 1982. Our elite in Quebec have the notion that borrowing from English or any other language is pollution. That's incredible. That's why when my dictionary came out it caused such an uproar. I knew it would, of course, but you have to do it, you have to fight fascism in language just as you fight fascism in ordinary politics.

BiC: *Your dictionary has been released in English, and you have said that the time is right for this translation. Why?*

Bergeron: Things that have happened have stimulated some English Canadians to say, "What is so different in Quebec? Who are these people after all? What do they speak?" So this dictionary comes at the right time to get the two communities to start talking to one another. We've been talking through *élites interposées*. If English Canadians can see that we use these words, that they are words we use in our daily lives, and that we have the same daily problems, communications can be established, right?

BiC: *The latest book you've done is apparently quite a shift.*

Bergeron: Apparently, yes.

BiC: *It's a manual for giving birth at home. Could you describe its origins?*

Bergeron: We lived this fantastic experience, Francine and myself, in Abitibi, in our home. During her pregnancy we studied the possibility of having the baby at home. The more we studied, the more we decided that it was the natural thing to do. Most of the books were American, and after the birth I said to myself, "If a Quebecois wants to do the same thing, does he have to learn English? So I'll write this book."

It's not strictly a manual. It's more than that. I speak of the role of the man, the father. His role is very important. I don't consider that his role is just conceiving the child with the mother and saying, "OK, now the doctors will take care of you." It's the couple that is pregnant. It's the couple that gives birth to the child. In other words the responsibility of the birth is the man's responsibility — it's not only the woman's responsibility. And if the man plays an active role in the birthing process, it is simplified to such a degree. So I think it's a book for men.

BiC: *The birth happened at your farm. Who was present?*

Bergeron: Myself, my sister Marie, and two other friends.

BiC: *So there were no medical people?*

Bergeron: No, not even a midwife. In Abitibi right now there are no midwives. Now a midwife can be very helpful, but we consider that the birthing process is such an intimate thing, it's nearly as intimate as conception. I mean, you don't conceive the child on an operating table. You conceive the child in the intimacy of a bedroom, and the birthing process should be the same. Of course, I favour midwives, but in our case it wasn't really possible, so we did it alone, and everything went well.

BiC: *How do you respond to people who talk to you of the risk?*

Bergeron: If people study the birthing process seriously they identify the risk, the complications. To us, there was really no great risk. The big problem with birthing is that people freak out because they've been terrorized by the medical profession. They've been told, you're not big enough to do it, you're too stupid, you're too incompetent, a pregnant woman is a sick woman, and all this crap. In England 50 per cent of the children are born at home with midwives. Are Canadian and Quebecois women less healthy than the British? The birthing process is a natural process. If the woman is healthy and has been checked throughout her pregnancy, what is the problem?

BiC: *It seems that there is a unity in all the books that you've written, that there is still a political intent in your books.*

Bergeron: Right. I am attacking a medical establishment, a certain power that terrorizes women, and men as well. Men, husbands, have been told they are completely incompetent in the field, that they are just the ones who have caused all this pain to their women, that they have enjoyed the pleasure of conception but ran away after. Well I don't take that crap. This book is certainly an attack on the medicalization of child birth and on the powers that the medical establishment has. At the same time it is attacking the State, which is favouring these doctors. The State is the Big Momma that is taking care of our birthing, our schooling, our jobs. What? Are we unconscious robots in this society? Can we not live fantastic experiences like birthing?

BiC: *In everything you've written you're attracted to manuals and self-help books.*

Bergeron: What I'm really driving at is responsibility of oneself. If we could develop in this society people who are responsible for their own bodies, their own health, their own child-bearing, their own education, and not relying on institutions to take care of us, we would be starting to have a new society. I don't believe in class struggle anymore. I don't think that will change society. I think

that we have to go through personal revolutions, that we start changing ourselves, that we become responsible for our own lives. What underlies my publications is this constant anti-establishment, anti-power attitude. We would not be governed if we were all responsible for what we do, critical and responsible. We are governed because we consider ourselves incompetent, childish, and we will change our society and do away with the powers that be if we do develop this critical attitude and say we can do things ourselves. □

THE BROWSER

Dramatic readings: from radio's role in Canadian theatre to the NFB's annoying habit of dubbing French-language films

By MORRIS WOLFE

THE WORST THING about **The Expos Inside Out** by Dan Turner (McClelland & Stewart, 203 pages, $18.95 cloth) is its unimaginative title. Apart from that, this book contains the best writing on baseball that I've read outside Roger Angell's superb *New Yorker* articles. Turner loves the game. (No patronizing Tom Alderman of *The Journal* is he.) Turner can take all-too-familiar statistics and turn them on their head. The Expos may have been third in fielding average, he says, but they "smelled like ninth or tenth." Tim Raines, for example, made only two errors in 1982, but he was so spaced out on drugs most of the time that he rarely knew where he or the ball was. My favourite line in the book is Al Oliver's: "I don't see how anybody can criticize a player of my ability and attitude."

NAIM KATTAN commented in *Books in Canada* some months ago that Northrop Frye "sometimes reduced literature to the condition of a corpse, so that he could study its anatomy." George Woodcock takes up this point in a review symposium on *The Great Code* in the Winter 1982/3 issue of the **University of Toronto Quarterly**: "Except here and there in a fugitive way in the 'Letters in Canada' reviews he used to write, I have never felt the sense of a book as a living entity emerging from Fry's [sic] critical writings, though those writings have their own life. There is, in all this brilliance of understanding . . . an absence of empathy, which explains why Frye may confront the work, but never encounter its maker. . . . With all good literature, . . . something more than decoding is necessary; the critic without empathy is no complete critic."

The same issue of *UTQ* contains a brilliant essay by T.D. MacLulich titled "The Canadian Tradition in Fiction." MacLulich distinguishes between Canadian and American culture by looking at the fiction produced in the two countries. Westerns, he argues ("novels of civilization evaded"), predominate in U.S. fiction. Northern ("novels of passion denied and sentiment repressed in the name of reason and social custom") predominate in Canadian fiction. "American protagonists often seek to escape from history," says MacLulich, "whereas many Canadian protagonists discover their true identities only by acknowledging their place in a historical continuum." Well worth reading.

CBC ENGLISH-LANGUAGE television almost never allows us to hear any French. Translators rush in to protect us from it after the first few words are uttered. So I wasn't surprised, when *Les Bons Debarras* was recently shown by CBC-TV, that we saw a dubbed rather than a subtitled version. (The CBC French network, it's interesting to note, doesn't share the English network's aversion to subtitles.) But I was astonished to discover that the National Film Board office in Toronto now has only dubbed versions of two films I show my Canadian film history students, *Mon Oncle Antoine* and *J.A. Martin, photographe*. Which means, of course, that the tension between the anglophone foreman and the francophone workers in *Mon Oncle Antoine* now is totally lost on the viewer. Is it too much to ask that subtitled versions of those films be available for those of us perverse enough to prefer them that way?

ONE HAS TO be pleased that **Canadian Theatre Review** devoted much of a re-

cent issue (number 36) to radio drama. It's an indication that theatre historians have finally recognized the central role radio has played in the development of Canadian theatre. At the same time, it's difficult not to be disappointed by the carelessness with which the issue was assembled. Mary Jane Miller's excellent article, "Radio's Children," for instance, is seriously marred by typographical errors. A memoir by George Ryga is so badly written that it ought not to have been published. Another article, "Walking a Thin Line," by *Globe and Mail* reporter Carole Corbeil, consists mostly of a personal attack on the current head of CBC-Radio drama, Susan Rubes. Her piece feels more like something the *Globe* rejected than a scholarly article. Still, there are enough good things in this issue of *CTR* that anyone seriously interested in Canadian radio will want to read it. An essay, for example, by Howard Fink about Concordia University's radio drama project. And a touching memoir by Len Peterson about working with Andrew Allan and Esse Ljungh. *CTR* is available from York University, Downsview, Ont. M3J 1P3.

MICHAEL COOK argues in *Canadian Theatre Review* that radio should once again "commit itself to raising the level of our common consciousness." A similar point is made by Murray Schafer in a recent essay, "Radical Radio," in the December/January issue of the Canadian Forum. "Why should it not be possible," he writes, "to record the changing of the tides and the winds, or the coming of the birds in spring? . . . Why is it not possible for radio to take hold of the pulse of another civilization, say in the reading of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, non-stop for as long as it takes? . . . Or the music of Africa, and China and South America . . . , the music of bamboo and of stones, the music of crickets and cicadas, the music of waterwheels and waterfalls, uninterrupted for hours." Anyone familiar with some of Schafer's lovely "soundscapes" can imagine the possibilities. Remember the program that took us from St. John's to Vancouver simply by splicing together all the answers to the question "How do we get to . . . from here?" What we heard, as we slowly moved from East to West, were all the dialects and linguistic idiosyncrasies that make up this strange country.

THE RECENT EXCHANGE between poet David Donnell and critic Gary Michael Dault in these pages on the nature of post-modernism made me realize once more that I don't understand what post-modernism is. Now along comes Roger Shattuck in the March 14 issue of The New Republic to question even the notion of modernism. "It's all make-work," he has a student say, "an exercise in nomenclature with no grounding in compelling events or works. Modernism is not a meaningful category of literary history or art history. It's a feather bed for critics and professors, an endlessly renewable pretext for scholars to hold conferences, devise special numbers, and glass each other's works into powder." I suspect that Shattuck's article, "The Poverty of Modernism," will be discussed for years.

NO ONE WHO writes or edits books will want to be without **Author & Editor: A Working Guide** by Rick Archbold, Doug Gibson, Dennis Lee, John Pearce, and Jan Walter (Book and Periodical Development Council, 36 pages, $2.95 paper). All aspects of the publishing process, from finding a publisher to resolving disputes, are discussed by five of our leading editors. They do so with intelligence, understanding, and good humour.

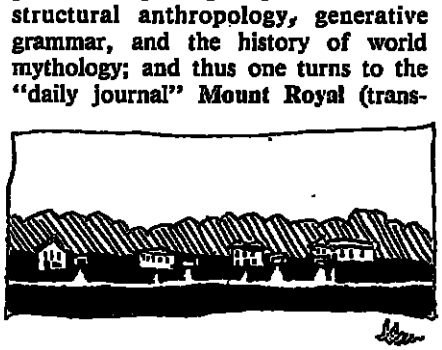
MY AWARD FOR the most vicious attack on a newly dead writer during the past six months goes to Lawrence Stone for his comments on E.H. Carr, the British historian, who died in November, 1982. In "Grim Eminence," the lead article in the January 20 edition of **The London Review of Books** (a far more lively journal these days than its New York counterpart), Stone informs us that Carr was, among other things, a bad teacher, a mean husband, a nasty reviewer, and a crummy historian. So terrible a person was Carr, writes Stone, that even "his own parents did not care for him." □

IN TRANSLATION

Though skilfully written, Robert Marteau's impassioned, at times wearisome, arguments betray a lack of social sophistication

By PAUL STUEWE

ALTHOUGH SEVERAL OF Robert Marteau's books have already been translated into English, there seems to be little awareness among anglophone readers of the prestige this French-born writer enjoys in his adopted Quebec. This can probably be largely attributed to the mutual ignorance between our two literary cultures and the distributional vagaries of small-press publishing, but in the case of Marteau a good deal of dedication and erudition is also required of the prospective reader. The short prose narratives of **Interlude**, one of two new titles from Exile Editions (translated by Barry Callaghan, $8.95 paper), presume a passing acquaintance with structural anthropology, generative grammar, and the history of world mythology; and thus one turns to the "daily journal" **Mount Royal** (translated by David Homel, $9.95 paper) in hopes that it will provide a more accessible way into Marteau's work.



Mount Royal is easier reading than *Interlude*, but its contents are by no means the sort of discursive jottings one finds in many literary journals. These are highly polished observations and meditations, written with future publication in mind; they often display rhetorical and didactic intentions that tacitly acknowledge the presence of an audience. They are neither conversations with nor advertisements for the author's self, but rather a series of impassioned arguments lodged within the more conventional descriptive and ruminative framework of the literary journal.

The entry for May 21, 1979, provides a good example of Marteau's technique. It begins with a description of the natural setting, then recounts an instance of physical suffering and draws psychological and metaphysical implications from it. This sort of graduated transition from personal experience to philosophical reflection seems logical and familiar, but the sudden interjection of "If Christ had appeared among the Haida, they would have accepted him

with open arms" seems neither. It introduces a lament for the "shattered debris" of West-Coast Indian culture that makes a powerful argument for the intrinsic worth of its subject, but does so at the risk of alienating that developing relationship with the author which can constitute one of the deepest pleasures of reading.

There seems to be a hidden agenda of specific concerns here that we are not going to be let in on, but are instead supposed to accept as a natural, organic component of a mind roaming freely over the data of daily perception. This may be making too much of what in a less accomplished writer would merely be an indication of deficient craft; but since Marteau is both a highly conscious and highly skilled literary artisan, I can only conclude that this method has been deliberately chosen, and is therefore a legitimate object of criticism.

Although its reportorial observations and their philosophical spinoffs are often abruptly replaced by programmatic concerns, *Mount Royal* is still rich in the kind of thoughtful, deeply sympathetic depiction of nature that seems to have been abandoned by post-modernist writers attempting to invent the perpetually reflexive self. Sensitivity to colour and humility before natural beauty are as characteristic of Marteau's perplexing book as a whole as they are of

> . . . rain clothing the woods, the hour struck and the sifting, cloth with warp or weft, thread after thread forever beginning from top to bottom, not perpendicular, thick, brittle, untearable, penetrated with impunity at its furthest point, behind, always further there is an infinity of threads untied, catching in the grass, blistering the pool, forming a muddy pustule torn by milky oyster and medusa; it is raining and there are bushes of twigs flaming purple and the birches wear coal-black rings and black bulbs and black incisions in their stroke of frozen metal; and the lozenges of rough bark resemble a cuticle enlarged by the microscope; and the stems of herbaceous plants that winter froze on their feet draw bloodstone lines and it is magic looking between the spruce-fir cones and the verdigrised dome of the Oratoire Saint-Joseph.

I must confess that as I read the book a second time I found myself editing out the more argumentative material. As a result I was able to more fully concentrate on the many passages of similar beauty.

But this is Marteau's book, and thus his programmatic concerns do have to be considered. They certainly are legitimate, even to some extent conventionally wise, responses to important social issues: his defence of threatened native cultures, his disparagement of the excesses of consumer societies, and his disgust at our continuing rape of the natural environment will all engage the sympathies of any fair-minded reader. What is much more surprising, however, is the virulence, at times seemingly close to self-hatred, with which Marteau expresses himself:

> The Indians were the Greeks of America. Both their heritages were pillaged, and the shadow Furies, still called the Eumenides, take out their vengeance in every soul.

and

> Today's knowledge, which we call science, took a stand against the fable, against the myth, and revolted against the word, not knowing that it was spun from it, wrapped in it. This questioning will finish in death. Will we be its witnesses, martyrs or victims?

This constant exaltation of native peoples and non-rational thought processes, and concomitant denigration of the "civilized" and rational, ultimately becomes very wearying. One finds oneself arguing the opposite case if only to relieve the monotony. Granted that Marteau is championing the historical losers, his dogmatism and refusal to consider the viewpoint of the villains of his piece make much of *Mount Royal* seem like special pleading. I was at several points tempted to mail him a one-way

ticket to some region where he might have a chance to experimentally test his theories — the headwaters of the Amazon, or the central African rain forests, say. I think he would discover there how necessity occasions many of the practices he assumes to be voluntarily adopted. He might thereby gain a level of social-scientific sophistication commensurate with his exceptional literary talents.

Those talents are consistently displayed in *Interlude*, a series of "revelations" that cloak the elemental mysteries of life in delightfully fresh mythic garb. A high level of fantastical invention is sustained throughout, with consequences that bring to mind Doris Lessing's "Canopus in Argos" novels: dazzled by the author's fancy footwork, we are easily seduced into reading narratives that might otherwise seem excessively intellectual. Not that they aren't intellectually difficult — they are, and in some cases pretentiously so. Still, one can usually enjoy them without worrying about their more complex significances. The kind of tale thus generated is the meta-fable of Borges, Lem, and Calvino, and Marteau's versions possess the same blend of whimsy, *chutzpah*, and fussily telling detail:

> Ka-a-lam lived on the stone of Lô. He knew all about the three worlds but did not speak, never moved his limbs, did not blink, did not urinate, never defecated, and was not a statue; he breathed, had a heartbeat. Ka-a-lam had been man, had been saint, had become dung, had been buried, and had nourished a growing plant that had crossed the huge stone of Lô; you could see this plant was none other than Ka-a-lam himself.
>
> Ka-a-lam was entirely useless. He performed no miracles. But wasn't it miraculous seeing him breathe, hearing his heart beat? Par-le-Farsi dedicated a treatise to him, entitled *Om'loukis if Ka-a-lam*, that is, *Variations of light on the face of Ka-a-lam*. I'll relate what I learned from a magnetic tape, recorded by a police captain called to a house in Pastré where a pubescent girl was provoking displacements of objects and tearing a few shreds of time from the immemorial. . . .

And therein, you can bet, hangs a tale.

Although devouring them all at one go might bring on mental indigestion, nibbled a few at a time these are stimulating excursions into the literary twilight zone. They establish that Marteau is perfectly capable of correcting the excesses and imbalances of *Mount Royal*. Reading these two books left me in no doubt as to why he is so well thought of in Quebec, and I look forward to further revelations from a most provocative and adventurous writer. □

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Bunnies and beavers: from a frustrating humanoid computer to the grim lessons of survival in war-torn Budapest

By MARY AINSLIE SMITH

THE QUALITY of Canadian stories for young children is constantly and delightfully improving. **Big or Little?**, by Kathy Stinson, illustrated by Robin Baird Lewis (Annick Press, 32 pages, $10.95 cloth, $4.95 paper), is the second children's book from this writer-illustrator team, following their 1982 *Red Is Best*. The little boy in *Big or Little?* is beginning to experience the tensions and conflicts of growing up. Sometimes, such as when he ties his own shoes or takes care of his little sister, he feels big. When he is scolded or lost, he knows he is still small. Stinson's text has a simple and very pleasing rhythm. Lewis's illustrations show a thoughtful and serious little boy working out his place in the world.

Annick has a popular series of very small paperbacks called Annikins — about the size of booklets of postage stamps, but cheaper at 99¢ each. There are three new Annikins this spring, all written by Robert Munsch and illustrated by Michael Martchenko, 24 pages long, and a lot of fun. In **Angela's Airplane** five-year-old Angela loses her father on a visit to the airport, and while looking for him finds herself alone in the cockpit of an airplane. When she starts to push buttons, of course the plane takes off, placing Angela in quite a predicament.

In **The Fire Station** two children's routine visit to the neighbourhood fire station becomes unexpectedly exciting when they are swept off in the back seat of a fire truck to the scene of a tremendous fire. **Mortimer** tells the story of a little boy who will *not* be quiet when he goes to bed, in spite of the admonitions of his father, mother, 17 brothers and sisters, and two policemen. Buy this book just for the picture of Mortimer on his bed, kneeling like a miniature Al Jolson and singing "Bang-bang, rattle-ding-bang, goin' to make my noise all day!" Buy enough of all these books to give to all your friends, adult and child. In fact, buy a few extras, because their size makes them very susceptible to falling through holes in book bags, between mattresses and headboards, and into heating ducts.

In **Mr. Wurtzel and the Halloween Bunny**, by Anita Krumins, illustrated by Brian Fray (Three Trees Press, 24 pages, $11.95 cloth, $4.95 paper), little Emily, dressed as a baby bunny for trick or treating, encounters the cynicism of the adult world. First her father does not admire her bunny suit, and insists that an appropriate Halloween costume should be scary, not cute. Then the first house she visits is Mr. Wurtzel's. Nobody likes Mr. Wurtzel, because he is so mean. He hates anything cute, and threatens to put Emily into a rabbit stew. Children will enjoy Mr. Wurtzel ragings, and adults will be satisfied that the story does not have a saccharine ending. Although Emily's optimism comes out on top, Mr. Wurtzel does *not* become the neighbourhood philanthropist.

Children's books are often used as vehicles to convey messages, morals that tend to dominate the presentation of plot and character. **Ms Beaver Goes West**, by Rosemary Allison and Ann Powell (Women's Press, 32 pages, $4.95 paper), seems to be that sort of story. Ms Beaver, whose previous travels have taken her to Toronto and Maritimes, visits her cousin Penny in British Columbia. They discover that a logging company has cut down all the trees in the area, thus upsetting the environmental balance:

> "What's this?" said Ms Beaver. "Where are all the trees?"
>
> "It must be that logging company," said Cousin Penny. "They've cut down all those trees! If there are no trees, all the animals will go away. When the rain falls, all the salmon streams will fill up with mud."

No one can deny the justice of Ms Beaver's crusades, but her solutions are too simple. She and Cousin Penny confront the J.P. Magee Logging Company and shut it down until Magee agrees to a tree-replanting program. But the acres of tiny trees that the beavers help to plant — by digging holes with their teeth and patting the seedlings down with their paws — seem a far from satisfactory replacement for whole mountains of mature trees cut down by rapacious loggers. Perhaps J.P. Magee will henceforth follow a program of consistent reforestation. Powell's line draw-

ings are printed in forest green, and present an appealingly buck-toothed Ms Beaver, a cheerful and plucky, if rather strangely anthropomorphic, little heroine.

In a Big Ugly House Far From Here, by Magda Zalan (Press Porcépic, 87 pages, $6.95 paper), is another book that clearly has something to say. Zalan describes in 10 related stories the life of a child surviving the bombing in Budapest during the Second World War. When her home was destroyed in 1942, she and her family were forced to live for the duration of the war in a small apartment in the big ugly house, filled with other refugees from happier times. The stories present the child's perceptions of her surroundings, her neighbours, and the events that caused her father to become a deserter, sent her to the country for a fattening cure, and killed her friend Kati in a bombing raid. It's grim, but the stories are told gently and with humour, so that readers don't feel sorry for the child Magda as much as they feel sympathy with her. Julius Varga's marvellously detailed pictures, crowded with people, animals, jagged skylines, and rubble from the bombings, help to create a strong sense of what it must have been like to grow up in such a desperate situation.

Print-Outs, by Claudia Cornwall (Nerve Press, 5875 Elm Street, Vancouver V6N 1A6, $5.95 paper), is the story of Edgar, a computer with feelings. Tired of being taken for granted and treated like a mere machine, Edgar rebels and prints out his problems, much to the frustation of his programmer, who can't understand what bugs have gotten into the system. Edgar also prints out poetry and art, searching all the time for a kindred spirit to communicate with. The story, printed on computer paper — with holes down the side — also provides a glossary of "Edgar's Lingo": such computer terminology as "cursor," "edit mode," and "voice data entry terminal." I'm not sure whether it's nice to imagine that computers can be human too, or whether that makes the new technology even more threatening.

Undertow, by George Swede (Three Trees Press, 64 pages, $10.95 cloth, $4.95 paper), is the story of three young teenagers, a bungling policeman, and their exciting encounters with heroin smugglers in Stanley Park. The story is told in a series of rapidly shifting points of view, with the result that it is fast-paced but rather elliptical and confusing.

Scholastic-TAB has three new paperbacks about young people with problems. **In Goodbye, Carleton High**, by B.J. Bond (131 pages, $2.25), the hero is facing failure in grade 10 because of his dyslexia. **Don't Call Me Sugar Baby!**, by Dorothy Joan Harris (148 pages, $2.25), tells about a 12-year-old girl who has just been diagnosed diabetic. **Who Cares About Karen?**, by Alison Lohans Pirot (151 pages, $2.25), describes how 14-year-old Karen overcomes her desperate feelings of shyness and inferiority when confronted with survival after a car crash in the British Columbia interior. All these stories, true to the best traditions of the genre, have optimistic, up-beat endings, and all, consistent with Scholastic traditions, are easy and enjoyable to read.

Core, (Station H, Box 186, Toronto M4C 5JC, 112 pages) is subtitled "Stories and poems celebrating the lives of ordinary people who call Toronto their home." They have been collected by Ruth Johnson and edited by Enid Lee. The book is a celebration of Cabbagetown, its history, its people, and the diversity of their ethnic origins. It contains many photographs and drawings to illustrate the stories and poems and a tribute to the most famous inhabitant of Cabbagetown, Hugh Garner. An attractive book, *Core* will engender pride and interest in children growing up in Cabbagetown today. □

PAPERBACKS

White attitudes toward Canada's native peoples haven't changed much over the years, but neither has the Indians' ability to survive them

By ANNE COLLINS

IT'S FUNNY how you have to go far away sometimes in order to begin to see what home is like. For me, any serious thinking about the situation of native peoples in Canada only began last year, during a month-long trip to South Africa. In the rhetorical war over apartheid, the favorite ammunition of some of the whites I talked to was the Canadian example: wasn't what Canada had done with its indigenous peoples a form of apartheid? Disinformation about Indian reservations had even become part of the South African school system's teachings on apartheid, so successful that one black doctor sincerely asked me if it was true, as he'd been taught, that North American Indians had volunteered of their own free will to live on reserves in order to maintain their racial purity.

But before I picked up the following two paperbacks by social anthropologist Hugh Brody, **Maps and Dreams** (Penguin, $6.95) and **The People's Land** (Penguin, $5.95), I had only thought myself into a fatalistic dead end. What kind of future was possible for a small minority that had been stripped not only of much of its culture but also of most possibilities of viable economic life? It seemed to me that Indians either lived a kind of nostalgic half-life devoted to the futile exercise of reinventing the past, or cut the bonds of their Indian-ness to learn white ways of coping in a white world. They either harvested wild rice in a canoe with all the old ceremony or bought a power-harvester and sold the quadrupled intake to American gourmets. Both seemed like no-win situations.

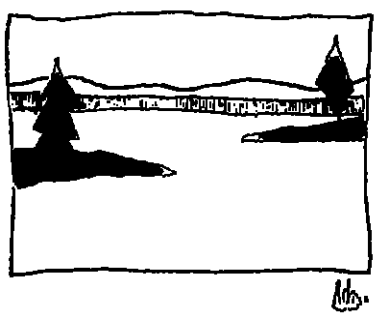
Hugh Brody himself was so pessimistic about the options of the Beaver Indians of the northeast corner of British Columbia that when he was hired to do a land use and occupancy study of the area by the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs he agreed to stay just five weeks, and only in an advisory role: ". . . many people had told me that the region had been so devastated by frontier developments as to make any work with its Indian peoples a thoroughly disheartening experience." He ended by staying 18 months, living and hunting with the Indians of one tiny reserve as well as being their regular chauffeur into the local town, and *Maps and Dreams* is the result. It's a book that unlocks the doors of prejudice, skepticism, and misconception to lead its readers into the heart of a hunting society that has definitely not yet been wiped out by even the newest version of the wild frontier: burgeoning white dreams of the North as non-renewable energy resource heaven.

Brody's assignment was to marshal statistics, to make maps with the Indians detailing their current use of Crown land under Treaty 8 for hunting, fishing, and berry-picking, and to investigate all

sources of income to prove, first, that the Indians did have a workable hunting economy. Then he was to consider the effect that the last straw in resource development — the proposed Alaska Highway natural gas pipeline — would have on peoples who had already been pushed into the edges of territory they had hunted on for centuries by white agriculture, mining, forestry, and sundry mega-projects like the W.A.C. Bennett Hydroelectric Dam.

His arguments, carefully developed in the even-numbered chapters of the book, show how the maps and dreams of Indians and whites collide — and how early, vaguely worded treaties and trapline agreements based on white ideas of land ownership (along with stereotypes of Indian hunters as feckless, drunken, and poor) "make it possible for settlers and developers to pay no heed to the Indians' [present] economic and cultural systems." But more important, he stresses the Indians' ability to survive in the face of white attitudes and policies that haven't changed all that much since the first white trader made contact.

The northeastern corner of British Columbia is believed to be the cradle of all North American hunting societies; the Athapaskan Indians (of which the Beaver are a part) are the inheritors of a culture that reaches 1.5 million years into the past to the first hunter-gatherers on earth. In the odd-numbered chapters of the book, Brody breaks the bounds of most "studies" by letting the Indians, and his own awakening perceptions of the richness of their everyday lives, set the agenda. Each academic chapter is counterpointed by a chapter of narrative describing a portion of his 18 months on the reserve — slowly and subtly he persuades the reader on an emotional as well as intellectual level that the Indians



do have lives that work. They have been changed by trading and trapping, new technology, and the temptations of a spree-drunk when they come out of the woods. The hard ironies of their relationships with whites abound in crossed purposes and misunderstandings: the reserve's ugly little houses are built close together in a mock-suburb to make it easier to deliver services like electricity and running water, neither of which is supplied to the reserve . . . and so on. On the surface, which is what whites normally see, is apparent squalor and despair.

But Brody also follows the Beaver on a hunt, into the woods and to the life they keep hidden, and tries to evoke the mind of the hunter, so different from agricultural Euro-North American man. A seemingly lazy and aimless sprawl of men at a river's edge suddenly reveals its true nature to Brody (and to us):

> Yet the hunters were a long way from sleep; not even the atmosphere was soporific. They wait, watch, consider. Above all they are still and receptive, prepared for whatever insight or realization may come to them, and ready for whatever stimulus to action might arise. This state of attentive waiting is perhaps as close as people can come to the falcon's suspended flight, when the bird, seemingly motionless, is ready to plummet in decisive action.

It's a flexible mind that the Indians have also turned toward adapting to their continuing relationship with whites:

> In historic times these people have been able to use their flexibility to escape restrictions imposed by treaties, and to defy any stereotypic suggestion that their way of life is dead. No one should be surprised when the Indians of today insist that their ways of looking at the world and harvesting its resources will outlive any other. It is not nostalgia, or sentimentality, when the Indians affirm their own identity and special interests; they are not paying their respects to an idealized and fossilized past.

Maps and Dreams takes its readers a long way from attitudes of futility and despair over the inevitable destruction of the native way of life. It leaves us, for once, confronting the possible. The white economic pipe-dream of the infinitely expanding energy frontier of the North is perhaps as destructive of white society in the long run as it is of native. Even small redraftings of white maps of northeastern British Columbia — less forestry, less mining, fewer white sports hunters taking more than their fair share of moose and deer — will leave the Indians enough that they can remain hunters.

The People's Land is an earlier book of Brody's, published originally in 1975 and based on his 1971-75 sojourns in the eastern Arctic as part of the team that did ground-breaking land use and occupancy studies of the Inuit. (The Inuit never signed treaties, and any land claims they make have to explain all the ways in which they live, and have lived, on the land.) While not as beautifully written as *Maps and Dreams*, in which the story-teller overshadows the academic, it is equally eloquent — rich with material that shatters preconceptions of the North, its fabled hunters and the white triumvirate of Hudson's Bay factors, missionaries, and RCMP officers who essentially colonized the North for Canada.

As Brody notes in a tiny addition to his original foreword, the picture in the far north has changed since 1975. The Inuit as a whole are far more aware of their rights and far more outspoken in their anger with white administration of their settlements. An updated version of the book is soon due. But *The People's Land* is still an excellent history and analysis of the white-Inuit relationship, and especially of the different and powerful effects that the stereotype of the "real Eskimo" (child of the harshest landscape southerners could imagine) had on both Inuk and white. It's a bit of a *non sequitur*, but I want to close with a quote from *The Eskimo Book of Knowledge*, published in 1931 by the Hudson's Bay Company and translated for the benefit of those it was supposed to enlighten by missionaries:

> Take heed, Innuit, for the future will bring even greater changes than have taken place in your country in the past twenty years. . . . Many White men will explore your lands in search of precious rocks and minerals. These traders and these trappers and these wanderers are like the drift-ice; today they come with the wind, tomorrow they are gone with the wind. Of these strangers some will be fairer than others, as is the nature of men; but whosoever they be, they cannot at heart possess that deep understanding of your lives through which our Traders have learned to bestow the care of a father upon you and upon your children. □

CANWIT NO. 83

WE HAVE recently received word that Peter Newman, at work on a book about the Hudson's Bay Company, is not the only Canadian writer who has turned his talents to corporate history. Other titles being rumoured are *The Clock That Ends the Night: The Westclox Story*, by Hugh MacLennan, and *Sole on Ice: A History of CCM Skates*, by Scott Young. We'll pay $25 for the best suggestions for other corporate histories that reach us before August 1, and $25 goes to Ron Robinson of Winnipeg for the idea. Address: CanWit No. 83, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

Results of CanWit No. 81

OUR REQUEST for back-to-back books brought a landslide of titles *à trois*. The

winner is Larry Mathews of Victoria, B.C., for a list that includes:

- ☐ *Something I've Been Meaning To Tell You/Canada Made Me/My Heart Is Broken*
- ☐ *More Joy in Heaven/Dance of the Happy Shades/Perpetual Motion*
- ☐ *Thin Ice/Going Down Slow/Surfacing*
- ☐ *The Blue Mountains of China/This Side Jordan/You Can't Get There from Here*
- ☐ *The Mad Trapper/The Last of the Crazy People/I Don't Want to Know Anyone Too Well*
- ☐ *Home Truths/From a Seaside Town/God Is Not a Fish Inspector*

Honourable mentions:

- ☐ *The Snow Walker/White Figure, White Ground/That's Me in the Middle*
- ☐ *The Firebrand/Flames Across the Border/The Scorched-Wood People*
- ☐ *Barometer Rising/Hold Fast/Tempest Tost*
- ☐ *Stepping Stones/A Fine and Private Place/Spit Delaney's Island*

— John Gregory, Toronto

- ☐ *That Summer in Paris/Confessions/Fat Woman*
- ☐ *The Betrayal/By Persons Unknown/Power Politics*
- ☐ *Violation of the Virgins/Beautiful Losers/Doing Time*

— L. Patrice Ward, Saskatoon

- ☐ *Fat Woman/The Acrobats/The Swinging Flesh*
- ☐ *Dragon Lady/Dragon's Breath/Such Is My Beloved*
- ☐ *Famous Players/Shoeless Joe/The Swell Season*

— W.M. McLaughlin, Windsor, N.S.

- ☐ *How I Spent My Summer Vacation/The Swell Season/The Fat Woman Next Door Is Pregnant*
- ☐ *A Fairly Conventional Woman/The Marriage Bed/Junction*

— Mary Lile Benham, Winnipeg

- ☐ *My Spirit Soars/My Heart Is Broken/Heaven and Hell in the NHL*

- ☐ *Grits/Radical Tories/More Losers*

— Sheila Peters and Lynn Shervill, Smithers, B.C.

- ☐ *The Boat Who Wouldn't Float/Women and Children First/Grey Seas Under*
- ☐ *Love in the Dog House/Bassett/Go-Boy!*
- ☐ *Love Affair with a Cougar/Consequences/Bodily Harm*

— Brian McCullough, Kanata, Ont.

- ☐ *Fat Woman/Beautiful Losers/More Joy in Heaven*

— Marjorie Retzleff, Lennoxville, Que.

- ☐ *What the Crow Said/Calling Home/From a High Thin Wire*

— Ann Knight, Calgary

- ☐ *Over Prairie Trails/The Vanishing Point/You Can't Get There from Here*

— Ed Prato, Vancouver

CLASSIFIED

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

A Sound Like Laughter, by David Helwig, Stoddart. The last in Helwig's Kingston tetralogy, this exuberant comedy centres on the disastrous messes we can get ourselves into in the pursuit of what seem to us reasonable goals.

NON-FICTION

Trailing Pythagoras, by George Galt, Quadrant Editions. Galt combines Pythagorean philosophy with the 19th-century travels of his great-great-grandfather John Galt to illumine his own wanderings, in which he reveals a Greece as yet unspoiled by tourism.

POETRY

A Sad Device, by Roo Borson, Quadrant Editions. Borson's meditations on the mysterious forces behind nature and male-female relationships are ripe with sensuous detail.

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:

Annual Flowers, by John Bradshaw, McClelland & Stewart.
The Bantams, by Sidney Allinson, Mosaic Press.
Bear, by Marian Engel, McClelland & Stewart.
Breaking Up Ontario Hydro's Monopoly, by Lawrence Solomon, Energy Probe.
Canada's Cultural Industries: Broadcasting, Publishing, Records and Film, by Paul Audley, Lorimer.
Canada and the New Constitution: The Unfinished Agenda, edited by Stanley M. Beck and Ivan Bernier, Vol. 1 and 2, Institute for Research on Public Policy.
Canada's Video Revolution, by Peter Lyman, Lorimer.
Canadian Family Law, Third Edition, by Malcolm C. Kronby, General.
The Canadian West Discovered, by Mary Javorski, Glenbow Museum.
Closing the Gaps, by Sheila Marindale, South Western Ontario Poetry.
Coast of Many Faces, by Ulli Steltzer and Catherine Kerr, Douglas & McIntyre.
The Coming of Winter, by David Adams Richards, McClelland & Stewart.
Coming to Grips with White Knuckles, by P.C. Brown, Williams-Wallace.
The Consolidation of Capitalism: 1896-1929, edited by Michael S. Cross, McClelland & Stewart.
The Critical Strategy, by Hedi Bouraoui, ECW.
Disappearances: True Accounts of Canadians Who Have Vanished, by Derrick Murdoch, Doubleday.
Displaced Persons, by Fred Bonnie, Oberon Press.
Economy and Society During the French Regime to 1759, edited by Michael S. Cross and Gregory S. Kealey, McClelland & Stewart.
The Education of J.J. Pass, by T.F. Rigelhof, Oberon Press.
The Fighting Parson, by C.H. Gervais, The Porcupine's Quill.
Fishin' Hats, by Gord Deval, Simon & Pierre.
Five Legs/Communion, by Graeme Gibson, McClelland & Stewart.
A Gathering Instinct, by Betsy Warland, Williams-Wallace.
Georgian Bay Gourmet Summer Entertaining, by Anne Connell *et al.*, Musson.
Growing Gourmet Vegetables, by John Bradshaw, McClelland & Stewart.
Houses of God, by Gail Fox, Oberon Press.
The Indoor Plant Primer, by John Bradshaw, McClelland & Stewart.
The Introduction of Pay-TV in Canada, edited by R. Brian Woodrow and Kenneth B. Woodside, Institute for Research on Public Policy.
John Bradstreet's Quest, by William G. Godfrey, Wilfrid Laurier Press.
Just Bats, by M. Brock Fenton, U of T Press.
Kunato, by Dennis Adair and Janet Rosenstock, Avon Books.
The Lawn Book, by John Bradshaw, McClelland & Stewart.
Lemon-Aid: New Car Guide 1983, by Phil Edmonston, Musson.
LifeStill, by Gay Allison, Williams-Wallace.
Le Livre-Texte, Les Presses de l'Université de Montreal.
Louisbourg Portraits, by Christopher Moore, Macmillan.
Marketing Canada's Energy, by I.A. McDougall, Lorimer.
Maple Leaf Route: Caen, by Terry Copp and Robert Vogel, Maple Leaf Route.
Maverick succeeding as a free-lance entrepreneur, by Geoffrey Bailey, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
The Men There Were Then, by Howard White, Pulp Press.
Midways, Judges, and Smooth-Tongued Fakirs: The Illustrated Story of Country Fairs in the Prairie West, by David C. Jones, Western Producer Prairie Books.
Music Directory Canada '83, CM Books.
The Naked Drawings, by Lorne Coutts, Mosaic Press.
Native Children and the Child Welfare System, by Patrick Johnston, Lorimer.
The Night the Gods Smiled, by Eric Wright, Collins.
No Birds or Flowers, by Diane Keating, Exile Editions.
Ojibway Ceremonies, by Basil Johnston, McClelland & Stewart.
The Paper Cage, by Robin Skelton, Oolichan.
The Phases of Love, by Dorothy Livesay, Coach House Press.
Primitive Offensive, by Dionne Brand, Williams-Wallace.
Profiles in Canadian Literature: 3 and 4, Series editor Jeffrey M. Heath, Dundurn Press.
Raising Brighter Children, by Sidney Ledson, McClelland & Stewart.
Reading Is (Not) For Me, by Ian Fraser & Karen Brownhill, Clarke Irwin.
Recreational Land Use, by Geoffrey Wall and John S. Marsh, Carleton University Press.
The Ring of Years, by Dorothy Corbett Gentleman, South Western Ontario Poetry.
Salvador, by Joan Didion, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
Seeing, by Cary Fagan, South Western Ontario Poetry.
Song of Orkney & Other Poems, by Robert Lawrence, South Western Ontario Poetry.
Spirit Wrestler, by James Houston, McClelland & Stewart.
Start with $1000: Do-it-Yourself Investing for Canadians, by J.J. Brown and Jerry Ackerman, Macmillan.
The Third Story, by J. Robert Janes, PaperJacks.
The Thunder and the Sunshine, by Jeffry V. Brock, McClelland & Stewart.
The Tree of Life, by George Korey-Krzeczowski, Mosaic Press.
What Place is This?, by Rosalind MacPhee, Coach House Press.

COMING UP
IN THE JUNE/JULY ISSUE OF

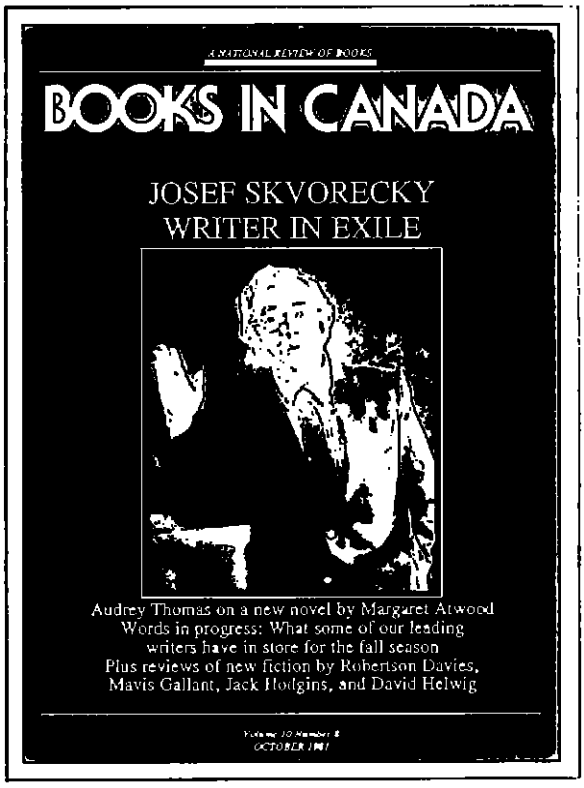
BOOKS IN CANADA

POET IN THE FAMILY
A profile of Michael Ondaatje
By John Oughton

WINTER'S TALES
The literary life in Yellowknife
By John Goddard

THE PAPAL PLOT
I.M. Owen on Philippe van Rjndt

Plus reviews of new books by Rudy Wiebe, D.G. Jones, George Bowering, Paul Audley, and much, much more.



BOOKS IN CANADA

Available in better bookstores everywhere or delivered directly to your home. Ten times a year. Shouldn't you subscribe now?

Yes, I'd like to subscribe to *Books in Canada* ☐

Name _____

Address _____

_____

_____ Postal code _____

Cheque enclosed ☐ Bill me ☐

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE $12.95 A YEAR
$15.95 A YEAR OUTSIDE CANADA

166 Adelaide Street East, Suite 432
Toronto, Ont M5A 1X9