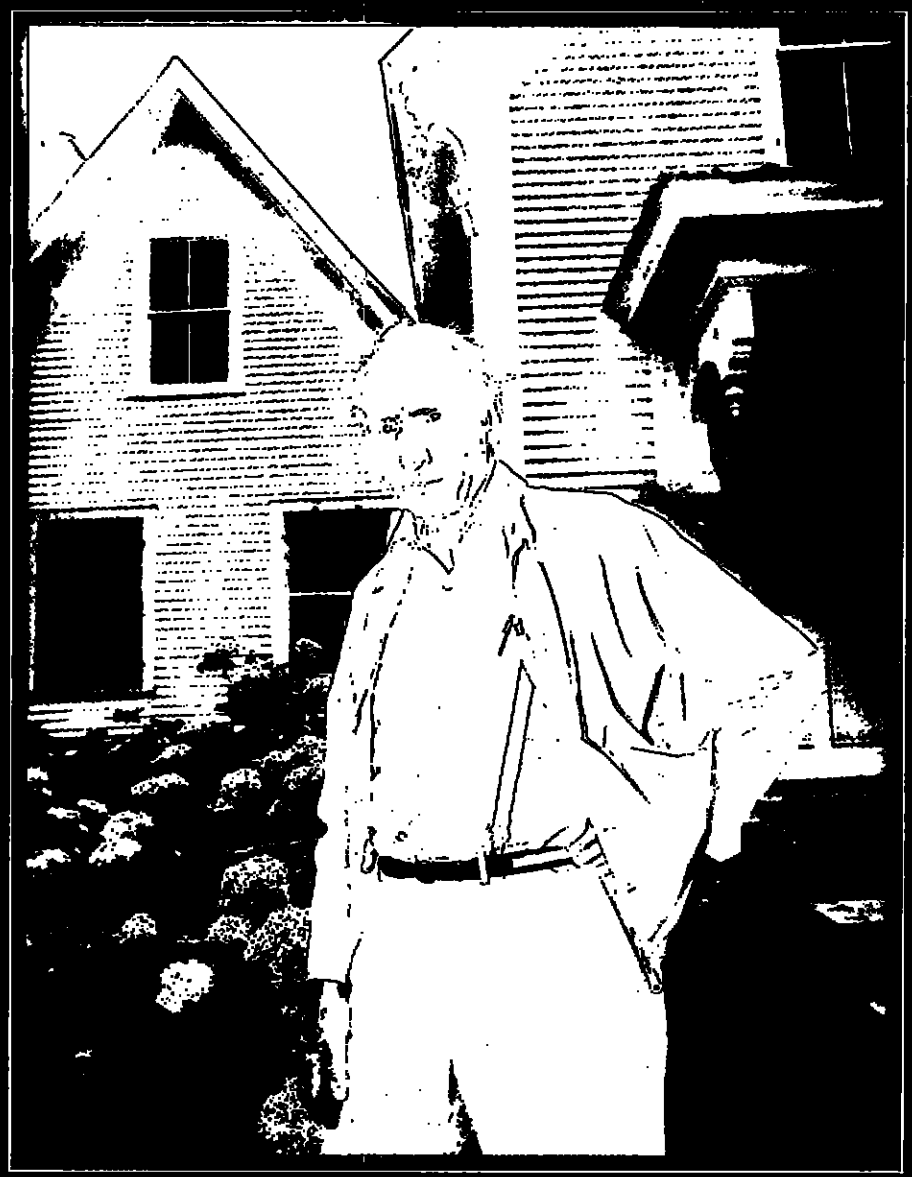
A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

BOOKS IN CANADA

THE WRITERS OF NORTH HATLEY



Robert Harlow on jazz, Al Purdy on Everest
George Woodcock and Roy MacSkimming on
the role of the state in the arts

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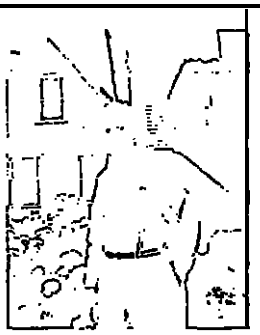

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH : LOUIS DUDEK BY PAUL ORENSTEIN

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The state and the arts: the need to bite the hand that feeds

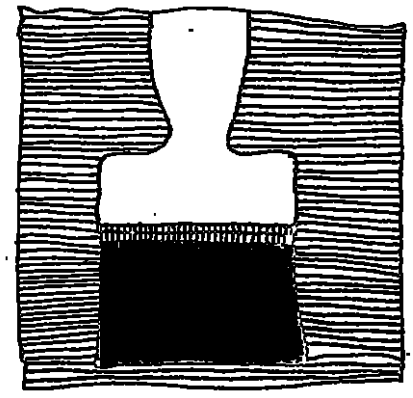
Dolphins and sharks

FOR A LONG TIME I have been gathering material for a book on the state and the arts in Canada. I have thought of calling it *The Need to Bite the Hand That Feeds* and using as an epigraph the mossy old tag from the *Aeneid: "Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes." I* believe there is a symbiotic relationship between a community and its arts, which are the most eloquent manifestation of its character, its identity, or what you will. But I also believe that the state is a very imperfect representative of the human community, that its gifts to the arts in the name of that community are likely to be tainted with perverse political motivations. Therefore the artist, cautiously accepting its gifts as what is owed to him by the community — as distinct from the state — should constantly be on the lookout for the razor blades bidden in the apples, and ready to protest as soon as the state as political instrument takes over fmm the state as agent of the community. To protest and to bite.

State agencies concerned with the arts can for convenience be divided into the dolphins, which are supposed to carry the arts like Arion through the choppy waters of economic difficulty, and the sharks, whose attitude — as recently and blatantly exhibited in the activities of Revenue Canada officials — can only be described as rapacious philistinism.

Take the dolphins first. Minister of Communications Francis Fox talks in large terms of developing what he ominously calls "the culture industry," and has recently unveiled a grand project with a niggardly budget for increasing the Canadian content of broadcasting. Up to now, however, he and his department have avoided a relatively inexpensive act of elementary justice to' *writers* — payment for public lending rights. The present situation seems to be that. as Ottawa always does when it suits its convenience, Pox has taken refuge behind the screen of needing provincial agreement. There is no evidence of any attempt to secure that agreement, and the sum total of Fox's recent efforts is that television film producers will be richly rewarded and writers will go short.

Turn to those other once glorious dolphins, the CBC and the Canada Council. Nobody my age can forget the CBC's contributions to Canadian writing in the 1940s: the nurturing of short stories (mainly by Robert Weaver) when there was nowhere to get them into print, the fostering of serious reviewing when it was being done nowhere else, the maintenance of a dramatic tradition on radio that provided the initial corps of writers and actors when live theatre began to emerge again in Canada. These were splendid holding actions, but the memory of them cannot take away from the fact that today the CBC is a very different organization, striving futilely to keep its place in the swim of commercial broadcasting (when its mandate is the reverse of commercial) and offering fewer and fewer opportunities for the writer or, indeed, for the creative producer. The resignation of Peter Herrndorf as the CBC's principal executive officer is especially disturbing. Herrn-



dorf was too much an information man to be a great friend of literature, but at least he had some feeling for creative quality in broadcasting. It is ominous that he has been replaced by the forma head of the sports department. The ens are likely to have a low priority in CBC programs for a long time ahead.

The Canada Council has a much better record in resisting political pressures than the CBC; here the problem is inter-"al bureaucratic ossification. I first began to notice it when I applied for a grant some years ago. Having been associated with the council as adviser and occasional beneficiary almost since its foundation (and not being entirely unknown in Canada), I was soddenly faced with a demand for a birth certificate to prove my citizenship.

One aspect of this bureaucratization is an increasing establishment-mindedness on the part of the council in choosing its juries. Recently I was disturbed by the case of a brilliant young novelist who had three times bee" refused a senior arts grant, yet in the same year as the last refusal was nominated for a Governor General's Award. Something, it seemed to me, was wrong, so I wrote to the council. Timothy Porteous, sounding distinctly hurt at the implications of my letter, replied that the grants had bee" assessed by peer juries; what other system could one use? But when I looked at the liits he offered me of *recent* juries for *senior* grants *in writing* I began to wonder how peerly they were. Every member of the juries for three years was palpably a member of the arrived_establishment. I have nothing to say against the literary credentials or the personal integrity of the eight people involved. (One appeared on two of the three juries.) I know them all, and two are my valued friends. But the latter facts disturbed me more than they reassured me. since they showed the close circle of "safe" figures from which the council picks its jurors.

I was eve" more disturbed when I calculated ages. The youngest juror at the time of judging was 44, but the preponderance of 60- and 70-year-olds pulled their average age up to 59. Two of the eight jurors — a quarter of the total — had published nothing substantial for almost 20 years; they could no longer be regarded as active writers. And in each jury there were two men and one woman. It is surely stretching points to count such people — whatever their excellence as persons or writers — as *peers* of writers in their 20s or 30s. It is time the *jury system* of the council was opened out. I have long refused to take part because I think younger people should be involved. If the arts-grant juries were to include at least one person under 35 and one under 45, the" the third might appropriately be a" elder writer, but as matters stand it is absurd

to claim that a peer system exists.

Just as disturbing as the decay of the CBC and the *ossification* of *the* Canada Council is the growing insolence with which the sharks of Revenue Canada have begun to shake down artists thmugb arbitrary reinterpretations of the tax laws. Up to now the most blatant attacks have been on visual and performing artists, such as the Toronto Symphony musicians who were not allowed to claim the costs of their instruments; the Carrousel Theatre, whose Canada Council fundii was seized in some petty dispute over unemployment insurance payments; and the painter Toni Onley, whose travel expenses were disallowed for several years back and who.10 his great credit, blew the situation wide open. In doing so. Onley performed a great service not only to his fellow artists but to writers as well, for what has been done to painters is ominous for writers. Painters who have teaching appointments are being treated as hobbyists, and are not allowed the expenses for their painting. Others are not allowed to deduct expenses until they have sold all the work resulting from the expense. It is obvious how this can be extended to writers. A novelist who takes a post as writer-in-residence may suddenly be regarded as a university employee and treated as a hobbyist so far as writing is concerned. A writer who undertakes heavy expensed researching a book that takes three or four years to get written and published may be unable to claim expenses *until* the *equivalent* amount of royalties has come in.

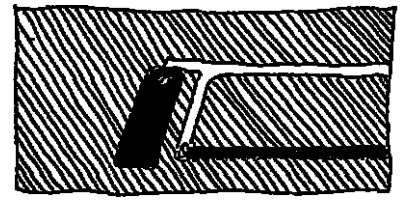
What super-shark in Revenue Canada instituted this policy, calculated to set the arts in Canada back to somewhere around 1945, has not been revealed. But at least he has emphasized how distrustful we should all be of the state when it comes bearing in its right hand niggardly gifts while its left hand reaches into the pockets of the artists whom its own statistics reveal to be, on the average, about the poorest paid group in the country. We must bite the hand that feeds to make it aware of the hand that robs.

—GEORGE WOODCOCK

North-south dialogue

SOUTH ASIAN CANADIANS come predominantly from the countries of the Indian subcontinent, the Caribbean, and Africa, and belong in large part to the wave of immigrants that arrived in the 1960s and '70s. The literature of these groups is as diverse as the countries they come from, and is written largely in English as well as in the heritage languages of Panjabi and Urdu. In Toronto recently a large number of South Asian writers and critics fmm across Canada met to take stock of the current status of this literature and to bring the writers and their public together. in many cases for the first time. The conference also marked the formal release of a report, commissioned by the secretary of state and edited by Suwanda Sugundasiri, on a. detailed survey of South Asian literature in Canada.

The tone of the conference was informal, and general discussions were encouraged. Except for some initial mudslinging (critics vs. neglected writers), the proceedings were amicable. As the emphasis was to be on *Canadian*



literature, with South Asian responses. writers from other backgrounds-such as G.D. Killan, Joy Kogawa, Eli Mandel, and Ronald Sutherland — were invited to participate as panelists and discussion leaders: There were three reading sessions in English by such writers as Cyril Dabydeen, Stephen Gill, and Reshard Gool. One of the more *gratifying* aspects Of *the conference* was the presence of new and young faces, some of whom had never been to a South Asian reading in English before.

In her analysts of the English poetry Arun Mukherjee provided a provocative contrast between mainstream Canadian and South Asian sensibilities. Earlier a related question had been raised: "Is the only way out for South Asian writers in Canada — besides a display of exotica, local colour, and bouts of nostalgia — a submergence into mainstream literature?" What was meant by "mainstream" was, of course, that which shares a common heritage with British and American literature. But is that really the mainstream literature? Not any longer, said some; mainstream is precisely the *multiplicity* of literature that exists in French and English and includes, integrally, an awareness of that multiplicity. The question is obviously not only one of semantic% As the writers were very much aware, it has also to do with market forces, of representation and recognition in libraries, anthologies, and book reviews.

A not-altogether-unrelated issue was the subject of a panel discussion with the somewhat flowery title, "Social Ac-

countability vs. Individual Aestheticism: Soldiers in Combat or Comrades in Arms?" Guidelines sent to the panelists bed indicated that the subject at issue was *responsibility,* but *accountability* was the notion that caught on, and was seen by many as the root *of* propaganda and programmed literature, which led to a rather limited discussion. Responsibility, o" the other bend, cannot be as lightlv dismissed. as subsequent discussion showed.

First of all, there is responsibility to the art itself: the question of language and form. the problems associated with writing , in a borrowed language or dialect, of authenticity, of defining an audience. These are problems that are especially acute for tbe immigrant, exiled, or Third World writer, and their resolution can have remarkably divergent consequences. To take an example, James Ngugi of Kenya, after several successful novels in English, now writes (as Ngugi wa Thiong'o) in bis mother tongue, Kikuyu. At the other extreme, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* does a brilliant job *of* using Indianized English for Hindi dialogues.

There is also responsibility es regards the existing social order. Accountability need not be to the state; it could be to a community, to tradition, to conscience. (One thinks of *The Crucible,* of Solzhenitsyn, of Neruda.) Interestingly enough, Panjabi literature i" Canada tends to be community-oriented. There is a well-defined audience, restricted by language, and the literature deals with specific issues in the Sikh Panjabi community in Canada — for example, the status of women.

The future of literature written in tbe heritage languages was another much-debated issue. The question, which other communities must also have asked, is whether such writing is a first-generation phenomenon. If it requires fresh generations of immigrants to keep it alive, the" it will not progress much beyond recording the various responses to displacement that each succeeding generation of immigrants feels. Nevertheless, these days literary activity in Panjabi is so prolific, it appears that eve" if it does not survive into tbe future its influences surely will.

There were few answers end many questions — questions that were carried over into lively corridor discussions, lingered into lunch and dinner breaks, and still remain. The conference did not have the time to go at length into specifics or to consider resolutions, but it was a good start. These are exciting times for South Asian literature in Canada, and Canadian literature itself is undergoing a change as a result, however gradually. — M.G. VASSANJI

As far as more than, we think it's an acceptable attraction, but there's no doubt that idled workers create more than one problems

By BOB BLACKBURN

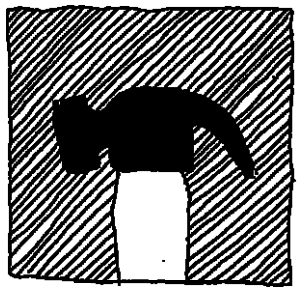
HERE IS THE opening paragraph of a "ewe story published by the Toronto *Sun*:

> One of two me" who escaped with his life as O'Neil (Dave) Keane died in an ambush-style shooting successfully appealed a life sentence for the murder of a woman almost four years ago.

I have nothing to say about it. I just thought people itt other parts of the country should have an opportunity to see an example of the sort of clear and precise writing that is available to big-city newspaper readers.

Also deserving of wider circulation is a line uttered on TVOntario by Elwy Yost, who spoke about someone "... who, alas, passed away only recently." leaving us to wonder if be would have been happier about the whole business if the person had died a long time ago.

A news report that began, "Workers idled through a layoff..." stopped me cold. What else would they be doing7 How could tbey work through a layoff? It took a moment to realize that the writer had committed the sin of using the verb *idle* in tbe sense of *make idle.* There's "o *justification* for this use. People who teach and train journalists are tight to stress tbe importance of



"tight" writing, but apparently lax i" warning of its pitfalls, one of which is the temptation to coin new usages. I'm sure tbis writer was striving for tightness, but what he achieved wee ambiguity.

A reader has asked my opinion on tbe use of over in place of more *than.* I don't like it, but I'm sure we're stuck with it. I don't think anyone can be faulted for saying he's over 40, but I don't think I would say that I flew over over five countries on my vacation. I don't think it's terrible to say that the temperature is over 80 when it's more than 80 degrees above zero, but it would be a bit much to say the party was over over hvo hours ago. More *than* is correct, it doesn't sound stilted, and is almost es easily mouthed. Why not use it?

Someone else brought up the question of whether *more than one* is singular or plural. Theodore Bernstein explains that it's technically plural but takes a singular verb "by attraction" -that is, the verb is "attracted" to the one and to tbe singular noun that follows it. "Attraction" is a term used by grammarians when they feel obliged to condone a bit 'of usage that is patently wrong. But then they don't help matters much when they start talking about "acceptable attraction" and "unacceptable attraction" and the grey areas between the two. Some authorities go on at great length about "the proximity principle," but the *real* reason for not saying "this presents more than one problems" is that it sounds funny.

For the first time I have received a piece of electronic mail from a reader of this magazine — a fact that I daresay is much more interesting to me than it is to you — and it set me to wondering if there are any others among you who "se word processors or computers for that sort of communication. If so, I can be reached through several of the better Toronto bulletin board systems, and my CompuServe ID is 72165.50. If that doesn't mean anything to you, forget it, but if it does, I'd be delighted to hear from you.

The reader who tracked me down electronically wrote about tbe gradual disappearance of the second half of the expression *as far as . . . is concerned,* particularly in the sports world. and offered tbis example: "As far es improving our running game, we're looking at this guy fmm Georgia. . . ."

I, too, have shuddered at that one. I wonder if it happens because these athletic people are trying to conserve their muscles of speech or because they're confusing *as* far *as* with *as for.* The latter, of course, would be perfectly acceptable in the construction cited. □

'GREEN, WONDERFUL THINGS'

A haven for some of Canada's best-known writers, North Hatley is divided over language rights and haunted by the spectre of mortality

By DAVID HOMEL
Photographs by PAUL ORENSTEIN

AT A BEND in the narrow road coming down from Sainte-Catherine-de-Katevale in Quebec's Eastern Townships, North Hatley appears delicately on the northern tip of Lake Massawippi. a village of rambling clapboard cottages, built in stages up a series of hills, with a post office, a hardware store, and a quiche emporium down at lakeside. Two thousand souls in the summer months, 600 in winter, the village and environs contain more Governor General's Award winners than any other literary territory in Canada. as any North Hatley writer will tell you. After all, what other rural district can boast three literary mags? It's a scale model of world conflict, with the French and English skirmishing over language in the cafés, a mysterious Arab either buying up all the village or going bankrupt, depending on whom you believe, and writers writing — lots of them.

North Hatley is a mutant village, more New England than Quebec (no church steeple dominates the town), yet one of its monuments, Hovey Manor. is a replica of a southern mansion, the fruit of American ex-Confederates who wanted to escape the summer heat without having to reside on Yankee territory. Doug Jones tells about people hearing Negro spirituals sung in the park on Sundays — the servants attached to the Manor.

Born in Shield country in Bancroft, Ont., Jones first saw North Hatley while on a skiing trip. Now he lives in a big white house half-way up the hill, and writes in a studio back of the vegetable garden. For him the summer of 1983 signalled the beginning of the end of the North Hatky community because, on the occasion of Frank Scott's birthday, there was no commemorative picnic on his land, as there had been for the last decade or two. Scott was too ill. That voice, Jones says, has already been weakened by the loss of A.J.M. Smith and John Glassco. Jones wonders about the future of the community for other reasons too: "The community depends — in English — on whether people can find work down here." Schools like the University of Sherbrooke, Bishop's University, and Champlain College have to stay strong to support a community of writers around them.

Writers like Smith and Glassco summed up the English voice in Quebec, at least in its more pastoral version. In their writing, Jones says, "there's a sense of duality, I suppose, Eastern rather than Western, almost a sense of Europe, like in *Buffy Glassco.*" Glassco delivered the rural mail and wrote about the run-down farms around Foster, Que., but he also displayed a European sophistication and bohemian side in his Memoirs *of Montparnasse* and his stylish pornography. "A certain kind of wit," Jones calls it, tempered by an awareness of nature. Nature is a predominant theme in Jones's work, and in this setting even the most resolutely urban poet would soften. "In winter I can walk out the front door down to the lake and ski across."

Doug Jones

Jones's neighbours are Ralph Gustafson on one side and Ron Sutherland on the other. A street so lined with writers conjures up visions of drink-drenched late-night rap sessions with the Muse hovering nearby. But Jones sounds like any smell-town dweller: "The problem here is that everybody knows what everybody else is doing." As for discussions between poets,

"you map steal something that you think is particularly useful, but at our age you don't go running around looking for someone to change your life."

RALPH GUSTAFSON presents another image, either comforting or claustrophobic, of the fraternity of insomniac poets: "I'll be at my typewriter and I'll need something to stimulate me. so I'll go to the kitchen, get a drink or make tea, and I look out my kitchen window at 2:00 in the morning, or 2:30, and lo and behold, there's a bright light 50 or 20 yards up the hill, and it's Doug Jones in his eyrie, writing too."

Ralph Gustafson

Gustafson is North Hatley's only native poet. Lime Ridge is his birthplace., dominated by the Dominion Lime company. "When I grew up this was a tightly puritanical neck of the woods," he recalls. He reacted by heading For more indulgent climes: Oxford in the 1930s and later New York. There, while employed by the British government as a" intelligence gatherer, Gustafson edited the first anthology of modem Canadian poetry, published in 1942 despite the wartime paper shortage. It was a *landmark* work, and some 40 years later he is busy revising another edition. The first edition included radical new *voices like* P.K. Page, Irving Layton, Raymond Souster, and Louis Dudek. "I wanted to knock all the snow and mounted-policeman poetry into a cocked hat."

Gustafson is a classical man; the rooms of his house are lined with books and records of classical piano, many old 78s. Here, there is no disorder of the senses. North Hatley for him is "a rostrum of quiet solitude where you can think about the world — and react to it. I've written more engaged poetry here than anywhere else." His poem 'Wednesday at North Hatley" is a first step into the landscape of the Townships. "That poem wrote itself, because I'd been 20 years waiting For it."

On the other side of Jones's place is a" even larger, more sprawling house that belongs to Ron Sutherland, the half-Scots, half-Italian University of Sherbrooke literature professor v/ho was brought up in Montreal's French-speaking East End. Sutherland thinks of himself as a bridge between the French and English-speaking cultures within Quebec, a sort of impresario of Quebec literature, though some of his opinions have disenchanted the more nationalist writers on the French side. Meanwhile, he's just finished a long "owl, a political pot-boiler set on a Caribbean island, quite a change fmm Snow Lurk, published in 1971. which became the movie *Suzanne.*

Besides playing the bagpipes and beekeeping in hls gener-

Ron Sutherland

ous backyard, Sutherland confesses to an interest in political gossip, the lives *of* famous and not-so-famous men and women, like the FLQ informer Carole de Vault. He's well placed to cultivate his interest (which, by the way, is common to most everyone *in the province):* in Quebec, literature and politics are entangled as nowhere else in Canada.

IF SUTHERLAND, Jones, and Gustafson are half-way up the hill lo North Hatley, Hugh MacLennan is almost all the way to the top. Street numbers don't seem to exist in the village; MacLennan describes his house as "the cottage with the phlox," which presupposes a knowledge of the flower world. Luckily, the neighbours are helpful.

MacLennan on the advantages of North Hatley: "No blackflies and hardly any mosquitoes." As well as being largely free of biting insects, it seems to have&o a good place to write: he composed the beginning and end of Two *Solitudes* here, as well as major parts of *The Precipice* and *Each Man's Son.*

What appeals to him about North Hatley is that the village has always been a refuge for the makers of history. (He too has been lo with the history-makers as part of boll sessions with Pierre Trudeau, Jean Marchand, and André Laurendeau of *Le Devoir.*) There are descendants of the Adamses and Benjamin Franklin in the village. he says. and gestures around the screen porch of bis house. which looks down the length of Lake Massawippi toward the United States. "The Marshall Plan originated on this back porch, that's not too much of an exaggeration." He launches into a storv involving an old American diplomatic family, Foreign *Affairs* magazine, Hamilton Fish Armstrong, a clandestine trip to Yugoslavia, a meeting with Tito, and a bottle of slivovitz. R's as if it all had happened yesterday. "Memory is a curious thing," says MacLennan. "My experiences in Germany returned to me after all the craziness of the 1960s, with that Marxist retread, Herbert Marcuse." So was born bis most recent novel, *Voices In Time.*

MacLennan's intellectual history has been like that of many 20th-century writers: a quest for belief in a system that ends in disillusionment and an all-embracing skepticism. He travelled to Russia in the early 1930s. ("Marxism seemed to make a great deal of sense..") Then came Stalin, the disillusionment, the need to preserve an order that; closes to home in Quebec, was shaken by the Parti Québécois victory in 1976. "If Canada survives, and it probably will, it'll be because of Lévesque," he told a Toronto gathering after that historic election. "He let you know how much you could lose." Like other Quebec English writers, MacLennan is keenly aware of the duality of Canadian history, and like them he is committed, through his novels and social commentary. to keeping those dualities in constant relationship.

The future? "I don't see myself writing another novel, but you never know. My publisher suggested I try my hand at my memoirs. I have a long memory."

LOUIS DUDEK contemplates the North Hatley scene — "a tight little community of snobs" as be puts it, where some restaurants won't let you in without a jacket — from a vantage-point at the far cad of the lake; Way's Mills, it's called, and its rolling agricultural atmosphere is more beautiful in its own way than the splendour *of* Lake Massawippi and its mountains. "It can really irritate you to know there's someone else probably writing a poem today," he laughs. "But if there were Do other poets around I couldn't be comfortable here lying in my hammock."

On this sunny day lo his backyard with Aileen Collins — his wife and editor of the old *CIVIn* magazine — death, decay, and illusion are on the menu. Any community, says Dudek, is an idealized construct for deriving illusory comfort and keeping "nameless dread" (the title of a Ron Everson poem as well as a common state of mind) from the door. The cancelling of

Prank Scott's picnic is a bad omen. "The community dissolves when Frank Scott disappears. We all forgathered around him."

Dudek is a city man transported to the country. Along with Ezra Pound, Carl Sandberg is his poetic patron saint. His Polish and Lithuanian ancestors were Farmers, but in tbe new world they quickly urbanized; bis father drove a truck. For Dudek, city poetry in the 1940s was synonymous with making it new: "Green, wonderful things are enemies never to be Forgotten," he quotes Raymond Souster. But his coming to Way's Miis, if only For summers and weekends until he retires From McGill. was a rediscovery of nature. True to Form, Dudek looks at those "green, wonderful things" as a struggle of stunted Forms *of* life For survival. He's also the only one to, wonder out loud why there are no women writers in the North Hatley group. "Today, women poets would be more urban poets," he says; presumably, they would distrust the softer aspects of nature.

Michel Garneau

Dudek is tbe sombre philosopher of the Lake Massawippi group. He pronounces the phrase "modem life" with a certain amount of distaste, especially when discussing the marriage-go-rounds that make it hard to keep up with who is and is no longer living in North Hatley. Way's Mills is a milling village that lost its mill: the only monuments are the two white clapboard Protestant churches Facing off against each other in sectarian jealousy. A cautionary tale.

WHILE HIS CHAUFFEUR idled outside on the rue Gilford, we went to Gérald Godin's constituency office on Montreal's resolutely Preach-speaking plateau, Mont-Royal. Once a radical journalist, a Patti Pris publisher, a post who talked about how the Quiet Revolution wasn't so quiet after all, Godin has become the minister *of* cultural communities and immigration in fhe Lévesque government, the man responsible For the language law, Bill 101. He has also been Frequenting North Hatley since 1968, and owns land then. "A novelist could write a novel about one year in North Hatley," he says in English, afraid of being misquoted if be speaks French. "I'd like to write that novel if I ever had the time."

What Godin does have time For is discussing English-French literary relations in tbe North Hatley microcosm. "The October Crisis separated us. Prank Scott approving the War Measures Act was a very good case of double standard. When the tights of the bloody French are concerned — they don't have any right anyway, so why should we Fiiht for them?" That From a man who, along with his wife, was imprisoned without charges in October of 1970. "A wall went up." Godin says. "It showed that there are two cultural projects-at least two — in this country." Godin is bitter about McGill students who demonstrate against human rights violations in Chile, but were silent when it came to Montreal writers and intellectuals being arrested without the protection of habeas corpus.

As For the North Hatley writers. skirmishes have broken out around the issue *of language.* During a poetry reading in the early 1970s, when works were presented in English only, the French contingent raised a protest. Fuelled by alcohol of various sorts, the event took on apocalyptic proportions, Godin recalls. He figures it was all a question of temperament: "When the Frenchies get together, it's not a success if there's not a good brawl." The "love exchanges" between English and French writers and/or their wives didn't help matters any. 'But Godin doesn't want to write off *les anglais* across the board. He has stayed in contact with Doug Jones, a man who. "has always remained Faithful to himself."

Godin is interested in other landscapes besides the politico-linguistic. He has become an expert in edible mushrooms since coming to North Hatley. and compares his isolated, plateau-top farm to the small mountain where E.T. arrives. Languages of the spheres, anyone?

TWO OCCASIONAL H&y-region poets, Michel Garneau and Michael Harris, the *bon vivant* and the dour Scot, have Found common ground in Emily Dickinson, the legendary spinster poet of New England. Garneau is back in town From his perch near Tomifobia in the Townships to teach at Montreal's National Theatre School. Over lobster in a corner Portuguese restaurant, he explains the meeting of minds. "Michael has a complete and complex way of describing something that took only a couple of seconds to happen. And we both have an obsession with tbe animal world, a way of looking at the world through animality, though his is more tragic and mine more . . . pagan. *Un mystérieux dialogue,"* he concludes. The grilled animality of the lobster is dispatched.

The Garneau-Harris collaboration began when Michel asked Michael to translate into English his Dickinson poem. "Cousine des Ecureuils." Harris returned some time later with an entirely new English poem. "Death and Miss Emily." Garneau never did get his translation, but a great team was launched. Why Emily Dickinson, the eternal spinster? For Garneau, she was an enigma: "How can you write the things she wrote if you really *are* a Frustrated old maid? Obviously, there were other things happening there."

Harris contends he would "rather write about [Emily Dickinson] than suicide or the Canadian landscape," even though he spent lest summer writing in a tent pitched on the land of a rented cottage near the hamlet of Massawippi. "I like U.S. and British sources more than Canadian sources," he says — which puts him at odds with certain of our poets. "Louis Riel and Susanne Moodie are figments of the Canadian imagination that never happened. It's a contrived national lie, which has nothing to do with the immediacy of what poetry should be." When it comes to poetry, intensity is all: "It should be an enormously concentrated attention to the details of the real world," not the tree itself but "what the bugs do to each othn in the bark."

For Harris, the Townships are a retreat. just as Mexico and Greece have been for him at other times. Along with Robert Allen, Stephen Luxton, Richard Sommer, and at times David Solway, Harris may represent the next generation of Eastern Townships writers, a more rootless — or multi-rooted — generation, without tbe passionate commitment their fore runners had -end have — to the place. □

FEATURE REVIEW

Not guilty

Thomas Flanagan's defence of the conviction and execution of Louis Riel is based on an untenable misreading of the events of history

By GEORGE WOODCOCK

Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 **Reconsidered,** by **Thomas Flanagan,** Western Producer **Prairie** Books, illustrated, **192 pages,** $19.95 **cloth (ISBN** 0 88833 **108 8)** and 512.95 paper **(ISBN** 0 88833 110 **X).**

THERE IS A **certain courage** about **this** book. **Thirty** years ego **when** I wrote in ***The Beaver*** that I felt it had been **a** mistake **and** miscarriage of justice to **hang Louie Riel,** I — end the editor — wilted under the barrage of hostility, **especially** Western hostility. **Times** have changed, and — particularly in academic **and** literary **circles** — to declare that **Riel was** rightly **condemned** is **now** rather like **standing up in an anarchist** meeting **and** shouting that **Sacco** and **Vanzetti** were guilty. But **this** is what Thomas **Flanagan has** done. **Having approached** the **Riel case. originally** from **the** currently **accepted** angle, he **came,** in the process of researching a **collection** of Rid's **writings** connected **with** the *1885* rebellion, to the conclusion, to quote his **own** words,

> **that** the **Métis grievances were at least partly** of their owe **making; that the government was** on the verge **of resolving** them **when** the Rebellion **broke out;** that ***Riel's* resort** to **arms could not** be explained by **the failure** of **constitutional agitation; and** that he **received** a surprisingly **fair** trial.

As **a** result of thii **change** of **mind, Flanagan declares** in ***Riel*** *and the* ***Rebellion his opposition to any proposal*** for granting a free pardon to Rid **as** part **of the 1985 centennial** of **the** North West **Rebellion.**

Flanagan stands up admirably to be counted. **but this** doer not mean that **his arguments are** correct. His own statement **that "the Métis** grievances were at **least partly** of their own **making"** begs the question of just what ***partly*** means. **In** fact nothing in ***Riel and the*** *Rebellion* effectively **counters** the **argument that in 1884-5 on** the **South Saskatchewan,** as **in 1869-70** *on the* Red River, the M&is found **themselves threatened** by **an** invasion of land-hungry settlers from **Ontario.** In **the** second case **as in the first,** it seemed **that** the surveyors, with their heads full of **quadrangular** maps to which **the** old river lots must be ad**justed, were** merely the agents of **the invasion** that would **overwhelm the semi**nomadic way of life the **Métis** preferred **— a** way of **life** that was **anachronistic only** because **Macdonald's** National Policy for **the** West made it so.

Flanagan brings out' **virtually** no new **evidence when** he argues **that "the government was** on the verge of **resolving"** the **Métis grievances "when the** Rebellion broke out." It is indeed **true** that, after **a year** of inertia **and** repeated **warnings from** people other **than Métis** in the **Saskatchewan area, Macdonald —** who **consistently refused** to **answer** the petitions of **the various** aggrieved groups **in** the region — did **wire** to Lieutenant Governor **Dewdney that the government** *would* **"investigate** *claims* of **half-breeds" and carry** out **an enumeration** of them. This dii not — as **Flanagan** seems to **assume — promise** a **resolution** of M&is **grievances;** it **merely constituted an** undertaking to look into them, **and** the **aggrieved Métis** were incased when **the** contents of **the telegram** were **communicated** neither to **Riel** nor to Gabriel **Dumont,** their local **leader, but** to **Charles Nolin,** who was already **regarded as** a ***vendu.***

Macdonald's telegram contained so little in **the** way of **substantial promises that** Dumont told **Riel** their year of seeking justice peacefully had **been** wasted, and the only **way** to redeem **their** fortunes was by **direct** action. **Throughout his book, by centring on Rid, Flanagan ignores the part played by Dumont and** other local **leaders in the** spring of 1885. **The decision to rise in armed rebellion was actually taken at a secret meeting of the leading Métis on March** 5, 1885. at which 11 **were present, including** Gabriel **and Isidore Dumont** end **Napoléon Nault, Riel's** nephew, **as well as Riel** himself. **The decision** was **collective.** Forty days elapsed between **Macdonald's** telegram and the declaration of the **provisional** government on **March** 19. **during** which **nothing was** done to **implement even** the **vague** promises it coo-' **tained.**

In dealing with **the** events **that** followed, **Flanagan** consistently loads **his** argument against **Riel,** by **ignoring the roles** of **other** people **in** the **rebellion. It was,** for ***example, the*** Hudson's Bay **man** Lawrence **Clarke** who invented the

tale of a North West Mounted Police column advancing on Batoche that set off the actual rebellion, but Flanagan has nothing to say about this. It was Gabriel Dumont, not Rid, who commanded the M&is in the battle at Duck Lake, which propelled events on a fatal course. During the weeks that followed it was Dumont and his associates. like Damase Carrière, who argued — perhaps with tactical good sense-that unrelenting warfare should be mounted against Middleton's advancing columns, and it was Riel who restrained them.

So we come to the point of the fairness of Riel's trial. Perhaps, so far as courtroom proceedings went, it was conducted as fairly as, at that period, one might expect. The unfairness lies in the nature of the indictment. Why was Bid charged with high treason under the medieval Statute of Treasons, promulgated in 1362 — under which the sentence of death was mandatory — while all his M&is associates were charged only with treason-felony, which allowed relatively brief periods of imprisonment to be imposed? The charges against Bid and the ignoring of the jury's recommendation of mercy are all the more reprehensible in view of the general amnesty that the Canadian government proclaimed in the summer of 1886. just over a year after the capture of Batoche, for all surviving participants in the rebellion. These included Gabriel Dumont, who planned and led all the Métis attacks on Canadian police and militia, and in terms of active rebellion was far more Involved than Riel.

Riel was in a way the victim of his own charisma, of the fact that he had posed himself as a symbolic leader of the M&is nation (a concept that had been around since about 1814,, long before Riel became active). He was accepted by Macdonald at his own valuation and tried accordingly, in a separate category from all the other defendants. In this way, the trial was clearly unfair, since it differentiated him from the other men who had decided on armed rebellion and had been more active in carrying it out. Even more unfair, as Flanagan somewhat reluctantly admits, was the fact that the one slight hope of reprieve Riel had, the report on his insanity by Dr. Valade, was doctored by Macdonald and his cabinet associates before being presented to the House of Commons so that it should appear to say he was sane.

Clearly, like so many others, Flanagan has fallen under the spell of Riel's charisma insofar as he believes him to have been solely responsible for the North West Rebellion. It is an untenable misreading of history when the ghosts of Macdonald and Dumont stand in the shadows. □

REVIEW

All that jazz

By ROBERTHARLOW

Milestones It The **Music and Times** of **Miles** Davis to 1960, by **Jack Chambers,** University of Toronto Press, 345 pages, 824.95 cloth **(ISBN 0 8020 2499 8).**

SOMETIME IN THE 1970s Miles Davis told thii story to Max Gordon, who had owned the Village Vanguard Jazz Club in the' 1950s: "I was playing Birdland one week. We were out front during intermission. standing around minding our own business. Broadway's crowded. A cop comes over. 'Move direr,' he says. Sure, it's me. I'm the one blocking the goddamn traffic. 'Move,' the' cop shouts. I don't move. He gets his club nut. I don't move. Lets me have it on the head. I wipe the blood off my head. but I don't move. I don't move for no goddamn cop. I don't move for nobody."

The Gandhi parallel doesn't work here. The man who didn'tmove for the policeman's nightstick was not then and is not now a social revolutionary. The story is his. The facts are that he was taken away in handcuffs; he was charged with disorderly conduct and assault; his cabaret card was taken' away from him so he couldn't work in New York; he sued the city for wrongful arrest: and during the plea bargaining before his trial his lawyer persuaded him to drop the suit. He believed none of this would have happened if he had not been seen by the cop putting a white girl into a cab On Broadway in fmnt of the Birdland.

This is the white fantasy-and-prejudice-powered scene black musicians lived in and played through in the 1940s and '50s. Davis reacted by withdrawing, going quiet — cool, some called it; arrogant was another label. Charlie Parker, after whom Birdland was tied, tried to contain his anger by being a put-on artist, but he was also capable of striking back. One night, in a posh Chii club that had 'a phone booth across the room fmm the bandstand, Parker -who among other vices drank copiously — put his horn down and walked through the adoring white crowd, opened the booth door, dosed it carefully behind him, and pissed like a horse for a minute and a half. The ensuing brouhaha, which very nearly banished him from playing in dubs where Polite Society might, see him, bothered him not at all. Dizzy Gillespie's reaction. on the other hand, was to remain Negro. to smite, play a funny-lopking horn, put on a funny hat, and keep an old-time black burlesque comedian (Joe "Bebop" Carroll) on the stand to down with, and thus let the white world know, as blacks had done for generations, that he was no threat to it.

Despite oppression, it was transition time in the jazz world. Black musicians were making their contributions up front: they were no longer presented to the white public fdtend through the Benny 'Goodmans and the Harry Jameses. White record companies had begun recording black musicians, and their race (i.e.. black) labels were being phased out. Inside the music business, bands and groups were often integrated; hut in the rest of America nothing had changed.

It is the 15 years from the war to 1960 that Jack Chambers chronicles in *Milestones I.* using Davis as a focus. It is not precisely a peculiar biography, but it is a particular one. It very carefully doesn't deal with the underlying realities, the metaphysics, of that time. Were the Davis history a musical line on which to build, Chambers would be seen to blow closer to Chet Baker than Miles Davis. There is a distance here, and if there is passion it is born of the lusts of the researcher who climaxes at the moment when a date is corrected, an aircheck recording is discovered, or a quotation verified. Only once do we see Chambers himself, and that is on page 195, when he tells us how Davis's December, 1954, recording of "The Man I Love" turned him on to Davis when he was a teenager: "transfixed", hi, he 'says. He leaves enthusiasm and criticism to other voices: he is never a fool far either the art or the man. He is, at best, protective of him. At worst. the social scientist in Chambers reduces Davis's life to-parenthetical glimpses between recording sessions. There is a delicacy in this approach, a silent, civilized agreement not to gossip beyond mentioning the expensive clothes. the Ferrari, and the "bitches" (Davis's word).

This is a scholarly work. Chambers does a description of each of Davis's recording sessions from his first in the mid-1940s until volume one of this biography halts at the end of 1959. He also analyses the important cuts and gives a place in jazz history to each of the seminal works and solos recorded by Davis and the men he worked with.

In fact, Chambers spends little time telling us about Davis's personal history. His marriages and children are not mentioned, his lifestyle can only be guessed

at. We learn a good deal more about the musical careers and personal lives of many of the musicians Davis worked with from the time he went to New York from St. Louis in 1945. we often see Davis peripheral to the heavy focus on Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonius Monk, Gil Evans. John Coltrane, Bill Evans, and Cannonball Adderley. I" short, the times and music are often more central to the book than' Davis.

Yet, in the end, these approaches turn out to be strengths. For the reader who is turned on by jazz but is not yet hooked, this book has nearly all the musical information anyone needs about the 1945-60 period, because Davis is seminal and, along with people like Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Parker, he is a foundation jazzman who developed as a musician over hi whole musical career, while others, great as they were, arrived, had their say, and either left the scene or stayed to reiterate.

For the reader who has some or a lot of knowledge about the Parker-Gillespie-Davis-Coltrane cm, this book might be a" instrument to hone sharp again old perceptions about that time. I enjoyed reading through it and playing some of the tracks Chambers talked about. First, the Parker-Davis recordings that chronicle the rise of Davis and the burning-out of Parker. I don't have much Gillespie., but I played what I had again and wondered why I didn't have more. I listened to Claude Thornhill's band when Canadian Gil Evans arrived on the scene, and the"to Davis's Nonet, which the great Evans arranged for — seminal writing that cleared the way for the birth of Cool. I got out Mulligan, listened to Getz, adjunct white players in the midst of the Davis milieu. It was pure fun, for me at least, to read what the critics said about Ahmed Jamal ("a cocktail pianist"), and then hear Chambers delineate Jamal's influence on Davis. The sections on Monk and Mingus and Bill Evans and Coltrane in another context might only be mildly interesting. but placed here inside the music Miles was insisting on, inventing and recording, these innovators gained stature and clarity. I have always been a Cannonball Adderley fan. I played a lot of him again while Chambers talked about the fine Miles Davis Quintet at the end of the 1950s, and I was reminded why I liked him (honesty and craft), but also why all that verve and speed and focused versatility does not add up to greatness.

This is not a book that forces you to think; rather, it is one that allows you to assess and reassess in a way that a more passionate and personal work might not. Miles was the ma" who, black and oppressed, stood cm the sidewalk in front of Birdland and said "No" to a cop. He is also the man who listened to others — Parker, Gillespie, Gil Evans, Jamal — and used what he heard to help him communicate what it was he heard in his head. He is also the musician who grew and didn't stop growing until he made the musical age he lived in his own.

A second volume, *Milestones II,* will be published next year. There is a lot more of Davis to show and tell. In the meantime, if you are a jazzhound, or simply curious about the age of Bop and Cool, let this be one of your books. □

REVIEW

The unholy mountain

By AL PURDY

Everest Canada: The Ultimate Challenge, by Al Burgess and Jim Palmer, Stoddart, illustrated, 214 pages, 534.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7737 2009 X).

THIS IS AN extraordinary book. While reading it I skimmed *through* John Hunt's The *Ascent of Everest* (1953) for purposes of comparison: the British book reads like a 1910 Bureau of Statistics report; the Canadian one like a superior and melodramatic soap opera. It is interesting, and the photographs are superb. I had to go to the John Hunt book for a glossary of mountaineering terms, a sad deficiency, but it has everything else except sex: photographs that *practically* transplant you *to* Everest; boiling emotions, some under control and some not. It is a record of 21 Westerners (mostly Canadians), 35 Sherpas (Nepalese), and how they acted under stress when four of their number died in the Khumbu Icefall.

Some facts. Roger Marshall of Golden, B.C., first *applied* for a licence to climb Everest, with himself as leader of the expedition. When Air Canada agreed to sponsor the attempt, Marshall was dropped as leader ("dropped" is a euphemism) because of "activities that could harm the expedition's image, and in turn that of the expedition's sponsor." These "activities" are never spelled out, and there must be much more to it than that. George Kinnear of Calgary became the next leader, but he suffered a detached retina and had *to resign. His* successor *was* Bill March, also of Calgary, age 40, with extensive climbing experience. March's deputy leader was Lloyd "Kiwi" Gallagher, of Canmore, Alta.

After much preparation and a "walk-in" of 160 miles from the Nepalese capital, Katmandu, to the Base Camp in Sherpa country. the expedition really got under way in September, 1982. Almost at the outset three Sherpas were killed in an avalanche on the Khumbu Icefall, a vast, tangled glacier below Everest that moves down at the rate of a metre a day, its ice-block components and hard-*packed snow constantly and dangerously* shifting position. The accompanying Westerners managed to survive this disaster. Burgess says these me" "had been lured into a vulnerable position." What does that mea"? Burgess doesn't say.

Only one of the dead Sherpas' bodies was recovered, that of Pasang Sona. According to the expedition's Tim Auger, "We put the cold, lifeless body in a *sleeping* bag with Rusty *[Baillie]* while Dave McNab and Bezruchka [Stephen] did CPR [cardio-pulmonary resuscitation] for almost half a" hour." The attempt failed. Sona's widow, distraught with grief, was comforted by Bill March, who held her in his arms, swaying back and forth, while she moaned to him pleadingly, "Oh Bara Sahib — Oh Bara Sahib!" Then a" aged Sherpa appeared, grabbing March's *arm:* "Let no *more Sherpas die!*" It must have bee." awful.

The" Blair Griffiths, a young Vancouver photographer, did in a "major collapse in the Icefall." March told Peter Spear by radio to leave Griffith.? body in the Icefall: carrying it down from there would be risking more lives. Spear refused the order, Griffiths' body was retrieved, and emotions boiled high.

A period of soul-searching followed: *to* abort the *expedition* or *go* on. Six climbers did quit at this point: Don Serl, Jim Elzinga, James Blench, Dave McNab, Rusty Baillie, and Dave Jones. Who is to say they were wrong? When men die, sport stops being 'sport. It 'blackens the white mountain.

In the midst of the indecision, Burgess delivered a verbal tirade to the remaining climbers. He said, in effect, that even if 'everyone else quit he would still continue: "We'll get Canadians 0" the top in spite of you." (What a great Canadian, if you like that kind of patriotism, I don't happen to.)

The upshot of all this: Everest Canada was still alive., diminished and disheartened, but alive.

Four camps were to be established on' the slopes of the 29,000-foot mountain,

the last in the South Col — a pass between Lhotse mountain and Everest that surmounted the Khumbu Icefall. A New Zealand expedition, also with Sherpas, accompanied the Canadians to a point 200 feet below the South Col Camp IV, where they branched off to the right for Lhotse summit. The Canadians and their Sherpas turned left for Everest. Burgess's brother, Adrian, was a member of the New Zealanders team.

On Oct. 5 Laurie Skreslet, Lhakpa Dorje, and Sungdare, climbing from the South Col camp, achieved the summit of Everest. They took photographs and planted Canadian and Nepalese flags. Two days later Pat Morrow (a climber and photographer), Pema Dorje, and Lhakpa Tshering also achieved the mountain peak. Burgess had started out with this latter group, but his oxygen failed and he turned back: More flags and more photographs. The successful Canadian climbers — Skreslet and Morrow — are probably the two who most deserved their achievement.

There were disagreements and controversies on this expedition that only a court of law could decide. Jim Elzinga, Dave McNab, and James Blench (all of whom quit the expedition) thought "a serious mountaineering error had been made." The same "valley" used by Canadians in the Icefall had been the scene of an avalanche during a 1981 American expedition, and John Hunt's British book says there are passable routes on both sides of the Icefall, "but so menaced are both by the ice avalanches that to use them would be suicidal."

Burgess snipes continually at the expedition's leadership. He also resented Roger Marshall's dismissal. "It is very easy to second-y& a leader," he says, and goes on to do so all through the book. He claims that March was "a hard, merciless leader." When March went down to Pangboche Monastery to encourage the Sherpas, "everyone realized he was going down to sort out his own emotional problems." When Gordon Smith went out solo on a traverse. Lloyd Gallagher, the deputy leader, threatened to throw him off the expedition. Burgess says Smith's solo jaunt "was certainly not dangerous."

During the final assault on Everest, Burgess was trail-breaking through heavy snow. He complains that "no one else was really prepared to come forward to help." And also: "After our efforts to reopen the Icefall we hoped that all the people who were sitting in Base Camp waiting to see what would happen would now back us up more than verbally and get involved in trail-breaking and' rope-fixing."

How do you sort it all out?' An achievement, of course. But flawed in the process, concept somehow greater than accomplishment. An armchair judge, I'm inclined to give the high-altitude Sherpas top marks, along with Skreslet, Morrow, and Peter Spear. (And poor Bill March: with friend Burgess sniping at him, he doesn't need any enemies.) But the Sherpas. ah, the *Sherpas!* They were marvels of strength, uncomplaining fortitude, and tolerance. They endured with grace and good humour all these unpleasant foreigners — my heroic fellow countrymen. And the mountain remains, white and unconquerable in the mind. □

REVIEW

The high and the mighty

By DuBARRY CAMPAU

Debrett's Illustrated Guide to the Canadian Establishment, edited by Peter C. Newman. Methuen, illustrated, 408 pages, 845.00 cloth (ISBN 0 458 96790 4).

WHEN DEBRETT publishes its books about the British peerage, as it has done for many years, it is on firm ground. Lords are lords beyond dispute, and the place in the hierarchy of baron, viscount, earl, marquess, and duke simply cannot be diddled about. Debrett can list them all and, with reasonable care, be sure of getting them right, as well as their lineage and visible descendants. But when it dabbles with the rank, position, influence, background, and importance of a citizen of a country without titles (or at best, with a few left-over ones) there's little to go, on but somebody's subjective judgement.

That is the base on which *Debrett's Illustrated Guide to the Canadian Establishment* is put together. Edited by Peter C. Newman, it leans heavily on Newman's own evaluation of his fellow countrymen. The, opening chapter, written by him and called "The Power Network;' is pretty much a distillation of the work he has already done on what he considers to be the Canadian establishment.

No one disputes that in today's market money *is* power. Bravery in battle, ancient lineage, great knowledge,

and gracious behaviour will never get you on to as many managerial boards or to as many cocktail parties as will a vast number of bucks. That's reasonable enough, as even those of us without them can see. And once that is accepted, it would probably be just as simple and equally accurate to use the credit ratings of Canadians as proof of their place in the establishment, just as the titles of the British give them their place in the peerage.

That concept alone, however, apparently seemed a bit too crass to Debrett, so Newman has been asked to fill out the prominent figures of the nation with more than their bank accounts for viability. As a result, we get a lot of talk about a lot of rich men. how they got their money, and what they do with it. If you are fascinated by other people's wealth, reading this may be a lot of fun for you. But even if you have too much trouble balancing your own cheque book to care about someone else's, you will enjoy the photographs, which have been selected and largely taken by John Reeves.

Through them you can take a peek at the interiors of clubs where you'll never be bought a drink. You can marvel at the beauty of banquets to which you'll never be asked. And you can look at rich families, casually dressed but formally lined up, to whom you'll never get a chance to say "Hi!" You can also sneer at the appalling taste apparently shared by all those who are powerful enough to push around even the best architects, and you can marvel at the dullness of the pastimes chosen by this group with whiih to refresh themselves.

Because of Canada's relatively small population, most of the men and women in this book know. each other. Inevitably, only a few people can afford the handful of expensive private schools here, and even the largest cities can support only a few exclusive clubs, so the rich are naturally going to run into each other at these. Eventually their names appear and reappear on many of the same boards of directors of banks, businesses, industries, hospitals, and art galleries. And, as imagination can't be bought for cash, credit, or plastic, rich Canadians are apt to take their holidays at the same resorts which, like Holiday Inns, will insulate them against any surprises either in equipment or clientele.

And. of course, they marry each other — probably because they don't know anyone else but also because firm economic advantages can be gained this way. Sometimes, however, these marriages must be arranged quite carefully with little consideration for romance. The establishment woman is not expected to go *out* and get a job. but to do one within the confines of her social and economic positiqn. This is important, because a couple's position is keyed by that of the wife. Men can marry up — women can't.

Much of that lore is brought out in the section called "The Dynasties," composed of 21 families that "for 'at least three generations have exemplified prestige and leadership." The Vaniers are the only French Canadians included in this group. but they show up more prominently In the Honours List, "being a listing of Canadians of exceptional achievement in the Arts, Architecture, Journalism, Business! Finance, Law, Public Service, the Military, Religion, Academe, Science and Medicine." (The Dynasties do most of their achieving in beer, banking, department stores. or mining.)

Debrett must. have found itself on more familiar ground when it discovered that there are more than 70 titled residents of Canada. They range fmm some left-over knights and widows of knights to a couple of marquesses. One curious little trio of nobility — the Marquess of Exeter, Lord Burghley, and Lady Marina Cecil — all live together at

100 Mile House, B.C. Whether they are related or just share it for fun isn't made clear. British Columbia, by the way, is the most popular province for the titled: 19 of them live there, while only 14 live in Ontario.

Undoubtedly this book will have a certain so* of popularity, especially among those mentioned in it and also among those of us who would like to have been. But it would be well to realize that Debrett didn't necessarily feel that some Canadians are so exceptionally wedded to the concept "that counts the rule of the worthy and the responsible as the highest virtue" that they deserved immortalizing in this volume. At this very moment Debrett is also bringing out something called *The Texan Peerage. And it* only costs $29.951 □

REVIEW

Scenes from a novel

By ALBERT0 MANGUEL

Through the Byes of **a Cat: Irish** Stories, by **Seán** Virgo, **Sono** Nis, **66** pages. S3.95 paper (ISBN 0 919203 07 8).

LET **US JUDGE a** book by its cover: on a lime-green background, a **black-and-**white **lithograph** shows the **corner** of **a** room at night. The **wall** is cut by a door leading into darkness, **and** on the table burns a" oil lamp **next** to an empty **bowl.** The **cover** promises **scenes,** not plots, and **that** is exactly **what** the book delivers. The **scenes** (the stories) **in Seán** Virgo's second **collection are as** haunting as the cover **lithograph:** strong black **lines cutting out tbe** objects **in** a. twilight world **we** know must be **real;** objects observed "through the eyes of **a** cat;' a creature **who,** it **seems, can** see in the dark. The scenes do **not tell** a story as **Maupassant** told a story; **we are** not asked to witness a beginning. a **middle,** and **an** end. Instead **we are presented** with sections of a much **broader** reality, sections through which **we** may **guess** at the whole.

The book of short stories that neglects plot in **favour** of character and mood has **a** famous Irish precedent: **James** Joyce's ***Dubliners,*** which, though witten **in** 1905, **was** not published until **nine** years later because the **printers (for** once the **guilt lies not** with the **publishers)** objected **to** the use of **the word** "bloody" (twice) but mainly **to** the specific mention of actual Irish characters and place"**ames,** a device **essential** to **Joyce's** purpose of describing Ireland's slow-flowing **reality,** "this **lovely,land** that **always** sent/Her writers **and** artists to **banishment."**

Like the **stories in *Dubliners, Virgo's stories hint at*** possible, **secret tales** through side **references, memories.** In **"Shan Val Mór" an** old man is dying: the untold story of his **wife's ancient** infidelity defines the old man's character and makes him powerfully moving. Arid, indirectly. it **makes** him a **hero: a** man who **refuses** to **take** death **lying** down, a man like **Cu Chulainn** (the **mythical** Irish warrior) who, surrounded by **his** enemies, tied himself to a rock in order to die on his feet — his enemies did not know that he was dead until a raw." came to peck out his eyes. Mythological and historical allusions **glimmer through** the stories, but to many readers who have no Irish background these may be lost. ("It **would seem** that almost everyone has an Irish **grandmother!"** exclaims Virgo in his introduction. Not **really:** I, for one, do **not.)**

And yet, even **though** the allusions **may remain unclear, the reader certainly** has- **a** sense of a **rich, background, a brilliant** and ancient undercoating. Like the poetic ***kennings*** **Virgo** mentions in his introduction (catch-phrase metaphors of the Old **English** bards, whose meaning the **listener** was supposed to **grasp** immediately), Virgo's allusive stories gain, not lose, by their ambiguity. **We understand the scene, the character, the** mood — if not the **background —** and **the** unsolved riddle **enhances** the metaphor. The metaphor becomes **more** powerful **than** the invisible object it seek.5 to **illustrate.**

The **charm** of **these** short **stories lies,** I **think,** in **the** language. Virgo's use of English, the conqueror's tongue. "Whichever Ireland you are writing about," he says in his introduction, "you don't get any **nearer** the truth by 'stripping **away'** the charm. That, even **for** urban writers, is just **another** posture.; for the **charm** in question is "ot **glamour.** It's in the **air,** the bedrock, **the** language." Virgo's **language** we would **call** poetic, if that word had not bee" drained of meaning. **Here** is how he conjures **up** an **army** of ghosts, **ancient mythological** echoes **resounding** through a few chosen words:

> **Ciaran was** dark and **restless,** six **years** older than me. **He would lead** me **down** to the dyke at the **wood's** end. **and** my uncle's **orchard.** We made great daughter of **the** songbirds **there: the meek blackbird who would fall, however lightly the** shot **tipped him;** the robin **redbreast** who **would** not **go easy** out of this **life. I've watched a** robin. **lying** on the **dry needles** at the wood's **fringe,** bating his life out stubbornly **though** hir heart **was shattered, seeming** to send up **the veil on his quiet eye only when he chose to sleep. The birds died beautifully — I've seen** but one **man die,** Pat **Conra,** the **tinker** fallen **fmm his cart in tk market. and that was an ugly,** shameful sight.

Some writers seem to thrive on small breaths: their style rightly **fits** the short story. In the **case of Seán Vii** however, **languagc seems** to **cry out** for **more space, for an** intricate story to **tell, long** and unfolding: it **seems** to **cry** out for **a** 'novel. Let **an** intelligent publisher do **his** job: force Virgo's hand, see that he has **time,** money, and peace of **mind, sit him at a** table to write. **Lurking** somewhere in these 66 **pages is a masterpiece.** We should not let **Seán** Vi get **away** before he has told **us** the ***whole story.*** □

REVIEW

Cheers today, goon tomorrow

By J.D. CARPENTER

The Last Season, by **Roy** MacGregor, **Macmillan,** 312 **pages,** $19.95 cloth **(ISBN** 0 7715 9778 **9).**

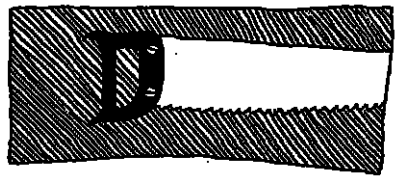
FELIX BATTERINSKI, narrator and central character of **Roy** MacGregor's second novel. is a **paradox:** he's **a** professional hockey player (a goon, **as** his **name transparently** suggests) **whose checkered** career has led him from the backwoods of the **Madawaska Valley, through** fame and **glory** in **Philadelphia,** largesse **in** Los Angeles, and ignominy in Helsinki, but he is **also** a sensitive **soul searching** for happiness and **attempting** to make peace with **his** past.

A **third-generation** Pole **growing up in** the mythical Ontario hamlet **of Pomerania,** Felix **is embarrassed** by his **family.** His father **runs a** bait shop, says **"dis"** for "this," and wears **a hat made** of **"straw** woven in fedora **style,** with **a** hollow plastic golf **ball** sliced **in** half **and** stapled onto some **slime-green** plastic **grass** that [rides] **up** 0" **top." His** Uncle **Ig** is **a jovial retard** who **covers** bis bald-

ness by scotch-taping the sweepings from the floor of Hatkoski's barber shop to his scalp. His grandmother, Batcha, is a malevolent presence who blames Felix for his mother's death: her curse follows Felix throughout the novel.

Felix wishes he could be like his buddy, Danny Shannon, easy-going and popular. Instead he is tormented by the backwardness of his family and vows to escape to a better life. He learns commitment, whether to a two-hour hockey game or a lifelong dream. He believes his coach and mentor, Sugar Bowles (another unfortunate name). who explains that "talent is what begins hockey games, heart is what wins them." Predictably it is Felix who goes on to play Junior in Sudbury and from there to a Stanley Cup in Philadelphia, while Danny, comfortable as a big frog in a tittle pond, returns to Pomerania and a job in the mill.

The relationship between the two friends is beautifully rendered. Ready to die for each other at 15, they eventually separate and make lives for themselves. But before they do we suffer their rites of manhood with them: Felix's rage and humiliation when the local nymphomaniac, Maureen the Queen, who has already accommodated three of his teammates in a late-night orgy in the empty arena, rejects him because of his acne; Danny's pain one afternoon when, in sub-zero weather, he becomes "stuck" to tbe intake pipe of the high-school principal's car while trying to foul the gasoline. With these characters and anecdote& MacGregor is at his best. Only au old hockey man could capture



Felix's affection for the arena itself, his palace of dreams:

> The door opened on my favourite smelt: the arena, empty and waiting. Only the night lights were on, making the lobby shadowy and cold and the ice beyond dark and rippling red where the distant exit lights bounced along the surface. . . . For me, coming into the arena was like crawling back in under the bed covers.

And much later when Felix, now a wealthy Los Angeles King, returns home for a visit, MacGregor hammers home *just* how much he has changed:

> Poppa walked in Kodiak workboots so stubbed the steel toes had worn through. I wore my wedge-heeled, suction-cupped Nikes. Poppa was in his summer longjohns and. green hydro pants. I had on my white painter jeans and a fishnet blue tank top. Poppa was bareheaded. I wore my stiff. ten-pound leather handcrafted cowboy hat. and felt like a damned fool.

MacGregor's experience as a sports journalist is put to good use. Bobby Orr, Bobby Clarke. Bill Barber. and Jerry Buss make' cameo appearances. We travel with Felix through America and thence to Finland. Sweden, and Russia We meet Torchy Bender, an L.A. teammate who trades in his sex aids for the love of Jesus; Vit Wheeler. a players' agent who does Felix out of $300,000; Kristiina Jalonen, Felix's freedom-loving Finnish lover.

The novel is written in stream-of-consciousness sections with frequent flashbacks, and each section — whether it be *Sudbury in* 1963, *Philadelphia* in 1976, or Finland in 1982 -is introduced by an excerpt from a magazine article ("Batterinski's Burden") written by a journalist named Matt Keening, the significance of which does not become evident until the very last page. By that point, however, the novel, which began so robustly, is past saving.

The problem is that MacGregor attempts too much. Having convinced us that hockey goons can have hearts of gold and can think interesting thoughts, he unwisely introduces Lech Walesa and Solidarity in order to awaken in Felix a sense of Polish pride. To add fuel to these flames, Felix's late grandfather's family history-is unearthed and transcribed in lengthy and tedious asides. In an attempt to give his book more meaning, MacGregor sabotages a perfectly good hockey novel. He forgets the limitations of his material; he forgets 'that it is accomplishment enough to lure the reading public into a novel about one of hockey's bad boys in these heady days when the sport *appears* to be. through with the Dave Schultzes and Fred Sheros of our time.

But to make matters worse. MacGregor then uses Felix's grandmother and her curse to manufacture a conclusion so appallingly ill-chosen that one suddenly Feels he's fallen into another novel, a *bad occult novel, or that someone at* Macmillan has mistaken *the* final *chapter of another* novel *for the* final chapter of MacGregor's.

The Lust Season is a good hook that addresses modem hockey issues such as sanctioned violence and players' unpreparedness for wealth and fame. The hockey scenes are wonderful, and the flashbacks of Felix's youth read like an Ontario *Who Has Seen the Wind.* (The *sex* scenes *are* alternately *hilarious* and *embarrassing.)* Yes, it's a good book, hut it deserves a better end. □

REVIEW

Doktor Strangelove.

By JON PEIRCE

Hitler's Bomb, by Chris Scott, McClelland 4 Stewart, 238 pages, $18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 8010 7).

SPY THRILLERS aren't usually my cup of tea, and it's doubtful whether the world needs another book about Allies and Nazis. But there's a lot more going on here than in the typical spy thriller. Chris Scott has a superb grasp of history and is able to provide excellent insights into the workings (and failings) of the British Intelligence Service and the German scientific establishment. And the book is so beautifully written that it would be a pleasure to read even if *its* subject matter weren't inherently fascinating, It has been a long time since I've come across a novelist with Scott's gift for precise description ad characterization.

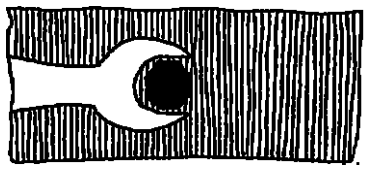
The story seems simple enough, but proves to have many surprising twists. British Intelligence officer Carlo Peat must find out whether Germany, losing the war badly on the conventional front in late 1944, is as Hitler claims close to building an atomic bomb that would destroy London. If Hitler's claim is well-founded, the British will obviously have to come to some kind of accommodation with the Germans, who as it tams out are quite willing to strike a bargain. In return *for* separate Allied truces on the Western Front, which would prevent an Allied occupation of Germany and would free Germany to continue her war against Russia, the Germans will not dmp "Fat Albert." The British have precisely three weeks to agree to Germany's terms.

Peat isn't sure that the Germans possess either the capability to build the bomb or the desire to use it (many in the German scientific establishment have had doubts about the project from the start). His mission leads him and his operatives on a merry chase through the English countryside, into high-level British cabinet meetings, and eventually into the offices not only of German intelligence chief Rudolf Stengel, bat even into those of Der Führer himself. Throughout. the pleasures of the chase are heightened by Scott's crisp style and by the spies' delight in their work.

Not unsurprisingly, perhaps, the plot includes a series of seemingly unconnected murders and disappearances, a British commando raid on the air base from which "Fat Albert" is to be launched, and a courageous attempt by German pilot Viktor von Wenden to carry out the planned raid with "Fat Albert" even though the commandos have badly damaged his plane. AU this seams conventional enough. Tbe ending, however, which it would be churlish and cruel to divulge, is neither conventional nor predictable: in *Hitler's Bomb* (as-in much of real life) history proves rather more complex than it appears on the surface.

Scott's character descriptions alone are worth the price of admission. Here is a sketch of Major Karl Kroll, Stengel's chief assistant: "He was a small, lithe figure who reminded Stengel of a ferret. A former Korpsstudent (hence the sabre scar on . . . his jaw), he was neat and punctilious, shaving twice a day lest the scar, with its tendency to show a livid white against his blue jowls, should make him look more sinister than he really was." Then them's British Air Group Captain Lucas, who doles out aerial reconnaissance photographs of the bomb site "like a visiting great aunt her snapshots of Brighton beach." And, best of all, parachute instructor Charlie Page, who claims to be able to "take the piss out of a stone if he wanted to" — a claim that his cohorts are inclined to believe.

The characters' names are also delightful. The British officer who con-



tacts General Dorf is known as Balthazar, after the wine bottle that holds 15 quarts; the commando unit that raids the German bare is called Force Vorpal, after the blade that slew the Jabberwock *in* Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem. Other characters are blessed with names like Johnny Scarr and Raymond Thring. Perhaps only Bertolt Brecht and Peter De Vries, among-modem writers, have equalled Scott at the fine art of nomenclature.

Clearly Scott is no ordinary writer of *spy* novels, and it would be interesting to see what would happen if he were to apply his formidable technical gifts and splendid knowledge of history to a depiction of the contemporary Canadian scene. But if he'd rather go on writing spy novels. that's all right, too. □

REVIEW

The monsters among us

By JUDITH FITZGERALD

Bed Faith, by Ian Adams, NC Press, 232 pages, $16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920053 12 2).

IAN ADAMS'S SIXTH bodk, *Bad Faith,* concerns itself with the inhuman impulses and mean-spirited motives that ultimately govern and direct most individuals in an ostensibly enlightened and civilized world. Adams has moved from the spy terrain of some of his earlier works — S: *Portrait of a Spy* (1977). *Endgame In Paris* (1979) — *to the more* recognizable terrain 'of journalism and crime. However. his aim is still the same: to expose the way our legislative and judicial systems have deteriorated. At one time our democratic notions of freedom and justice may not have contained the hollow ring of mere rhetoric; now, the objective of those in power is to remain in power — nothing more, nothing less. "We must never appear to have been dealing in bad faith with the peõple."

The story, narrated predominantly from the alternating viewpoints of a crime reporter (Vidal), a small-time crook charged with the first of en apparently long list of child murders (Grinell), a criminal lawyer for the defence (Turner), a crown prosecutor (Solomon), a hook-handed homicide inspector (Brodsky), and a staff-sergeant (Lou), spans every class of Canadian society: "There is a snake under *every* rock." There are Frank the cab-driver, Solange the actress, Eddie the pimp, Peter Newman tbe psychiatrist, the Attorney-General of the province (significantly never named), and a host of seedy or successful others.

Vidal, a disillusioned journalist, lives the way he does "out of a sense of personal revenge." He works for a daily newspaper identified only by the name he *and his colleagues have* given it, the Mattress Factory ("This ain't a job, it's a mattress to lie down on"). Vidal eventually unravels the story behind the story of the accused and finds himself with too much unwanted information on his hands. Loosely reminiscent of Clifford Robert Olsen, Grinell ends up in the midst of a little game the A-G and his various henchmen play for their own gains: Let's Make a Deal. Virtually everyone connected with the "monster murders" gets a cut in that deal and they all play with marked cards. It is no accident that Adams takes his epigraph from Jean-Paul Sartre: "I would like to know the underside of the cards, I want to contemplate mankind as it is." Treachery is the touchstone of *Bad Faith,* and "monsterism" is its theme. The novel's narrative twists and counter-twists before reaching its unsettling and unsavoury conclusion: civilization has a long way to go before it can rightfully claim its name.

Although Bad *Faith is* primarily concered with Grinell and his actions (or lack of them), it also addresses far more. than the gross implications of a judicial and legal system gone awry. Adams extends the "monster" metaphor to encompass not only the daily intercourse between men and women, but also the idea that monsters exist everywhere. The human universe is fraught with them. At one point Solomon interrogates Grinell and applies a little pressure:

> They weren't sides of beef, John. They were men, or at least they had been mm. . . . *They* were corpses, flesh tortured by the cruellest sadism latent in some men. and then sculptured; yes, carved into *something* indescribably hideous. . . . For a new enlightened *people in this* world, *saints,* some psychiatrists, the truly innocent and naive, ma like you are just sick, out of control. . . . For the rest *of* us, *even* if we can accept this idea intellectually. in our guts we just don't want to believe you're human. Your actions are too threatening to us. We do not want to confront the possibility that wc ourselves could behave like you. It is easier to believe that you are not one of us, not human. This is the importance of monsters.

Hence it is not merely criminals-turned-monsters that Adams takes to task; it is a system that creates and demands "the monster" in order to sustain its perverted self-image. In this respect, the system and society itself become monsters of another sort:

> For the last six months *the* monster had almost become the Focus of daily life. *Or* so it would seem From the media's unrelenting appetite for speculating OR the sexually macabre. . . And this also being an election year, the political pressure on the attorney-general's office had become *intense, a* pressure applied in turn on the police to break the case, or at least to come up with a suspect.

Whether or not Grinell is guilty is one of the interesting points Adams highlights in *Bad Faith;* another point involves the public- and media-generated frenzy to do justice to monsters who may not be murderers at au.

The monster, as Adams seems to view it, has infinite potential for rearing its ugly and malignant head in all areas of human existence, personal relationships and public office included. "People. .. are really incredible in what they do to each other. . . . They're all so busy reinventing their own individual reality. they have no idea of the collective psychic damage they wreak along the way."

Bad Faith is superbly written; its narrative structure and style contain a supercharged tension that combines with its content to create an unrelenting examination of the darker side of existence. In turns cynical and brutal, the novel ultimately explores the value of information, or knowledge, at all:

> Of course he had known for a long time that most so-called "information" is prejudiced. . . . Over the years he had acquired too much information about how his society worked to continue to be of much use as a reporter to his employers. '.. As journalists we play an important role in the denial of our own history.

If there is indeed "a snake under every rock," then Adams has left no stone unturned. The strength of *Bad Faith,* however, is not located in the depths it explores; rather, it is in its urgent warning: "That's what the world needs: more compassion. Forget love.. Forget understanding. Stick with compassion." ***Bad Faith*** possesses, ultimately, a sense of compassion. □

IN BRIEF

Rubicon One, by Dennis Jones, General Publishing, 369 pages, 819.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7736 0116 3). It's hard to know what today's generation of thriller writers would do without the ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation. As a plot device it's irresistible. Take a world already gripped with paranoia, plunge it to the brink of global destruction, then. just as the doomsday clock is about to strike midnight, find a way to ward off tbe crisis. Dennis Jones takes the formula and adds enough twists to turn tbis latest rendering of the eternal tug-of-war into a gripping tale of apocalypse averted.

It's 1986, and Ronald Reagan has been replaced in the White House by the politically ambiguous Jason Law. In the Soviet Union, Andropov is dead and is soon joined by his moderate successor. Vitaly A. Boyarkin, the KGB chief who combines "the worst traits of Stalin, Beria and Ivan the Terrible," takes over as Soviet leader. Reversing a Russian policy that withheld nuclear arms from client states, Boyarkin encourages Pakistan to ship cruise missiles to Libya, which, in turn, arms Syria. Syria, bolstered bv her new-found nuclear strength, decides that the time is ripe to take back the Israeli-occuoled Golan. To further complicate ma&s, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt is assassinated, a victim of his country's détente with Israel.

Monitoring the situation in Washington, a sophisticated computer program known as "Rubicon" predicts nuclear disaster. Its chillingly accurate track record prompts President Law's advisers to urge the adoption of "Rubicon One," a last-resort scenario so terrifyingly bizarre that its existence is acknowledged at only the highest levels. In Moscow, Boyarkin's reign of terror aggravates the bitter rivalry between the army and the KGB, and a coup is planned to oust Boyarkin and purge the KGB.

Although Jones's dialogue leans toward the melodramatic and most of his characters lack depth, *Rubicon One* is difficult to put down. Events in the 10-week period covered by the book follow each other with the rapidity of machine-gun fire and their urgency is accentuated by Jones's *cuts* between the book's various locales. At the same time, it's a compelEn. reminder of how delicately our survival is balanced in a world where humanity lags far behind military technology. —MARK GERSON

REVIEW

Layton's inferno

By JOSEPH KERTES

The Gucci Bag, by Irving Layton, McClelland&Stewart, 128 pages, S9.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 4917 X).

IRVING LAYTON calls *Thè Gucci Bag* his "last volume of poems," and in many respects the poems read like the culmination of his life's work. The themes and subjects of the collection are not unfamiliar to readers of Layton. The poet is concerned with love and with the bit-

terness that necessarily accompanies a family's dissolution; with the corruption and — even worse — "bovinity" that results from greed; with the *place* of the once prophetic Jew in a context in which success is measured by material gain; with the relationship between man and nature; and, naturally, with poets, *the process of poetic composition, and with* the function of the imagination in modern life.

The difference is that this book operates much more like a sustained poetic treatise than Layton's previous works, and the effect is intentional. The poems are merely numbered, and tbdr titles are parenthetical: they can be found only at the back of the book. He tells us in the foreword that he would like us to think of them as bis *Divine Comedy.* If we do not concentrate too much on the parallel and agree to accompany Layton on his extended voyage, we are richly rewarded. We are introduced to the&k hell of love lost and the ensuing tangle of lawyers and other dead souls. We are then led, by the light of purgatory, to vision through art: there are three poems to Pasternak and others to Strindberg, Moutarde, Dante, Yeats. and to young, forgotten artists like Ruby McQuesten. Heaven, finally, consists of new love, freedom, and forgiveness.

In the first poem, it is "a Gucci bag" — which has been nailed, ironically, to the outside of the poet's house — that reminds us that "evil is not external but within." But, by the last 'poem. a quatrain called "Letting Go," we are cautioned not to dwell on the sorrow that evil arouses:

> He *who to himself a grief does bind*
> *Learns to dispraise all mankind*
> *But he who speeds the grief as it flies*
> *Keeps a candid low in his eyes.*

It is this roundness of vision that is truly remarkable about The *Gucci Bag* — not the subject matter, in other words, but the unprecedented wisdom that is brought to bear upon it. Even the Edenic love poems of the first third of the book are enriched by a profound understanding of the lovers' fate. In the book's second poem, there is a garden of "sweet meadows," through which stroll the goddesses of "Ecstasy and Freedom and Love." But

> a *faery who dwells in the Black Forest*
> *divined the peril in our bliss.*
>
> *She pointed her magical stick*
> *at my head and turned it to old snow.*
> *I still adore your brooding eyes, Love,*
> *but where did the goddesses* go?

Sorrow is thus linked to ecstasy ("pain," we are told in the very next poem, is "pleasure's indisseverable twin"), and the truth is "ever black or white but always grey, always complex.

In more than a dozen other poems the imagination serves up a feast of delights that the intellect cautions against. But Layton's wisdom here is in knowing that even the intellect is limited. In an extraordinary poem called "Bottles" an artist is at work — compulsively. continually — painting bottles. while "*Mussolini* came and went,/likewise the. war,/Hiroshima, the Holocaust ....". He, of course, has only one "self-portrait": he *lives in* a bottle. The poet, who looks on, can understand this artist's limitations, but realizes 'that "There must be a deep meaning/in this somewhere/but what it is/I cannot tell." Tbe poet himself lives in a bottle — perhaps a bit larger than that of the painter of bottles, but smaller than that of an experienced "old whore." or a "philosopher" or "death."

Ultimate knowledge, Layton realizes, cannot be ascertained without some recognition of death. Some of Layton's finest poems on this subject since "Keine Lazarovitch: 1870 - 1959," the elegy to the poet's mother, are contained in The *Gucci Bag:* "The Seesaw," in which a young boy watches as his brother is interred; and "To Make an End," in whiih the poet gazes upon the corpse of an old and once vital woman.

> *her diminutive teats, raw and wornout,*
> *mocking our vaporous presence on earth*
> *with the mordant emphasis of quotemarks.*

Even the vitriol characteristic of some of Layton's earlier work — and for which he has occasionally been criticized — is tempered here by a pervasive sense of calm and reconciliation. Layton still curses with the best of them — a lawyer. is called a "dung beetle" and his brothers-in-law "loudmouthed, money-mad, sadistic bastards" — but when the smoke clears he recognizes that "If you live long enough, the differences cancel out." The last third of the collection is devoted to tbii thesis. Layton invites Louis Dudek. an old enemy, to "bury the hatchet." The poet's job, like that of the ancient prophets, is to "stifle discord," he writes lo "The Carillon," for "In the creative word lies redemption." It is only the poem, ultimately, that is worth tbe effort, because life itself is transitory. "The Garden" of The Gucci *Bag is not Eden,* therefore, but the real world long after the Fall:

> *Nature conspires with and against*
> *me, brief shuttle between womb and tomb:*
> *a centimetre on which is notched*
> *immense vistas of anguish and gloom.*

If these poems are any indication, we can only hope that Layton's *next* "last" volume is equally masterful. □

INTERVIEW

Cultural bureaucrats, says Roy MacSkimming, should be battling to raise our artists' earnings to a level that is closer to their own

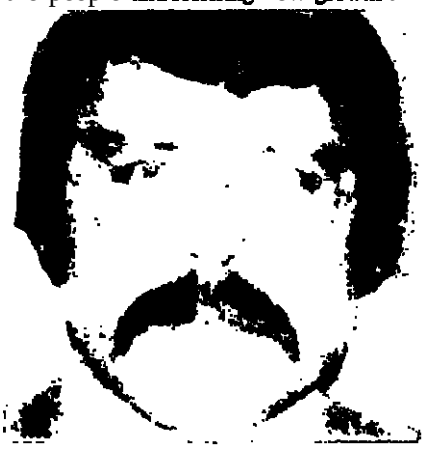
By GEORGE GALT

ROY MACSKIMMING has for 20 years worked in and around book publishing and the Ottawa arts bureaucracy. Born in Ottawa in 1944 and educated at the University of Toronto, he began his career as an editor at Clarke Irwin, and during the wave of cultural nationalism at the beginning of the 1970s was a co-founder, with Dave Godfrey and James Bacque, of New Press. The author of a novel. *Formentera* (1971). he served as tbe *Toronto Star's* book editor before becoming a literary officer at the Canada Council. He was on the staff of the Applebaum-Hébert committee on the arts, and — at a *time* when government participation in the arts is again under review — has written For Arts' *Sake,* a history of the Ontario Arts Council, which recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. Now a senior writer with tbe National Arts Centre, MacSkimming talked with George Galt about tbe role of the state in the arts:

Books in Canada: Isn't it *true that, despite a democratizing intention, arts councils may engender a new kind of elitism, encouraging artists to create work for other artists more than for the community at large?*

MacSkimming: Historically, some arts councils have democratized the arts. The Ontario Arts Council, which is tbe one I've been delving into most recently for the history, is a very democratic body.

It's been a catalyst for all kinds of developments outside of the established centres of activity. There was a very conscious intention of bringing the arts to the people and fostering new growth all



Roy MacSkimming

over the map. They've now spread themselves so thinly that they can't fund their large established clients properly, but that's not really their fault. They're not being funded properly.

I don't think all arts councils automatically take that approach. The Arts Council of Great Britain has tended to be more selective in its funding and to concentrate much more on the large performing groups that. they feel are the repositories of excellence in music, theatre, opera, and so on.

In the case of individual artists, the large programs for funding them in arts councils tend to be the ones for writers and visual artists. There probably what you're saying has some validity. The councils choose the members of the juries that judge grant applications, and that's a delicate process. It's a very influential process in determining what kinds of creation are funded. The councils that I've worked with — the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council — try to represent a variety of schools of thought and regional and artistic perspectives of their juries. They really are very conscientious about getting a left-handed female New Brunswick poet to sit beside the right-handed Saskatchewan male novelist. But finally to answer your question, I suppose you're right. The people on the juries are not trying to provide publishers with' saleable manuscripts or booksellers with hot Christmas sales items. They really are trying to encourage the creation of excellence in literature or in painting or sculpture or choreography. And so they're being very subjective.

It's really a kind of a crap game, frankly. If you are the writer or painter or choreographer who's applied to that particular competition in that particular year, God knows who'll be on the jury. You may get a group who are generally sympathetic to you and you may not. The more erratic the juries are, the more democratic the process. It means that a particular point of view won't predominate year after year. My experience has been with the literary section of the Canada Council, and I think there that a particular school of thought hasn't predominated. On the other hand, perhaps in the visual arts it has a bit more. There has 'perhaps been a tendency for artists and critics who are very specialized to choose their colleagues. Working at the Canada Council and on the Applebaum-Hébert committee, one sensed a much wider swath of disaffection among visual artists than among others. There's a sense of artistic empire-building in that field more than in any other I've seen.

BiC: ***It remains extraordinarily difficult for an individual artist to make a living in this country over a 30- or 40-year working life. Is there anything more you think arts councils could be doing lo make it easier?***

MacSkimming: I don't think that arts councils should be concerning themselves with providing a guaranteed annual income for artists. It wouldn't be long before the available funds were exhausted, eaten up in perpetuity by those few who were lucky enough to be fingered for the guaranteed wage. I think government assistance has to remain one of the elements in the economic. ecology of the arts. If the government is intervening on such a scale that it's providing individual artists with their main means of support, they're clearly no longer free to think and write independently. And there arc other sources for artists. IL'S a very tough row to hoe. but I think the fact that a grant may come along just when it's needed, and help get the artist ova a financial hump or help get a work finished, that's essential. If the artist is concerned with his society, he's also going to be concerned with sources of funding from the marketplace.

The Canada Council is doing something very important by trying to establish payment for public use. The principle is terribly important, that writers be acknowledged financially for the "se the public makes of their books la libraries. By adding that string to its bow, the council is making a major step to become more useful and more effective.

The Ontario Arts Council, I think, does less for writers. There are something like 600 grants given annually; the typical grant is something. around $1,000. That satisfies a sense of fairness and democracy, but I don't think it does as much as that same pool of money

could do if it were directed a little more selectively.

BiC: *In* For Arts' Sake *you suggest that some of the Ontario Arts Council's policies need to be reassessed. Apart from grants to writers, what do you think needs reviewing?*

MacSkimming: The first thing, and it's now under review, is the role of the council in the whole field of arts support. The reason it needs to be reassessed is that the council is in danger of being passed over in the government's scheme of things. It's a fate that often befalls cultural agencies over time. The government creates the agency to encourage artistic development; the agency finds many able and willing workers in the arts to give money to; it fosters an increase in professionalism; the public is attracted, goes, spends money — and within a generation or half a generation you have a vibrant artistic scene where it was much smaller and more truncated before. Everyone agrees that's terrific. At this point the organization reaches a crucial stage in its development. The government looks at it and says what kind of credit do we get? We want to be part of that action.

BiC: *This has in fact happened in Ontario, hasn't it?*

MacSkimming: It's happened in Ontario, and it's happened in the federal government. Both the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture in Ontario and the Department of Communications in Ottawa are now major players in funding the arts. I'm not saying that's necessarily bad: it increases the sources of support. From the point of view of growth and development in the arts, it's probably a good thing. But clearly the arts council may get forgotten. If it does not show itself to be innovative, it may been seen as *passé*, mired in the *status quo*, and barren of new ideas. The funding will start more and more to go in other directions. The question will then arise, Do we need this organization at all? This is the point the National Film Board has arrived at.

BiC: *You note in* For Arts' Sake *that a key question for an arts council is whether to raise or to spread — to raise the quality of artistic endeavour, or to spread opportunities to enjoy the arts to a wider audience. You say the Ontario Arts Council has chosen both.*

MacSkimming: It's been an inevitable choice. You can't expect people to travel hundreds or thousands of miles to see theatre and hear music and look at paintings in this country. That's just not the way we work in Canada. So it's inevitable that they would try to spread. But they can't afford to neglect excellence. It's politically necessary to be regionally responsive, but it's also politically necessary to fund the big established organizations in the arts, because they have their supporters too. They are the ones who will argue most eloquently on their own behalf but also by extension on behalf of the arts generally. One of the ideas I tried to get across in *For Arts' Sake* was that it is essential that the arts be seen as a whole or as a continuum. Any government body that's going to find the arts sensitively and wisely needs to have a holistic view.

BiC: *It's one animal. You can't cut it up.*

MacSkimming: It really is. Twenty or 25 years ago a few small mainstream companies achieved sufficient excellence and sufficient support in the community for the government to establish an arts council. In that sense the establishment feeds the experimental. The experimental groups and individuals in turn seed the large mainstream institutions.

BiC: *You've been in the cultural bureaucracy for some years. How do you respond to the argument one often hears outside Ottawa that the cultural bureaucrats get too much of the money?*

MacSkimming: I think the artists who say that the cultural bureaucrat shouldn't be making three or four times what the artists are making are absolutely right. If the cultural bureaucrat is going to earn that salary, he ought to be working his ass off to try to change that situation. The best of the cultural bureaucrats will get out of the Ottawa mentality enough to see that they really have a responsibility to serve the community as well and as imaginatively as they can so they won't adhere to precedent and the *status quo*. □

PAPERBACKS

Mavis Gallant's novels foreshadow the brilliant stories to come, while Morley Callaghan's reaffirm how fine his stories were

By DORIS COWAN

HARDLY ANYONE in Canada seems to have read Mavis Gallant's two novels when they first appeared in 1959 and 1970. The reviews were, apparently, not very enthusiastic. This astonishing obtuseness does not say much for our literary judgement, and their reappearance in Macmillan's Laurentian Library series is very good news.

The earlier book, **Green Water, Green Sky** ($6.95), is a brief, dazzling display of the qualities that have become familiar to readers of Gallant's recent collections of stories: acuteness of insight, exactness of detail, radiance of imagery, and characters that stay in your memory like people known in life, not on paper. Her reserve, too, is already evident; it is a coolness that describes with an attention so close, so complete, that the reader is never aware of the narrator, only of the narrative.

This book, though, has a fiercer, narrower, more tragic focus than is usual in her later work. Every element in it bears directly upon the painful, disintegrating consciousness of its unhappy heroine, Flor. She is the only child of an American divorcée, Bonnie McCarthy, and she has lived most of her life in a stiflingly close, possessive, and dependent relationship with her mother.

Bonnie is an amazing creation, a shallow-hearted, posing woman who adores her daughter with a love that is idolatrous but without real warmth. Her considerable intelligence has all gone into carefully nurtured delusions and affectations, which she clings to for comfort after her humiliating divorce. To escape the difficulty of appearing in society as a rejected woman, Bonnie has lived with her daughter in Europe, in a kind of wandering exile, since Flor was a child of 10, binding the girl to her with ties of offended loyalty, and teaching her to hate the faithless father.

When we first see the adult Flor, as a young married woman of 24, her love for her mother has turned to bitterness and rejection. Flor has impulsively married a rich, young, New York businessman, in charge of the Paris branch of the family business. Bonnie continues to live with them. She and the young husband settle on and furnish a flat. Flor, increasingly passive, soon begins to withdraw into silence and secretiveness, and eventually into complete mental breakdown.

> . . . and each could now think, If it hadn't been for you, my life would have

been different. If only you had gone out of my life at the right time.

The story is told from several points of view: Bonnie's, the husband's, a young American cousin's, even through the eyes of a parasitical male friend of Bonnie's, Flor's perhaps least of all, yet it is all her story.

A Fairly Good Time ($9.95), the 1970 novel, is as masterly a piece of writing as the first, though in a very different way. Gallant prefaces the book with a quotation from Edith Wharton: "There are lots of ways of being miserable, but there's only one way of being comfortable, and that is to stop running around after happiness. If you make up your mind not to be happy there's no reason why you shouldn't have a fairly good time." The novel began, Gallant has said, "with a girl on the Metro. I saw her going home one morning, having been out all night. She was wearing a dreadful-looking raincoat and her hair cut in some funny way and she was reading a letter from Canada." It became a book like its heroine: impulsive, untidy, vivid, and generous; also puzzled, comical, and sad. Shirley Higgins is the Lost Girl of Europe, hoping to find friends, baffled by the French, unable to understand how she creates her own confusion, and slowly, painfully, coming to the realization that love will not be easy to find.

Gallant's prose is as striking here as it was in the earlier book:

> The building across the courtyard must have been removed by someone playing with bricks, for the light of the morning, which had been suppressed until now, blazed through a gap in the bedroom curtains, shot along a wall, set on fire a mirror framed in snapshots, notes, postcards, out-of-date reminders to and from Philippe, and revealed a small, scarlet, translucent spider, hanging on a rope of the stoutest silk. A milder luminosity — of imagination this time — surrounded two middle-aged persons cycling steadily up an English hill. In homage to the morning, and to the splendour of new beginnings, they carried an offering of blue. . . .

Laurentian Library has also reprinted two novels, **The Loved and the Lost** and **A Fine and Private Place** ($6.95 each), by the writer Canada can't make up its mind about: Morley Callaghan. I find him admirable in his early stories and novels, far less so in the later work.

The stories are full of variety, conviction, and passion, and their plain, easy language flows naturally. His novels, both early and late, are extraordinary in construction and pacing of narrative, and in boldness and seriousness of conception. The problem with his later work seems to me to be chiefly one of language. For example, let me quote, almost at random, the opening paragraph of one of his stories, "A Girl with Ambition":

> After leaving public school when she was sixteen Mary Ross worked for two weeks with a cheap chorus at the old La Plaza, quitting when her stepmother heard the girls were a lot of toughs. Mary was a neat clean girl with short fair curls and blue eyes, looking more than her age because she had very good legs, and knew it. She got another job as cashier in the shoe department at Eaton's Store, after a row with her father and a slap on the ear from her stepmother.

Here his command of the idiom is completely assured, but in 1951, when *The Loved and the Lost* was published, Callaghan was 30 years older than his young characters, and it shows. It is a fine novel, with a moving story, and the plotting and conception are as watertight as ever, but the language is no longer simply plain and colloquial: it has begun to be awkward, an affectation of naturalness rather than the real thing.

In *A Fine and Private Place*, the problem has become acute. The 1970s allusions and slang seem pasted on, and though the motivations of the two young people, Al and Lisa, are stated plainly enough, they do not make emotional sense, and the main story is laboured and seems false. Only in the subplot of the policeman (an old-fashioned personality) does the writing have the sound and shape of truthfully reported reality.

This novel had its own fascination, though, a lot of it arising from the appearance of Morley Callaghan himself (slightly disguised) in the role of Eugene Shore, an internationally respected novelist living in Rosedale. He is rather an enigmatic character, and it may in fact have been the inherent difficulty of writing with clarity and objectivity about himself that has pulled *A Fine and Private Place* askew. □

ART BOOKS

Two books on contemporary art reshuffle the same old deck, but a rich, poetic study of Ernest Lindner introduces a wild new card

By SUSAN CREAN

LAST NOVEMBER, Russell Harper, the dean of Canadian art history, died at 66. Only 16 years have passed since he published his magnum opus, *Painting in Canada: A History* (just in time for my fourth-year exams, I recall), which was the first comprehensive study of Canadian art ever undertaken. Since 1966 we have seen two major reworkings of the subject — by Dennis Reid and Barry Lord — and scores of books, large and small, from coffee-table tomes to exhibition catalogues, covering all manner of themes, artists, and artistic movements. But it was Harper who first charted the territory, and it is his original map that remains in standard use.

Two new books on contemporary Canadian art, both mostly about painting with some mention of sculpture, give special emphasis to recent permutations of the avant garde: video, performance, and installation. Both, incidently, come from Western-based publishers.

Contemporary Canadian Art, by David Burnett and Marilyn Schiff (Hurtig, 300 pages, $27.95 cloth), is a handy survey of artists who have been active in Canada over the past 40 years, primarily in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. As such its main value is as an up-to-date directory of the art and artists you are likely to find in public and commercial galleries around the country. Intended as a guide, it does not attempt to break new ground thematically or theoretically. Rather it sets out the usual framework for considering visual art using familiar notions about the linear progression of styles, statements, and aesthetics that unfold in hot pursuit of the most "significant," the most "advanced," or at least the most noticed.

One characteristic of Burnett/Schiff's view of art history that we certainly have encountered before is the habit of relating Canadian artists, wherever possible, to the nearest American. In essence their account of our cultural evolution is framed in terms of events and movements taking place somewhere off-stage, on the international scene. However, most of the American (and occasionally European) artists evoked by the authors will be completely

unknown to the vast majority of readers (as indeed is the art being referred to), which means that the technique can only reinforce the hackneyed idea that Canadian art has to be understood as a subtext to really important work being produced somewhere else. "Do we still suffer from a profound sense of cultural inferiority?" asks the press release that accompanied my copy of the book, and I can't restrain the thought that the authors exhibit the classic symptoms of that very disorder themselves.

Visions: Contemporary Art in Canada (Douglas & McIntyre; 239 pages, $29.95 cloth), is an exceedingly handsome book, comfortable in the hands of designer Robert Bringhurst. With 120 full-page colour plates it is cheap at the price, mainly because of a $50,000 contribution to costs by Canadian Pacific, which celebrated its centennial last year. As part of its gift package to the nation, CP funded TVOntario to produce a series of television documentaries on contemporary art (also called *Visions*) and this book came about as part of the project, though it is not actually intended as a companion text to the television programs.

Visions is the combined effort of no fewer than 10 people: an editorial board of four, including Bringhurst, Geoffrey James (ex-head of the Canada Council's visual arts section), Russell Keziere, and Doris Shadbolt (for many years associate director of the Vancouver Art Gallery), who in turn commissioned six other critics and curators active in the field to contribute essays. As the editors explain in an introductory statement, they deliberately chose to abandon conventional approaches (i.e. art by chronology, geography, or style) and instead decided "to toss the art of 30 years into the air to allow it to settle in a fresh configuration." A fascinating idea, and one, I think, that might have had more exciting results had the writers started out with a fresh deck of cards.

Of the six essays the two by Alvin Balkind and John Bentley Mays are the most thought-provoking, if not exactly provocative, partly because both of them step back a bit from the action to take things in a broader perspective, and to chronicle events in some kind of larger-than-the-art-world context. But none of the writers in either book strays far from the mainstream, narrowly and traditionally defined. Although, to be fair, neither book sets out to be all-inclusive or to do justice to everybody, it is nevertheless impossible not to notice how women are invariably given supporting roles and bit parts to play. They are there to be sure in greater numbers today than ever before, but never as headline-makers. Even in the two essays by women (Charlotte Townsend-Gault and Diana Nemiroff) in *Visions* it is clear that women do not yet make art history; they follow it, colouring in between the lines drawn by men.

To end on a bright note, let me recommend a most extraordinary book, which may be the breakthrough we have been waiting for in the accumulating literature on the visual arts. By Terence Heath (who also contributed an essay to *Visions*), it is **Uprooted: The Life and Art of Ernest Lindner** (Fifth House, 152 pages, $17.50 paper). It is the story of an Austrian immigrant who came here almost by accident, who got to know and came to love the Prairies during the Depression, and who became a leading light among the first generation of painters to put down roots as a community in Saskatchewan. It is art history, biography, and social documentary (Lindner's own compelling "War Memoir" is included), woven together in rich, poetic prose that perfectly matches the energy and imaginative élan of Lindner the artist. □

POETRY

Alden Nowlan's early poetry, collected posthumously, reflects not only his Maritime roots but also his years as a newspaperman

By DOUG FETHERLING

THE TRIBUTES to Alden Nowlan following his premature death last June all made mention of his position as a regional force in New Brunswick and the Atlantic provinces generally. But those that mentioned the other fact that so informed his work — the fact that he was, for many years, a working newspaperman — stopped just short of seeing its importance. At least to one who knew him only through his writing, he always appeared a latter-day representation of that strain of writer, less common now than 50 years ago, to whom the newsroom was the poor man's university. Moreover, this always seemed one of his strengths and part of his appeal. He was connected to a tradition, and he knew what to do with it. Such are the thoughts that come in reading the posthumously published **Early Poems**, edited by Robert Gibbs (Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 183 pages, $20.00 cloth, $12.50 paper).

Gibbs makes clear in his preface that the original intention was merely to draw from a few of Nowlan's early books, published when he was still the editor of the weekly *Observer* in Hartland, N.B. With Nowlan's death, however, the project took on more importance, and was extended to include selections from all six of his collections prior to *Bread, Wine and Salt*, the first of his Clarke Irwin titles, for which he received the Governor General's Award in 1968. With *Early Poems* it's certainly easy to see just how much of a pleasant shock *Bread, Wine and Salt* was, and what an advance over previous work, though it was the logical next step in a gradual process. *Early Poems* is a record of growth and as such is a positive document.

Nowlan's first book, published when he was 25, was *The Rose and the Puritan* (1958), number four in the Fiddlehead chapbook series — which is somewhat like the fourth McDonald's hamburger ever sold. The selections from it show Nowlan to have been even then a well-modulated but sometimes passive champion of a certain Atlantic sensibility, though later he could also criticize the people he lived amongst and loved. Reading the poems from this period, I remembered a sentence from Nowlan's essay on the New Brunswick press in Walter Stewart's 1980 anthology, *Canadian Newspapers: The Inside Story*. The line refers to a certain old acquaintance of his as being "a Canadian man of letters in the old tradition: he had contributed short stories to *Blackwood's Magazine* and could build a birchbark canoe." Circumstances once encouraged such an approach. I wager that is the sort of writer the young Nowlan privately aspired to become. Yet the same tradition shielded him from what was happening outside.

He wrote boring ABAB quatrains and such, some of which remind one of Chesterton, others of which are full of a sort of orderly fire. (I wonder if he was reading Kenneth Leslie at the time?) The

language is precise even when it's twisted to fit the form, though the contortions gradually disappear or become less visible. By his second book, *A Darkness in the Earth* (1959), he is writing in many different forms — even hymns — trying to find what suits him best, and the language manages to hit the mark several times, particularly when Nowlan is ironical. An example is "In the Hainesville Cemetery," wherein a Mrs. Talbot comes to put flowers on what will one day be her own grave: "The Talbots are people/who make the beds before breakfast/and set the breakfast table/every night before they go to bed." The poems are becoming very — in a word — journalistic.

By *Wind in a Rocky Country* (1960) there are still some poems in rhyme, but these are giving way to little descriptive lyrics in purely contemporary language and also, most especially, to miniature poetic biographies. There are still occasional echoes of the High Style. For instance, a poem for his grandparents begins with the remark, "Their love was sister to the starving deer/and brother to December." The rhythm is more important than the sentiment or the sense. There is even some of this in *Under the Ice* (1961). ". . . I was born like sound/stroked from the fiddle to become the ward/of tunes played on the bear-trap and the hound" is one of several places where the words that make one think for a second run afoul of the cadence that makes one feel; finally one has to sit back and resign oneself to this process. *Under the Ice* is also the book in which New Testament imagery seems to enter the picture as a description of something within the writer himself, rather than as a concern of his neighbours that he is simply describing objectively. But the more noticeable feature of both *Under the Ice* and *The Things Which Are* the following year is the inclusion of more and more poetic biographical sketches and the rise of a more journalistic tone of voice, often in poems with ironic endings that cry out "ending," as in a feature story. From this point onwards, the struggle is to use this more detached diction not in writing about others but in writing out of himself; the progress is slow but steady.

As most of the obituaries mentioned, Nowlan took a lot of pleasure in observing blue-collar New Brunswick people and remembering the Nova Scotia ones of his childhood. He saw wonderful diversity in not-quite-rural, not-quite-urban folks on the rim of official poverty. The same affection and understanding he felt toward them comes through in R.E. Blach's black-and-white photos, taken during the 1930s and 1940s to judge by the look of them, that appear throughout *Early Poems*. As one goes through these poems and images, one sees Nowlan moving toward the derelicts of urban life. My suspicion is that this is preparing Nowlan for his years on the Saint John *Telegraph-Journal*, 1963 to 1968, where he seeks the newsman's aesthetic, which sees a stylized reality in the idea of the city as the haunt of lost souls, broken spirits, and "characters" in general. This view begins to crop up in his poems in the 1960s, and later found expression in some of the stories in *Miracle at Indian River* (1968).

In a way, this is writing out of himself in that it is a stage he passed through between writing about his cousins, then about his parents, then about the purely external world — and then finding the interior one. By the time of *The Things Which Are* and his section of *Five New Brunswick Poets* (also 1962), Nowlan has actually arrived at the cumulative goal without losing anything he had earlier, except the technical mannerisms and forced diction, which needed losing. The poems from *The Things Which Are* and *Five New Brunswick Poets* — his last juvenilia, so to say — are generally

more allegorical and more sequential; there is some standardization both in voice (a voice near that of the later Clarke Irwin books) and in technique (the poems all present much the same appearance on the page). From that point forward, Nowlan drew more widely for his material, sometimes going back into history. He also wrote more surefootedly, with greater confidence, to the point where he could surprise us with the structure of his novel *Various Persons Named Kevin O'Brien* (1973) and have fun in the plays he wrote with Walter Learning.

In the process, he became the sort of all-rounder compatible with the 19th-century newspaper editor's image of himself, though by that time Nowlan was firmly settled into his long tenure as writer-in-residence at the University of New Brunswick.

There is a roundness and a wholeness about what he wrote that can be ascribed partly, I believe, to this inky persona in the back room of his imagination. His other posthumous book, for instance, is **Nine Micmac Legends** (illustrated by Shirley Bear, Lancelot Press, 56 pages, $2.95 paper). He retold the Indian myths in much the way Goldwin Smith translated Catullus: it was something to do when he had a minute. The act is squarely within the spirited layman's interest in such antiquarian pursuits as archaeology and anthropology, which in old English-Canadian newspapermen is roughly analagous to that of parish priests in Quebec. It is an attractive pose, and one that adds to the picture of Nowlan, who was neither the unworldly writer he was sometimes made out to be nor the rustic philosopher, but something much better and more serious. If the present books are not the full story, they certainly help to complete one's impression of an honest writer who found his footing and did his duty. □

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Small pleasures: some curiously familiar native folklore and the simple joys of playing with string

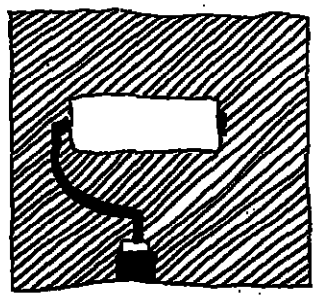
By MARY AINSLIE SMITH

LEGENDS AND folk tales, once passed from the old to the young within a specific culture, nowadays form the basis for a number of books — and for children of all backgrounds — each season. West Coast native culture is a rich source of such stories. **The Princess and the Sea-Bear** by Joan Skogan, illustrated by Claudia Stewart (42 pages, $4.95 paper), is published by the Metlakatla Band Council and distributed by Theytus Books, Box 218, Penticton, B.C. V2A 6K3. It contains eight Tsimshian legends, set in coastal villages near what is present-day Prince Rupert, that emphasize the intricate relationship within that culture of earth, sea, sky, and all living creatures, including human beings. Among them is the story of how Gamlugyides, the Tsimshian chief, befriended the Prince of the Wolves and how the wolves in turn helped his people in time of famine. Another legend tells how the secret of Gamlugyides's great strength is seduced from him by the youngest and most beautiful of his wives. In a third we learn that the earth is held up by a strong man with a huge hemlock pole braced against his shoulder. And in another a husband rescues his beautiful wife from the ruler of a shadowy world under the sea. All the stories, so intriguingly familiar and yet so different, are well served by Skogan's clear, direct style.

The Witch of Port LaJoye (Ragweed Press, 48 pages, $7.95 paper) is a legend from the East Coast, set in Abegweit, the Micmac name for Prince Edward Island. Joyce Barkhouse has rewritten for children a story that is still part of the Micmac oral tradition but also has a number of written versions. It tells how Marie, a beautiful young girl, arrived mysteriously on the island with her mother, a Basque woman, in the 1720s, the early years of French settlement there. At first she beguiled both the French settlers and the Indians with her beauty, her high spirits, and her wonderful singing voice. The son of a Micmac chief fell in love with her, and they were betrothed. But Marie was too exotic and mysterious a creature not to draw envy and suspicion. In Barkhouse's version, her mother and her bridegroom are murdered, and she is eventually arrested as a heretic and burned at the stake. Illustrations by Daphne Irving work with Barkhouse's story to evoke a strange, wild, and beautiful Prince Edward Island of the past.

The Wicked Fairy-Wife, a French-Canadian folk tale retold by Mary Alice Downie (Kids Can Press, 32 pages, $5.95 paper), also contains a good measure of violence and many reversals of fortune. A young girl, Josette, is taken from her parents, a poor farming couple, and groomed to become the wife of the handsome king. However, she is only queen for a short time when her position is usurped by an evil and ugly fairy who first makes her a slave and then orders her death. Josette's executioners take pity on her and merely pluck out her eyes and desert her in the forest. Josette survives and bears a son who grows up to avenge his mother, destroying the wicked fairy and reuniting his parents. This story contains a wood-chopper, a flying horse, a crystal castle in the sky, a magic violin that compels people to dance — all the familiar territory of folk tales in the European tradition. And in spite of the violence of many of the incidents, Downie tells the story with cheerful humour, a tone that is reflected by Kim Price's black-and-white illustrations.

From the oral tradition of the lumbering camps of the 19th-century Ottawa Valley comes another story about the giant Joe Montferrand. **Look! The Land Is Growing Giants**, by Joan Finnigan, illustrated by Richard Pelham (Tundra, 40 pages, $14.95 cloth), follows other accounts of this Canadian hero-giant's adventures, such as Bernie Bedore's *Tall Tales of Joe Mufferaw* (Amethyst, 1971) and Finnigan's own long discussion in *Giants of Canada's Ottawa Valley* (General Store Publishing, 1981). Joe is a good hero, even worthy to be "the carrier of the ethos of being Canadian," as a Tundra publicity release describes him. He has strength, ingenuity, courage, and humour. But to suggest that he is the progenitor of all the hockey teams in



North America is putting too much on him. No Canadian hero should have to bear responsibility for the Hartford Whalers, let alone the disastrous New

Jersey Devils. It just isn't fair to Joe.

Know Your Numbers, written and illustrated by Tim O'Halloran (Hayes Publishing, 3312 Mainway, Burlington, Ont. L7M 1A7, 38 pages, $9.95 cloth), is a bright and cheery addition to the many books that reinforce number learning in young children. A colourful variety of animals and people frolic through the book — such pictures as "16 bowls of undercooked clams" with many mournful eyes looking over the rims of the bowls, and four reindeer, their antlers ringed with eight doughnuts. The customary counting in the beginning pages leads to harder review exercises in addition, subtraction, ordinals, comparisons, and shapes. There are lots of problems to solve: "How many hippos? How many hamburgers? Does each hippo have a hamburger?" A four- or five-year-old going through the book with an adult would have a good mental workout.

John Hearn's **The Young Collector** (Douglas & McIntyre, 124 pages, $9.95 paper) begins with the premise that everyone is a collector of something, but that real enjoyment comes with learning about a collection and sharing the interest with others. Hearn provides 46 chapters, each dealing with different collectibles that children might be able to afford the time and money to pursue. They range from auto ads, thimbles, fishing lures, keys, sparkplugs, and butter pats to the more predictable coins, postcards, spoons, and hockey cards. Each chapter provides ideas about where to find these objects and what to do with them once they are collected. Ian Levanthal's illustrations suggest the pleasant clutter that seems to be a result of any collection.

Lesley Fairfield's latest bilingual picture book **Let's go!/Allons-y!** (Kids Can Press, 32 pages, $4.95 paper) follows *What's the Word?/Cherchez le mot!* and *Let's Eat!/Allons manger!* This time Fairfield's tousled brood of children makes trips to a library, a garage sale, a swimming lesson, and a circus, among other things. Each visit is represented by a full-page illustration on the right-hand page, with certain objects detailed on the left-hand side and labelled in the two languages. Bilingual puzzles at the end of the book review the vocabulary. Fairfield's pictures are witty, and a pleasure to study. This series makes a delightful tool for second language study.

Kids Can Press has also published a wonderful book that has changed our family's life, or certainly the way we spend our leisure time. **Cat's Cradle, Owl's Eyes**, by Camilla Gryski (78 pages, $7.95 paper), is a book of string games that is entirely responsible for us all carrying long loops of string wherever we go. Before we had the book we could, of course, already do the basic cat's cradle game, but now we can also make "The Winking Eye," "The Man Climbing the Tree," "The Siberian House," and even the intricate and beautiful "Apache Door." We also now know that string games were played by primitive peoples all over the world, and have been the subject of anthropological studies. Some of the most complex patterns come from the Inuit. Tom Sankey's large, simple illustrations and Gryski's step-by-step instructions give everyone a chance to feel the satisfaction of success. String loops are so much more versatile than Rubik's Cubes — perfect for long car trips and waits in doctors' offices. Gryski, apparently, knows many more string games; by the time we have mastered the 21 figures in this book, we'll be ready for the sequel.

The Children's Book Centre, 229 College Street, Toronto M5T 1R4, held its seventh annual Children's Book Festival from November 13 to 19 with the theme "Many Books, Many Voices," emphasizing the diversity of Canadian culture. The 1983 festival kit contains a poster, bookmarks, a catalogue of the centre's choices of currently available Canadian children's books, a Trivial Pursuit type of game based on children's titles, and a booklet suggesting special activities, also based on Canadian children's literature, that can be used by teachers, librarians, and parents with their children. The kits are available from the centre for $10.95 each. □

FIRST NOVELS

Through her heroes, if not her heroine, Heather Robertson transforms the outline of history into a brilliant novel of the body politic

By PAUL WILSON

Willie: A Romance, by Heather Robertson (James Lorimer, 359 pages, $19.95 cloth), is a fascinating, entertaining, and important book that carries the unmistakable stamp of a true writer's passion: the desire to portray the world in all its complexity as truthfully and eloquently as possible.

Although it is a first novel (and the first volume of a promised trilogy) *Willie* is by no means the author's first book. Robertson, in fact, comes to fiction with an impressive array of talents and a well-deserved reputation in what might be called long-distance journalism, the writing of non-fiction books. The most striking qualities of Robertson's earlier work (she has five non-fiction books to her credit) are the fascination and enthusiasm she conveys for her subjects, the clarity, sensual vividness, and idiomatic vigour of her writing, and her ability to discover unusual angles and extract new significance from material that one might have thought could yield up nothing more. One of her earlier books, *A Terrible Beauty* (1977), is an anthology of words and pictures created by Canadians in the First and Second World Wars, and I suspect that somewhere there lies a clue to the genesis of *Willie*, both its form and content. Here is what she wrote in the introduction to *A Terrible Beauty:*

> War is a mystery. It is full of ironies, contradictions, secrets. Its consequences are often more profound and unpredictable than the military exercise intended. War has had a traumatic, cataclysmic, revolutionary effect on Canada; its impact remains unstated, unexplored, unconscious, more powerful for its lack of recognition.

On one level, *Willie* is about the First World War and the profound and mysterious impact it had on the Canadian body politic. The central story, presented through a skilfully orchestrated use of diaries, letters, and narrative passages, concerns Lily Coolican, a bright, resourceful, self-confident young woman from the Ottawa Valley who comes to Ottawa just before the war, lands a position in the Governor General's household as a companion, photographer, and press agent to the Duke of Connaught's family, and by virtue of her position, gets to rub shoulders with the important historical personages of the day.

Her most important encounters, however, are with William Lyon Mackenzie King (the "Willie" of the title and grandson of William Lyon Mackenzie),

a 40-year-old, out-of-work politician — biding his time between jobs, as it were — and with Talbot Papineau, also a scion of rebel blood (being the great-grandson of Louis Joseph Papineau, leader of the 1837 rebellion in Lower Canada), who is on his way to the Front as an officer in the newly formed Princess Pats. Both men fall in love with her — each in his own peculiar way — and it is from the vantage-point of this intimacy that we observe their enormously complex characters unfold.

Lily, who of course is a fictional person, keeps a diary; through her sharp photographer's eyes and her barbed and eloquent pen we see the vivid panorama of everyday life in the capital city as Canadian society mobilizes itself materially and spiritually for a war that will change it forever. The city is teeming with politicians, policemen, society ladies, sufragettes, gold-diggers, and hockey-players who keep popping up in memorable cameo appearances throughout the book. Lily is an astute observer of human foibles; she is endowed with an abundance of common sense that allows her to cast an ironic eye on the men who see her destiny either as "hoor" (the spelling Robertson prefers) or housewife and on the women who view both these fates with the same ideological disgust. In fact, while other women around her sound off about emancipation, Lily seems slightly baffled by it all, because it had never occurred to her that she was anything but a free person.

Lily's encounters with Mackenzie King, who is always trying to fit her into the whalebone vision of womanhood he inherited from his mother, have a strong undercurrent of comedy. Robertson's humour brings to mind the films of Lina Wertmuller, who views the antics of men, especially where politics, patriotism, and sex are concerned, as endearingly ridiculous.

Yet for all her fine qualities, there is a curious lack of emotional depth in Lily. We follow what she sees and does with great interest, but we are seldom let in on her feelings. When she finally drifts into a secret marriage with King, there seems to be no good reason for it at all, except perhaps convenience, and that does not fit Lily's nature. It is almost as though Robertson felt that giving her heroine a strong emotional life would introduce too random an element into a plot whose broad outlines had already been set by history. Or perhaps she was just more interested in the male characters. Whatever the reason, the result is an odd and perhaps significant imbalance: it is the men in this novel, not the women, who carry the burden of sentiment.

Robertson's choice of King and Papineau as the two protagonists is brilliant. It would be difficult to imagine two people less alike, and yet each, genetically and in his public and private life, represents an important aspect of the national psyche, if there is such a thing. King is portrayed as a self-absorbed man of extraordinary ambition and considerable political astuteness, puttering about Ottawa, keeping himself in people's good graces, advising John D. Rockefeller Jr. on industrial relations, and developing a program of social reform that to some looked like rampant socialism and to others merely a cosmetic to pretty up the *status quo*.

In his private life King was so enthralled by his mother that it was impossible for him to have normal sexual relations with other women, and he appears to have believed sex was something that existed only outside the bounds of self-control. He was teeming with neuroses and was by our own (doubtful) standards a hypocrite, yet Robertson makes us feel a grudging admiration for his dogged struggle with himself and the world, even though there is little about him — apart from his work habits —

that one would want to emulate.

Papineau, in all but his relationship to his mother, is everything King was not: young, handsome, an aristocrat in spirit, a man who believed that civic duty is inseparable from action and personal courage. He is the perfect romantic hero, both in the narrow modern sense and in more traditional, epic terms. His letters to Lily from the Front (based on Papineau's actual letters to his mother and girl-friend, skilfully edited and adapted by Robertson) bring the war and his personality alive with such immediacy that at times he overshadows even Mackenzie King.

> For a while [he writes in one letter], I thought too vividly. I pictured the homecoming, the glad celebrations which you too promise, the widened fields of action, the possible realization of some ambition, then the wish to live became maddeningly dear. The wider my horizon, the keener my perception of self and the possibilities of life, the more horrible appeared death, the less I wished to put my head above the parapet and the more acute the inner throb when a machine-gun barked and I thought of the time to come when I should have to charge into that rain of bullets, and then suddenly cease to be, or slowly in pain realize the coming end of all things. . . . I am not by nature intrepid, nor even quarrelsome enough to make fighting enjoyable. On the contrary, I shrink from the naked disclosure of human passions, drunkenness, insanity, hatred, anger, they fill me with a cold horror and dread. But to see a man afraid would be the worst of all. To have to kill a man in whose eyes I saw the wild fear of death would be awful. I almost think I should stop and let the fellow kill me instead.

Both Papineau and King were hopeless idealists. Papineau saw leadership as something to be won by decisive example; for him integrity did not mean bringing the world into line with his vision of it, but rather bringing himself into line with his own best intentions. King, on the other hand, was the quintessential reformer, who sought to deal with evil in the world in much the same way as he sought to deal with it in himself: by imposing schemes of reform on it. Political leadership was simply a means to achieve this end.

Papineau ended up in the mud of Flanders, and King went on to dominate Canadian political life for 30 years. The final and greatest irony of Heather Robertson's fine novel is also the irony of the war that made Canada a modern nation: the country's finest ideals, the ideals that inspired soldiers and nations to defend their way of life, got left behind on the battlefields, leaving the victory to those who made indecision the chief art of political survival. □

GIFT BOOKS

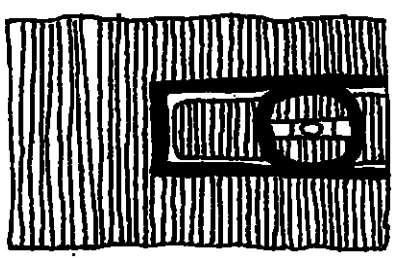
Style and substance: from Karen Kain's method for squeezing pimples to pastoral views of a French broad

By JOHN OUGHTON

THE EXPLORATION and mapping of Canada by early explorers would have been impossible without the canoe. Responsive enough to be steered through rapids, shallow enough to float on tiny streams, strong enough to carry heavy loads, light enough to be portaged anywhere, and easily rebuilt — or replaced — anywhere the birch tree grows, the canoe is the ideal vessel for exploring Canada's rivers and lakes. Furthermore, there may be Canadians who, like their country, owe their existence to the canoe: Pierre Berton once defined a Canadian as "someone who knows how to make love in a canoe."

There are few pleasures more pure than canoeing down a morning-misted river, the quiet dip of the paddles and trickle of the wave making it possible to sneak up on deer along the shore. Then, as the sun comes up, a burst of light reflects from the river bottom each time you lean for a stroke. As the blisters start to form on your city-soft hands, they can be cooled by trailing them overboard.

In short, the canoe deserves the wealth of research and illustration lavished on it in Kenneth G. Roberts and Philip Shackleton's massive study **The Canoe** (Macmillan, 280 pages, $50.00 cloth).



Recognizing that the ingenuity of native people throughout the Americas has produced an almost endless series of variations on the theme of watercraft powered by paddles, the authors decided to restrict themselves to canoe types produced in Central America, the Caribbean, United States, and Canada.

They report on the construction and use of vessels as varied as the coracle (or bullboat), the dugout, Haida war canoes, birchbark freight canoes, and Inuit kayaks and umiaks. The text is accompanied by an excellent selection of historical paintings, drawings, and engravings by explorers (often the only remaining record of canoe designs from their era), and vintage and contemporary photographs.

The range of uses to which the canoe has been put is astonishing, and the authors (who are reportedly so enthusiastic that they went on a canoe trip during Shackleton's three-day honeymoon) conveys that sense well. There is an almost lunatic implausibility to some of the illustrations they have chosen: a steam-powered canoe; a large freight canoe running the rapids under the control of a dozen voyageurs while an imperturbable couple, doubtless English, sit in their Sunday finery; the U.S. superintendent of Indian affairs en route in 1826 in a canoe with green canopy and a huge Stars and Stripes; and a pair of canoes carrying across a rough deck more furniture than a float plane could transport.

The only shortcomings in the book are the rather small type size for such a large, expensive book, and the fact that native representations of their cherished vessels are somewhat overlooked. It is difficult to find such work, but anyone with an interest in Inuit art, for example, could have directed the authors to Joe Talirunili's charming carvings and prints of the migration of his village in an overloaded umiak.

Another book deals with two ships not remembered for their buoyancy: the *Hamilton* and *Scourge*, two U.S. Navy schooners that capsized in a violent gale in Lake Ontario during the war of 1812, drowning 53 hands. As author Emily Cain recounts in **Ghost Ships** (Musson, 152 pages, $29.95 cloth), the ships were located in 1975 some six miles off Port Dalhousie by a Royal Ontario Museum expedition. Three hundred feet of cold water and the lack of currents had preserved the two ships to an incredible degree.

The problem is how to display these archeological treasure troves. In fact, this book may well afford the best look any of us will have at the two ships, since experts recently advised the city of Hamilton that raising them may cost

$10- to $20-million *more* than the original estimate of $10-million and take up to 62 years of restoration work.

The author includes substantial accounts from eyewitnesses of the disaster, including seaman Ned Myers, who recounted his story to James Fenimore Cooper. She also tells the story of the discovery well, quoting the words of minisub pilot Albert Falco on first sighting the goddess Diana figurehead of the Hamilton: "Ahh . . . fantastique . . . magnifique . . . ah la la . . . beautiful. For thirty years I have dreamed of being the first to see something so beautiful. Now I need to dream no more." With its underwater photos, historical maps and illustrations, and lively text, this is an intriguing volume.

The vote for most beautiful book of this month's crop goes to **Mountains of the Middle Kingdom: Exploring the High Peaks of China and Tibet** (Douglas & McIntyre, 194 pages, $45.00 cloth), by American mountain-climber and photojournalist Galen Rowell. This region, home of some of the world's highest mountain ranges, was closed to Western travellers from 1950 to 1980. Rowell, one of the first visitors after the travel ban was partially lifted, delivers everything the armchair explorer could desire: beautiful colour images of the people, the landscapes, and the mountains from a little-known part of the "roof of the world."

Rowell writes well about the politics of Tibet, occupied by the Chinese for more than three decades, the doughty Golok tribes, whose fighting spirit not even Mao could quell, the intrepid and often eccentric Western travellers who preceded him in exploring the area, and the beauty of mountains like the holy Anye Machin. The production values of this book match the contents; it is worth the price.

Less adventurous but also sumptuous is **Silk Roads — China Ships** (Royal Ontario Museum, 240 pages, $19.95 paper), a book on the recent exhibition organized by the ROM. It displays artifacts from more than two millenia of trade between East and West. As one might expect, there are magnificent Tang vases, decorated silks, and Hindu sculptures. But more rarely seen are pieces shown here that clearly illustrate the reciprocal effects of trade: Chinese fabrics based on English decorative themes, or Buddhas with robe-draping technique borrowed from Roman statuary.

As befits a museum publication the text, by John E. Vollmer, E.J. Keall, and E. Nagai-Berthrong, is a bit dry in tone. It does draw together many disparate fields of knowledge: the history of navigation, trade, military conquest, and fine arts. The illustrations are abundant and well-chosen, including maps, drawings, and engravings as well as effective photography of the objects. Like the exhibit itself (the first major ROM show to be internationally circulated), the book is an excellent effort. And considering that it is entirely produced in Canada, it also refutes the theory that good printing can't be done in this country at reasonable cost.

Imagine a ballerina who slept in, missed her original curtain call, but is determined to get on stage nonetheless. Donning fragments of several different costumes — some feathers from Swan Lake, Carmen's mantilla, and Jane Fonda's leotard — she pirouettes onto centre stage. **Karen Kain's Fitness & Beauty Book** (Doubleday, 176 pages, $24.95 cloth) has somewhat the same air — a feeling that it was untimely rushed into the marketplace to cash in on the fitness fad before it dissolves into a soggy heap of good intentions and old leg-warmers.

Let us begin by agreeing that Karen Kain is a great ballerina, a beautiful woman, and in superb shape. Given that, her editor and collaborators, photographer Jim Allen and "as-told-to" writer Marilyn Linton, should have produced work of an equivalent calibre. The book is a hodge-podge of fact, recipe, and matter available elsewhere (the Karen Kain method of squeezing pimples, the stunning revelation that "two of the fabulous fringe benefits of becoming fit are the way your new body looks and the way it makes you feel"). My favourite item is a handy "stress calculator" that lets you calculate how much relaxation you need: pregnancy beats "sex difficulties" by only a point. The exercises combine sensible warm-ups with well-worn ballet positions.

The book is visually underwhelming. The black-and-white photos are poorly reproduced, and at times give the Kain silhouette some unlikely angles due to clumsy scissor work on the originals. Kain appears in black tights throughout, so that it's difficult to see some of the subtle changes in arm and leg muscle groups that should be evident in a fitness book. "Gag" photos of the star complete each section, some cute, some cloying. This book ain't quite fit.

There's more to cheer about in **Celebrate Our City: Toronto, 150th Anniversary** (McClelland & Stewart, 160 pages, $12.95 paper). The book contains words and pictures respectively chosen by Toronto *Sun* editor Barbara Amiel and veteran photo-book editor Lorraine Monk from a city-wide competition. Generally, the literary contributions seem to come more from amateurs (except for Raymond Souster, Morley Torgov, and Irving Layton) and the photos from professionals.

Perhaps inevitably, there is a wide range in quality. A few of the photographs are overly blurred or grainy, and several of the verse selections veer into the mawkish, or simply rhyme Toronto's best-known attractions. The photos show little of Toronto beyond the downtown core, the waterfront, and islands. The result simplifies the city that any Torontonian knows.

But the book does transmit a feeling of the many communities in the city, the friendliness of neighbourhoods, and the austerity of Bay Street. It also may help visitors or recent immigrants to "place" the city, thanks to a historical essay by Mike Filey and the remembrances of time past in many of the anecdotes and mini-essays. The cover photo of a unicycling saxophone player is excellent, suggesting the spirit Toronto needs to exhibit a little more. This is a reasonably priced, reasonably entertaining book.

One shutter-snapper not represented in it is the Toronto *Star*'s Boris Spremo, perhaps Canada's best-known newspaper photographer. His work is displayed in **Boris Spremo: Twenty Years of Photojournalism** (McClelland & Stewart, 224 pages, $19.95 paper). Spremo's gifts are well-recognized. He has great reflexes, little fear of heights or dangerous situations, and a sense for the one shot that tells the whole story.

There are three things that a reader should expect from a book such as Spremo's: visual mementos of great people and events, a sampling of the shots that never made it into print, and much better reproduction quality than the giant newspaper web press can deliver. Spremo's choices certainly satisfy the first demand, with coverage of everyone from the Kennedys and the Beatles to Lady Di and What's-His-Name. A few of the plate sequences are amusing: in one double spread, Pierre Trudeau appears to be aiming a rubber band at the posterior of Margaret, who is stepping over a fence.

In the category of photos not fit for a family newspaper, notable examples include a little boy urinating into a pop container under the float on which contestants for Miss Nude Canada strut, and a kilted gent performing the same function in a washroom while a bystander proves that nothing is worn under. The one flaw is the printing of the black-and-white images: the rich, solid black tones that suggest the immediacy of a news photo are missing. Next time lay on the ink.

Like a newsman, a nature photographer needs good reflexes, but must also have great reserves of patience while

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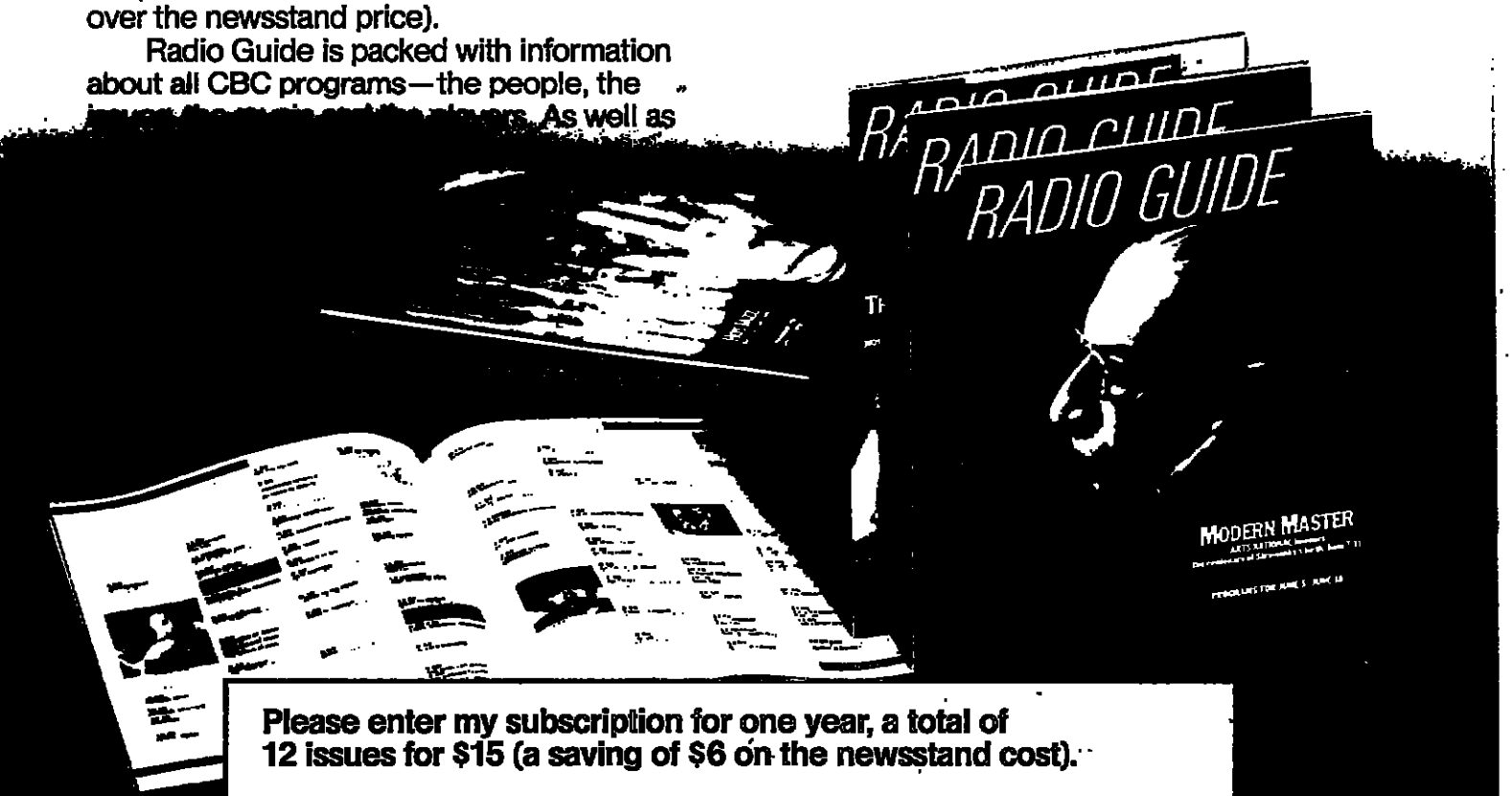

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awaiting the right light or subject. Tim Fitzharris is one of the best now publishing in Canada, and two new books give different ways to appreciate his art.

The Wild Prairie (Oxford, 144 pages, $24.95 cloth) is, like Oxford's other recent photo books, elegantly produced and well-printed. It reveals the extensive wild flora and fauna still found in the Prairies. The bird photographs are especially memorable, with at least two — sandhill cranes in a slough, and a great blue heron flying into the sunset — worthy of poster treatment. Fitzharris's photographs exhibit sensitivity and an apparent intimacy with nature, and his text is informative without becoming pedantic.

In **The Adventure of Nature Photography** (Hurtig, 216 pages, $27.95 cloth, $19.95 paper) he reveals what goes on behind such pictures. This is one gift book genuinely useful to the amateur photographer with an interest in nature. It encourages one to experiment, since the author writes that nature photography "can be practised readily in the back yard, in Banff National Park, or New York's Central Park." The text is practical, but not intimidatingly technical. Extensive advice is given on choosing lenses, tripods, electronic flash, film, and other equipment.

There's even a how-to section on constructing a floating blind with built-in hip rubber boots, a device that Fitzharris says has made many of his waterfowl pictures possible. Extensive colour plates of the author's own work are flanked by comments on how the images were made and what makes them work as visual statements. His hopes for the book are modest, and seem quite likely to be met by any reader who takes his counsel seriously: "I hope that this book will help you to look at nature in a clear and perceptive way, and that the photographs you make will, in turn, help others to do the same."

Sherman Hines's aims are somewhat grander — a book-by-book portrait of Canada. To a large extent, his **Quebec** (McClelland & Stewart, unpaginated, $29.95 cloth) is also a book of nature photography, or photographs that show nature's power over the works of man. The Quebec he reveals is beautiful but definitely wintry. There are few people in this book; none of the photos celebrate Quebec's bistros and cafes, the only place to go on a bone-chilling January night. Hines has an old-fashioned view of Quebec as a landscape of wood to be hewn and water to be drawn.

He is a talented colour photographer with a knack for unusual angles (he loves to shoot into the sun, or down toward his feet) and strong compositions. His work is well-reproduced in an appropriate range of sizes from double-spread down to half-page. The English-only text is limited to captions, making this a purely visual treat.

Syrup Pails and Gopher Tails (Western Producer Prairie Books, 144 pages, $19.95 paper) celebrates an institution from another region of Canada: the one-room prairie schoolhouse. The author, John C. Charyk, began his teaching career in such a school in 1928, so he knows his subject. The text recalls a time when primary education was much more of a challenge, both for the teacher (who had to direct up 45 students in nine different grades) and the students, who made their way through winter storms without benefit of a bus. Teachers also had to make sure the schoolhouse was heated in the winter, prepare contingency plans for blizzards that kept everyone in school for several days, and (worst of all) face regular visits from provincial inspectors.

This book will have the greatest appeal to graduates of such schools, but also offers abundant material for a Canadian theatre company looking for a theme. As for the title: drinking water for a school was often kept in syrup pails, and each gopher tail collected by a schoolchild earned a cent during "years of severe gopher infestation."

A very different way to examine Canada's past is shown in **The Potter's View of Canada: Canadian Scenes on Nineteenth-Century Earthenware** (McGill-Queen's University Press, 198 pages, $29.95 cloth), by Elizabeth Collard, a consultant on ceramics to the National Museum of Man. The book features pottery (not all of it produced in Canada) that displays scenes from Canadian life between 1800 and the end of Queen Victoria's reign — such popular views as Niagara Falls, the death of Wolfe, and winter sports.

The text is scholarly, aimed at the historian or serious collector, but the bulk of the book is beautifully printed black-and-white photographs of plates, dishes, teapots, and other utensils, often flanked by the card or photograph that originally provided the scene. This is apparently the first book to deal with the subject, which may in part compensate for the rather high price for a well-designed but small book without colour plates.

Albert F. Moritz, a Toronto poet, is the author of what is billed as the first "popular presentation of one of the great eras and accomplishments of American Art." **America the Picturesque in Nineteenth-Century Engraving** (New Trend, 168 pages, $19.95 cloth) examines the tradition of hand-engraved illustration established by such artists as William Henry Bartlett. Before the dot-screen method of photographic reproduction was invented, engravings were the only illustrations that newspapers and magazines could reproduce, and much of 19th-century America's world view was influenced by them. With 109 full-page plates and many smaller reproductions, this is a bargain.

Moritz's text is literate and appreciative of the work without gushing — putting American engraving into the larger perspective of Western art. He writes of one illustration: "The lush and exotic forms are pure Florida naturalism, but the combination of singular objects — bird, dog, banana bunch, fruits lying on the path — have the allegorical resonance of items in Renaissance paintings." One also notes how times and styles have changed: one landscape is titled "A Farm on the French Broad" (a river); another shows a large bear walking over the ice toward two pioneers with rifles, who ignore it with an insouciance that not even Davy Crockett could have mustered. □

LETTERS

No excuses

IT WAS WITH some concern that I read Alberto Manguel's rather confused effort at reviewing *Alibi* by Robert Kroetsch (October).

The first part of Manguel's review is fairly coherent — an easy task given the fact that most of it has all been said before by others more familiar with Kroetsch's work — and covers the thematic lines of quest, exile, and identification of the tradition through Odyssean plot lines and concomitant variations. All of this, as I point out, is not particularly new, and Manguel manages to reduce these elements to the basics required in such a review.

Manguel's quibbling begins when he introduces "two important variations." The first — that involving the spas, health, water, which he incorrectly identifies as the eternal youth theme — is the most important, and yet is also the one Manguel succeeds in thoroughly muddling and almost totally ignoring in one short paragraph. His real difficulties, however, begin with the introduction of his second variation.

His notion that a parody of the James Bond films has occurred is nothing short

of ridiculous, not to mention the fact that he makes no attempt whatsoever to discern or even discuss whether the narrator is Dorf or Kroetsch. But in the end it is this ludicrous notion of a continuing James Bond theme that has quite simply left me speechless. Most of what he has to say for the remainder of the review is entirely dependent on the reader believing at face value this comparison with Bond — "even though Kroetsch may not have used the James Bond theme intentionally." (How absurd!) Manguel, compounding his embarrassing display, then attempts to shore up his rather flimsy attack with a standard, out-of-context quoting of passages in order to further attack the language — again totally ignoring who the narrator is, and what that narrator is doing.

As a publisher, I have rather neutral feelings about reviews — good or bad — so long as the opinions expressed are, at the *very least*, and however briefly, intelligently supported or argued. Manguel's opinions, particularly in the case of his "Bond" thesis, are simple-minded in the extreme, bear little if any relationship to the novel, and certainly are not at all worthy of your magazine.

Ed Carson
Associate Publisher
General Publishing
Toronto

Alberto Manguel replies: Carson says that my identification of "spas, health, water" with the "eternal youth theme" is incorrect; in my review I say that "spas, health, youth, water, sex, and the passage of time are traditionally linked" in "the fountain of youth theme." Blurbs are perhaps not ideal sources of corroboration, but Carson, as the editor of *Alibi,* may wish to refer to the first flap of his book's jacket where it reads: "Dorfen is sent out to find the perfect spa — the place of eternal regeneration." And further on the blurb speaks of Dorfen's "quest for the 'waters of a new life.' " In other words, the fountain of eternal youth.

Carson says my "notion that a parody of the James Bond films has occurred is nothing short of ridiculous." I can only refer him back to my review where I list "the elements that stereotype the genre." I believe that if I, as a reader, discover these elements in a novel, exaggerated and seemingly ridiculed, I have the right to see that novel as a parody of the genre. I do not, of course, have the right to assume that this parody was Kroetsch's intention: for that reason I have given him the benefit of the doubt — a benefit Carson finds "absurd."

Finally, Carson takes objection to my quoting passages out of context (it is difficult to include lengthy quotes in a review because one is limited by space) "in order to further attack the language — again totally ignoring who the narrator is, and what that narrator is doing." In my review I say that "*Alibi* is told through the voice of Billy Billy Dorfendorf" and go on to describe him, thereby clearly stating who the narrator is. But whoever the narrator is, his words, if intended to make sense, *should* make sense. And if his words are supposed *not* to make sense, then that should also be made clear. In or out of context, the words "I was the torso of her rapacity" make no sense to me. Though I give in my review several more examples of incomprehensible lines, I would be grateful to any reader who could explain to me the meaning of just these words. (They occur in *Alibi,* in context, on page 127.)

Just folks

I WAS SURPRISED and delighted to read Geoff Hancock's review of recent books on Canadian folk art (November). It would have been all too easy to praise these books for their good photographs and folksy images of Canadian culture and leave it at that. His discussion of the somewhat confused definitions of folk art in these works and his criticism of the lack of context for the items presented is refreshing.

As a professional folklorist, I spend much of my time trying to show how items of folklore are only meaningful if understood in the context of contemporary Canadian culture; folklore is not a catalogue of items, but a stratum of cultural activity that is ever-changing. The item-oriented approach to folk art deadens the creativity represented by the photographs on the page.

I only wish that the writers on folk art — and, more especially, the institutions held responsible for collecting and preserving folk art — took the same contextual approach to folklore that Hancock demonstrated in his review.

Michael Taft
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

The herd instinct

IN HIS NOVEMBER column "English, Our English," Bob Blackburn states that the abomination, "If a person wants to do something badly, they will find a way," is the result of writers being "cowed by the feminist movement." Bull!

The creation of this abomination is an attempt to overcome the sexism in language. While it may be grammatically incorrect, it is an honest effort to acknowledge that one half of humanity is not "he."

However, the purpose of the feminist movement's attention to language is not to intimidate writers into "bad" grammar but to point out how language reinforces sexism. Grammatical solutions to overcoming sexism are the result of the creative ability of the writer, not the fault of feminism.

The idea that language change, particularly "bad" grammar, is the result of feminist intimidation is an interesting speculation. I wonder why we have not yet intimidated the media into recognizing words like Ms, or chairwoman. It is interesting that Blackburn thinks writers are only susceptible to feminist intimidation that results in "bad" grammar.

But for writers who have been "cowed" into recognizing sexism in language, I would suggest *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing* (Miller & Swift). The authors deal with avoiding language abominations in creative and intelligent ways.

Barbara J. MacKay
Toronto

Bob Blackburn replies: At the risk of further upsetting MacKay, I'm on her side.

CANWIT NO. 89

Hail to thee, bland beaver!
Bird thou never wert. . . .

WE HAVE BEEN worrying every since Terry Goldie mentioned in the November *Books in Canada* — in his report on the sixth triennial conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies — the plight of a Canadian student researching the image of the beaver in 19th-century poetry. Goodness, what if the poor soul can't *find* any beavers? So far we have managed to discover the opening lines (quoted above) from the first draft of a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley (who once made a secret visit to Canada), but other evidence of poetic beavers has eluded us. We'll pay $25 for the best parodies of 19th-century poetry in which beavers figure prominently, and $25 goes to Neil Sutherland of Vancouver for the idea. Deadline: February 1. Address: CanWit No. 89, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

Results of CanWit No. 87

ASIDE FROM a young woman in a sports car identified as BIG SAL, we haven't spotted many of Ontario's new vanity

licence plates yet. Fortunately, our faithful readers have more than made up for the shortage. The winner is David Paul of Lucan, Ont., whose list of 29 plates includes:

- ☐ Irving Layton: EGO ONE
- ☐ Margaret Laurence: DIVINE
- ☐ Barry Broadfoot: I TAPE U
- ☐ Bob and Doug McKenzie: 24BEER
- ☐ Joe Clark: NOBODY

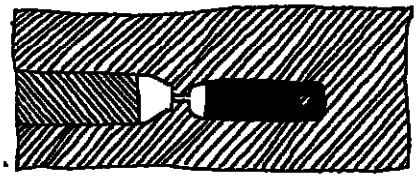
Honourable mentions:

- ☐ Pierre Trudeau: IAMGOD
- ☐ Mila Mulroney: MILADY
  — Barry Baldwin, Calgary

- ☐ Margaret Trudeau: OH U KID
  — Helene Weaver, Owen Sound, Ont.

- ☐ Pierre Trudeau: ABDICS
  — Diane M. Stuart, Vancouver

- ☐ Peter C. Newman: POO BAH
  — W. Ritchie Benedict, Calgary



THE EDITORS RECOMMEND

THE FOLLOWING Canadian books were reviewed in the previous issue of *Books in Canada*. Our recommendations don't necessarily reflect the reviews:

FICTION

A House Full of Women, by Elizabeth Brewster, Oberon Press. Similar to Alice Munro's in their regional focus and ambivalence toward family relations, Brewster's understated short stories, plain in style and subject matter, add up — like Norman Levine's — to a whole much greater than its parts.

NON-FICTION

Redney: A Life of Sara Jeannette Duncan, by Marian Fowler, House of Anansi. Born in Brantford, Ont., in 1861, Duncan was the author of 22 books (among which *The Imperialist* stands with the best of Canadian fiction), but is hardly known by modern readers — an oversight that Fowler's entertaining biography will perhaps help to redress.

POETRY

Everson at Eighty, by R.G. Everson, Oberon Press. To read a poet like Everson, unrepentantly himself, quietly independent in style, durable yet always supple with surprise, is to be visited with little epiphanies. Eighty years old and still writing strong, young lines, he deserves more readers.

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:

Adventures at Sea, by Francis W. Grant, Lancelot Press.
Adventures of the Magic Monkey Along the Silk Roads, by Evelyn Nagai-Berthrong and Anker Odum, Royal Ontario Museum.
The All Canadian Meat Book, Agriculture Canada, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.
Archê/Elegies, by E.D. Blodgett, Longspoon Press.
Aristocrats, by Robert Lacey, M & S.
The Best of Modern Humour, edited by Mordecai Richler, M & S.
Bill S-31 and the Federalism of State Capitalism, by Allan Tupper, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University.
The Blue Pools of Paradise, by Mick Burns, Coteau Books.
Brian McFarlane's NHL Hockey, M & S.
Canadian Pacific: A Portrait of Power, by Susan Goldenberg, Methuen.
Canoecraft, by Ted Moores and Merilyn Mohr, Camden House.
A Celebration of Society, by Frank E. Manning, Congress of Social and Humanistic Studies, University of Western Ontario.
Colombo's 101 Canadian Places, Hounslow Press.
Comeback, by Dan Hill, Seal Books.
Contenders: The Tory Quest for Power, by Patrick Martin *et al.*, Prentice-Hall.
Could Dracula Live in Woodford?, by Mary Howarth, Kids Can Press.
David Bowie: Out of the Cool, by Philip Kamin and Peter Goddard, Musson.
A Difficult Day, by Eugenie Fernandes, Kids Can Press.
Doctrine of Signatures, by Anne Szumigalski, Fifth House.
The Donnellys: A Trilogy, by James Reaney, Press Porcepic.
Don't Drink the Water . . ., by Stanley S.K. Seah, Grosvenor House.
The Dream of Snowy Owls, by Monty Reid, Longspoon Press.
Drug Trafficking: A North-South Perspective, by Andre McNicoll, North-South Institute.
Eden & Other Reservations, by Jerome McCarthy, South Western Ontario Poetry.
The Empty Quarter, by George Melnyk, Sidereal Press.
L'Etat et la Société, edited by Pierre Dandurand *et al.*, Les Presses de l'Université de Montreal.
Federalism and the Canadian Economic Union, edited by M.J. Trebilcock *et al.*, U of T Press.
Federalism and Democratic Theory, by Reginald Whitaker, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University.
The Fells of Brightness, by Jon Whyte, Longspoon Press.
Flaking Paint, by George Swede, Underwhich Editions.
The Frieda Frogwort 'Beat The Blues' Cookbook, by Joan Irvine, Frogwort Press.
From A to Z in Nova Scotia, by Leonnie Cumming, illustrated by Jennifer Fanning, Lancelot Press.
From the Songs of the Artisans, by Liliane Welch, Fiddlehead.
Full Circle, by Glenn M. Frew, Underwich Editions.
Get Smart! Make Your Money Count, by Lyman MacInnis, Prentice-Hall.
Going Places, by Don Kerr, Coteau Books.
Going the Distance, by Raymond Souster, Oberon.
Gopher Hills, by Tom Cummings, Western Producer Prairie Books.
Grumsel X 3, by Wilfred Watson, Longspoon Press.
Great Hockey Masks, by Michael M. Cutler, Tundra Books.
Haiku, by Jiri Valoch, Underwhich Editions.
The Hanging Gardens of Etobicoke, by Francis Sparshott, Childe Thursday.
Hard Earned Wages, by Jennifer Penney, The Women's Press.
Harpur's Heaven and Hell, by Tom Harpur, Oxford.
The Harrowsmith Cookbook, Vol. II, Camden House.
Hot Water Music, by Charles Bukowski, Paget Press.
Hugh Hambleton, Spy, by Leo Heaps, Methuen.
Hugh MacLennan, by T.D. MacLulich, Twayne Publishers (U.S.).
Inside Job: Essays on the New Work Writing, by Tom Wayman, Harbour Publishing.
It's All in Fun, by Ernest Rhuda, Lancelot Press.
Jungian Dream Interpretation: A Handbook of Theory and Practice, by James A. Hall, Inner City Books.
Last Call, by Morris Panych, Harbour Publishing.
The Last Great Frontiersman, by Leland Stowe, PaperJacks.
Life After Oil: A Renewable Energy Policy for Canada, by Robert Bott *et al.*, Hurtig.
Life By Drowning, by Jeni Couzyn, Anansi.
Lucy Kent and Other Poems, by Stephen Bett, Longspoon Press.
The Man Who Stole Dreams, by Barbara Taylor, illustrated by Judie Shore, The Women's Press.
The Man with a Flower in His Mouth, by Gilles Archambault, translated by David Lobdell, Oberon.
The Moneyspinners, by Rod McQueen, Macmillan.
Moon Dice, by Richard Truhlar, Underwhich Editions.
Mordecai Richler, by Victor J. Ramraj, Twayne Publishers (U.S.).
More About Pictonians, by James M. Cameron, Lancelot Press.
More Than Meets The Eye: The Life and Lore of Western Wildflowers, by J. Ward-Harris, Oxford.
Mountains of the Middle Kingdom, by Galen Rowell, Douglas & McIntyre.
My Name Is Pauli Popowich!, by Monica Hughes, illustrated by Leoung O'Young, James Lorimer.
No Memory of a Move, by Anne Campbell, Longspoon Press.
no saviour and no special grace, by Michael Dennis, South Western Ontario Poetry.
The North American Wood Heat Handbook, by Gordon Flager, Deneau.
The Nuclear North: The People, the Regions and the Arms Race, by Carole Giangrande, Anansi.
On Duty: A Canadian at the Making of the United Nations, 1945-1946, by Escott Reid, M & S.
100% Cracked Wheat, by Bob Currie *et al.*, Coteau Books.
Other People's Money, by Peter Foster, Collins.
Paintings for Lovers, by John Lim, Tundra Books.
A Poetry of Frontiers, by Clement Moisan, Press Porcepic.
Predators of the Adoration: Selected Poems 1972-82, by Christopher Dewdney, M & S.
Puddleman, by Ted Staunton, illustrated by Maryann Kovalski, Kids Can Press.
René Lévesque Buys Canada Savings Bonds and Other Great Canadian Graffiti, edited by John Robert Colombo, illustrated by David Shaw, Hurtig.
Rima, the Monkey's Child, by Harry Lee Little, University of Alberta Press.
Risks, by Anne Szumigalski, Red Deer College Press.
Rockbound: Rock'n'Roll Encounters, by Red Robinson and Peggy Hodgins, Hancock House.
Settlements, by David Donnell, M & S.
The Sharpshooter, by Ronald Kurt, Sidereal Press.
The Silent Enemy: Canada and the Deadly Flu of 1918, by Eileen Pettigrew, Western Producer Prairie Books.
The Silent Song of Mary Eleanor, by Marjorie Wilkins Campbell, Western Producer Prairie Books.
Simon Jesse's Journey, by Stan Dragland, Groundwood.
The Singing Rabbi, by Martin Avery, Oberon.
Solstice, by Cathy Matyas, South Western Ontario Poetry.
The Sorcerer's Apprentices, by Peter Foster, Totem.
Spotski, by T.A. Walker, Harbour Publishing.
spokesbeards, by Sandra Braman and Paul Dutton, Longspoon Press.
Stuck Fast In Yesterday, by Heather Kellerhals-Stewart, Groundwood.
Surviving the Paraphrase, by Frank Davey, Turnstone Press.
Sweet Poison/Coming Soon, by Pierre Turgeon, translated by David Lobdell, Oberon.
Tales from the Beechy Woods, by Molly Burke, illustrated by Gerda Neubacher, Hayes Publishing.
Talking Dirty, by Sherman Snukal, Harbour Publishing.
Things Your Travel Agent Never Told You . . ., by Gordon W. Stewart, Grosvenor House.
Thomas H. Ruddell, by Alan R. Young, Twayne Publishers (U.S.)
Trouble at Lachine Mill, by Bill Freeman, James Lorimer.
Two Nations, by Susan Crean and Marcel Rioux, James Lorimer.
Two-Sea-Monster Stories, by Judith Flebiger and Olga Belisle, Canho Enterprises.
Ukrainian Canadian, Eh?, by Michael Czuboka, Communigraphics.
Union Sisters, edited by Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz, The Women's Press.
Unsnarling String, by William Bauer, Fiddlehead.
Victoria, by Dennis Adair and Janet Rosenstock, Avon.
The Weather, by Lorna Crozier, Coteau Books.
Wells, by Nicholas Power, Underwhich Editions.
what a city was, by B. Dedora, Underwhich Editions.
Wheels for Walking, by Sandra Richmond, Groundwood.
Wildhorse Jack, by Grant MacEwan, Western Producer Prairie Books.
Zoom at Sea, by Tim Wynne-Jones, illustrated by Ken Nutt, Groundwood Books.

COMING UP
IN THE FEBRUARY ISSUE OF

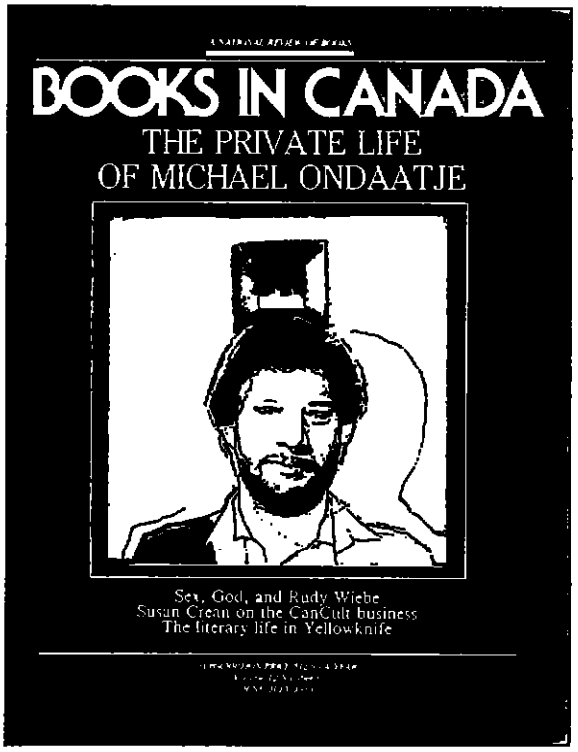
BOOKS IN CANADA

A WRITER FOR PEACE
A profile of Margaret Laurence
By Matt Cohen

IN THE SHADOW OF THE WIND
A review of Anne Hébert's latest novel
By Aritha van Herk

THE SPY WHO CAME OUT OF THE COLD
A review of Leo Heaps's *Hugh Hambleton, Spy*
By I.M. Owen

Plus reviews of new books by Joe Rosenblatt, David Donnell, Christopher Dewdney, and an interview with Guy Vanderhaeghe



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