

# BOOKS IN CANADA

## THE GUILT-EDGED WORLD OF TIMOTHY FINDLEY



The publishing adventures of Clyde Rose  
George Bowering on book reviewers  
And an interview with Sharon Butala

IN THIS ISSUE:

THE  
BOOKSHOW  
BOOKSELLERS 84  
ASSOCIATION

A SPECIAL  
SUPPLEMENT

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BOOKS IN CANADA



FEATURES

- Smooth But Hearty.** *Clyde Rose* is synonymous with book publishing in Newfoundland. By *Terry Goldie*..... 7  
**Findley's People.** Timothy **Findley's** characters devise new ways to deal with their guilt. By *Alberto Manguel*..... 13

SUPPLEMENT

- Book Show 84.** A special guide to the Canadian Booksellers Association Book Show..... S1

REVIEW3

- Why Do You Live So Far Away?,** by Norman Levine ..... 16  
**Murder Before Matins,** by John Reeves ..... 16  
**Banting: A Biography,** by Michael Bliss ..... 17  
**Kerrisdale Elegies,** by George Bowering; **Woman in the Dust,** by Patrick Lane ..... 19  
**Book of Mercy,** by Leonard Cohen ..... 31

DEPARTMENTS

- Field Notes  
**The Blue Tower,** by *M.B. Thompson* ..... 3  
**Balancing the Books,** by *George Bowering* ..... 4  
**English, Our English,** by *Bob Blackburn* ..... 6  
 Interview with **Sharon Butala,** by *Geoff Hancock* ..... 22  
 Poetry, by *Doug Fetherling* ..... 24  
**First Novels** by *Paul Wilson* ..... 27  
 In Translation, by *Paul Stuewe* ..... 30  
**Cookbooks,** by *DuBarry Campau* ..... 31  
 Letters ..... 32  
 The **Editors** Recommend ..... 33  
 CanWftNo.94..... 34  
 Books Received ..... 34

CONTRIBUTORS

**Bob Blackburn** writes frequently about English usage in these pages. For a review of *George Bowering's Kerrisdale Elegies* (Coach House Press), see page 20. **DuBarry Campau's** favourite reading comes in cookbooks and diaries. **Doug Fetherling** is a Toronto freelance writer. **George Galt** is the author of *Trailing Pythagoras* (Quadrant Editions). **Terry Goldie** is the East Coast contributing editor of *Books in Canada*. **Geoff Hancock** is editor of the *Canadian Fiction Magazine*. **Joseph Kertes** teaches English at Humber College. **Alberto Manguel** is the editor of *Black Water: The Anthology of Fantastic Literature* (Lester & Orpen Dennys). Drawings by Toronto artist **Steve McCabe** appear throughout the issue. **Elwin Moore** is a short-story writer in Eganville, Ont. **Paul Orenstein's** photographs of literary personalities appear frequently in these pages. **Paul Stuewe** is the author of *Clearing the Ground: English-Canadian Literature After Survival* (Proper Tales Press). **Phil Surguy** is a Toronto writer. **M.B. Thompson** teaches English at Carleton University. **Paul Wilson** is a Toronto writer and translator.

EDITOR • **Michael Smith** MANAGING EDITOR • **Wayne Grady** ART DIRECTOR • **Mary Lu Toms**  
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COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL ORENSTEIN

# Footloose in Stockholm: a runner's guide to Strindberg's bedevilled town

## The Blue Tower

ONE OF THE few Stockholmers who did not cry "heja, heja, heja!" at me during last year's marathon in the Swedish capital was August Strindberg. All the more surprising in that the route necessarily ran past several of the 20-odd addresses known to have housed the "bedevilled Viking" during his lifelong involvement with the city he loved and loathed.

Though Stockholm underwent a huge Hausermannesque facelift in the 1870s, many of those addresses are extant and visitable. The main one is fairly downtown, the noted and notorious Bla Tornet, the Blue Tower, in which Strindberg spent the last four years of his life and in which he died in 1912. It's at 85 Drottninggatan (Queen Street) where it crosses Tegnérsgatan, named too for a writer, the Romantic poet Esaias Tegnér (1752-1846). Why the fourth floor of 8.5 Drottninggatan was called the Blue Tower is hard to see now, but Strindberg thought that it had a towerish appearance and, I guess, a bluish one, and the name stuck, not least because those strange packed ramblings of his last years, the Blue Books, took their name from the author's dwelling.

In any case, the apartment is wonderfully preserved, exactly as it was when Strindberg lived there. One ascends from a gloomy lobby in an antique cage elevator and is deposited on a small dingy landing. You guess a bit, and a marked door yields: there you me. There's a little desk, with posters, postcards, and a recording (\$5) of Strindbergian comedians reciting in their old age — by heart, judging from the fluffs — chunks of the master that in many cases they premiered. Harriet Bosse (his third wife, who didn't die until 1961) is on it, and Falck (who founded Intima teatern) and the awesome Maria Schildt-necht-Wahlgren (who died at 96 and recorded her bits of *Mäster Olof, Pask* (Easter), and *Fröken Julie* in 1968 when she was 67).

The apartment is ordinary enough, kept in working order so that you can see Strindberg's bedroom, bathroom, living room, and, above all, workroom. Stubs of pencil, dried inkpots, scribbled

scraps litter the desk. Some of the scraps give paw: "B. Shaw 8 Albemarle Gdns" is one, followed further along under glass by letters from O.B.S. that unbedevilled Celt in London. Snaps, maps, cartoons, opening night posters, and a Swedish flag bedeck the wall. Bding in them is a silly thrill, as these things shouldn't be, but always am.

It's from one of the maps that one gleans where else Strindberg lived in town. He was born and raised in a scruffy area near the Klara Church, and he's buried out north, in Nya Kyrkogården near the Charles Hospital (Karolinska sjukhuset) on the Uppsala mad, which



he called. In his last crazy play, *stora landsvägen*, the Great Highway. In between he swooped and plummeted all over Stockholm, in streets that no visitor can avoid: Humlegård, Ostermalm, Narva. The Intimate Theatre was on Norra Bantorget, not far out, and indeed Strindberg kept for the most part fairly close to the middle of what is not now — and certainly was not then — a particularly huge metropolis. When he did move out, it was to his beloved skärgård — the skerries, the archipelago outside the city — most often to tiny Kymmendö, commemorated in such novels as *Hemsöborna* (People of Hemsö) and *I havsbandet* (Among the Skerries, translated as *By the Open Sea*).

Most visitors will know best Gamla Stan, the Old Town, the medieval Staden mellan broarna, the town between the bridges. This was the heart of

old Stockholm, and many of Strindberg's splendid historical plays contain references to its steep twisting streets and the Hanscatic edifices. But he paid less oblique tribute in books — alas untranslated — such as *Gamla Stockholm*, and countless sketches and essays. Dozens of stories have specific Stockholm settings, and his most famous novel, *Röda rummet* (The Red Room), is a geographical, social, financial, and intellectual exposition of 1860s Stockholm. It centres — as does its sequel, *Götiska rummen* (The Gothic Rooms) — on Bern's restaurant downtown on Berzelii Park and its "Red Room," where the students, artists, writers, and malcontents met to excoriate their elders, refashion Swedish art, and make plain the rough places for the coming revolution.

A very small stone's throw across the square looms another landmark wood, execrated, and finally possessed by Strindberg, Kungl. Dramatiska Teatern, the Royal Dramatic Theatre. Flunked from its portals as an aspiring actor, lukewarmly performed as an aspiring playwright, Strindberg lived in love-hate with this baroque lady too. Only after his death did the consecration begin, and while Sweden has bred its share of good playwrights, the Royal Dramatic is more Strindberg's house than anyone else's. One permanent display in the "Id ante-rooms is of a production of his masterpiece, *Erik XIV*, complete with costumes, set design, photos, memorabilia, and directorial notes.

Stockholm wasn't only Strindberg's town. A wealth of writers has hymned and hated it. Strindberg hated Carl Michael Bellman, for that matter, who never went out of Stockholm in his life, but wrote, like Machado de Assis of Rio, about the whole world from its microcosm. There are many who would think of Bellman as the purer writer: I think of him as one of the great European poets, the Swedish language notwithstanding.

Them were in 18th-century Stockholm some 700 pubs, inns, and taverns for 70,000 people., and Bellman very probably drank in them all. Modern criticism has somewhat modified the picture of Bellman's lurching from dram to dram,

from doxy to doxy, occasionally dashing off, like Schubert or Bums. a spontaneous *chef d'oeuvre* (or *mästerverk* as they would prefer to call it). In fact he was patronized by that most urbane of kings, Gustaf III. and fit quite comfortably into various levels of society.

Bellman's apogee was the 1770s, though publication did not visit him until the '90s. His two great books are *Fredmans epistlar* and *Fredmans sanger*, visions of life through his partial alter ego, the tavern-crawling Fredman, and his 20 or 30 cronies in a low-life Stockholm.

"*Drick ur dit glas, se Döden på dig väntar*" says Fredman to old Father Movitz who is croaking of consumption: "Drink down your glass, see death awaiting you." He celebrates Mollberg's parade to the grave of Corporal Boman, rackets and pub-crawls round the islands, and, immortallest of all, wakes one morning in the gutter and delivers an epistle "which is the soliloquy when Fredman lay outside the Creep-In tavern over by the Bank of Sweden one summer's night in 1768." Beginning by reviling his parents for the sweet urge that led to his begetting, and thus to his waking tremulous in the muck and hangover of the Creep-In's back alley, he modulates to a glorious gratitude for being alive at all to stagger and creep back in to start the boozing day afresh. The best trace of Bellman, now that his pubs have

tumbled to the legal bulldozers of democratic socialism, is his house at 3 Urvädersgränd, a lane in the quarter just a bit beyond Gamla Stan. It's only open the first Sunday of the month, as I discovered when I sallied down on the second.

Then there's that odd fish C.J.L. Almqvist, public servant, educator, journalist; man of letters, born in Stockholm but not able to die there, fleeing to New York in 1851 from charges of poisoning, forgery, and theft. Early Almqvist could have shared a department with Erik Johan Stagnelius, short-lived sombre Keats of the Swedish romantic movement, and he certainly worked for a while on *Aftonbladet*, an evening paper that employed Strindberg too. The author of *The Book of the Rose* (*Törnrosens Bok*) and that 1839 bombshell *Det går an* (On *It Goes*, translated as Sam Videbeck) was a Stockholmer through and through, and the city permeates his writings as it does those of Sivertz and Söderberg, Blanche and Bo Bergman, and so many others. Their traces, literary and actual, are ubiquitous: the city lives. if nowhere else. then in their work.

Stockholm, the Venice of the North? I prefer to think of Venice as the Stockholm of the South. At any rate I know which one I'd rather run 26 miles around at the height of a summer's day.

— M.B. THOMPSON

## Balancing the books

I HAVE ALWAYS thought that I was pretty naive about the business of writing and broadcasting. In fact, I believe that you have to be rather naive if you want to cod up being a writer of any kind, whether a poet or a philosopher or a sports writer, all of which I can remember aspiring to. I have always thought that the people I worked for or with were a lot smarter and wiser than I was. Magazine editors, radio producers, critics, even the people who come to the airport to meet me when I am travelling on lecture and reading tours. I used to think, though not so often any more, that the world I was coming into was a lot more experienced and wise than I was. If it has been around longer than I have, it must know more than I do.

So as far as I could see, the critics and the book reviewers must be older and more knowledgeable about their trade than any new titer could hope to be. They must be the elders that a young writer hopes to please a little and learn from a lot. That's what I thought; and later that's what I wished. In Canada one might as well wish that one could go into a book store and find a clerk who knows as much about books as a shoe clerk knows about shoes.

But when I was still a pretty young writer, I surprised myself by getting a job as theatre reviewer for the *Calgary Albertan*. Of course I went into the editing room believing that everyone there was a grizzled Runyan and I was a scared boy from the sticks. Then I saw the *Albertan's* system for book reviewing. There was a big round table in the middle of the room, and in the middle of the table a heap of books that had come in for review. Anyone working there, feeling an urge to write a book review, could lift something from the table and give it a try.

In the many years since that eye-opener, I have heard similar stories from people who have worked at dailies around the country. There are, of course, exceptions, such as the redoubtable *Globe and Mail*, but perhaps some readers are old enough to remember that in the 1960s the *Globe and Mail* had a whole magazine section on books, just like the *New York Times*, you understand. Even our temples have felt the effects of spiritual hard times.

In a lecture he gave quite some time ago, and published as a book called *The Well-Tempered Critic*, Northrop Frye made what would seem to the naive mind a temperate suggestion that a

## Hail and farewell

THIS IS THE last issue of *Books in Canada* in which the name of Wayne Grady appears as managing editor. After 3½ years, he is leaving for new adventures as the managing editor of *Harrowsmith*. Anyone who knows the ways of this magazine will understand how sorry we are to see him go.

A former associate editor of *Weekend Magazine*, Grady brought to *Books in Canada* a considerable enthusiasm both for Canadian writing and for the practice of journalism. He has worked for us at various times as reviewer, columnist, feature writer, associate editor, and on brief but memorable occasions as cover photographer and acting editor. He also cared very much about the appearance of the magazine, and played a large part in its evolution into its present form.

As if that were not enough, Grady

found time to write reviews, articles, and profiles for a number of other magazines (particularly *Saturday Night*, for whom he was a contributing editor) and to edit books, most notably *The Penguin Book of Canadian Short Stories* and its companion, *The Penguin Book of Modern Canadian Short Stories*. His special interest in Canadian fiction has led him to meet and become friends with more than a few well-known writers, many of whom have also become friends of this magazine.

Of course such devotion to the cause of *CanLit* will be a hard habit to shake., and although Grady is officially leaving the staff of *Books in Canada* we look forward to his continuing contributions — through columns and reviews — on a less formal basis. In the meantime, we wish him all the best. □

country might train and prepare its critics and reviewers with as much seriousness as it prepares its engineers and military cooks. Maybe our universities could be encouraged to educate some young literate people in the practice of book reviewing, giving a course in the history of the subject, complete with various examples of competent and even excellent documents from the past. A methodology could be introduced, perhaps beginning with the admonition that the reviewer read the book to be reviewed, and even to read earlier books by the same author, maybe even other books in the field.

Speaking personally, I can say that the few excellent reviews of my own books have been highly appreciated by their author, and have aroused the old pleasant feeling of my naiveté. The best reviews have encouraged me to go back to my work with a changed idea, with the determination to correct faults and develop strengths. I am not kidding. Neither am I referring to those rare notices that announce my brilliance. They are nicer than the ones that urge my extirpation (less rare), but not as useful as the ones that consider such things as the argument and context of the book, its intentions, as the schoolteachers used to say, and its use of language.

Like a lot of people, I always got a

school report card that alleged that I was not working up to my capability. When the schoolteacher was moonlighting as a book reviewer for the local newspaper, she always said that the author in question was not in sufficient control of his materials. Now, I have laboured for years to find a serious method that would reflect my view that one should not be in control of his materials. I am not charmed by such quick dismissals of my literary belief.

In recent times I have been pestered by those reviewers who resent the author's "interjecting" himself between the reader and the story. A second's reflection would produce the thought that there was no story there before the author came along intruding. I suppose that it is unappealingly naive to expect the Canadian reviewer to know more than the book's author does, but I do not think it unreasonable for the reviewer to understand the author's point, and even to discuss its merits, before abjuring it.

In a lot of disciplinarian the tyro is judged by his elders, and if he has the gift of that will shake and renew the discipline, he will prevail while learning to anneal his blade. But in Canadian book reviewing it is normal for a veteran poet, for example, to be reviewed in quite highly regarded publications by a representative from the horde of post-

teen versifiers. I myself used to do kilometres of reviews on books by my elders and masters. And now that I am an elder, perhaps it is my duty to review the young poets, at least to prove my point and redress the balance. But I have decided that I have contributed enough reviews to my nation. Isn't that a conundrum? Will we always have the unlearned judging the learned?

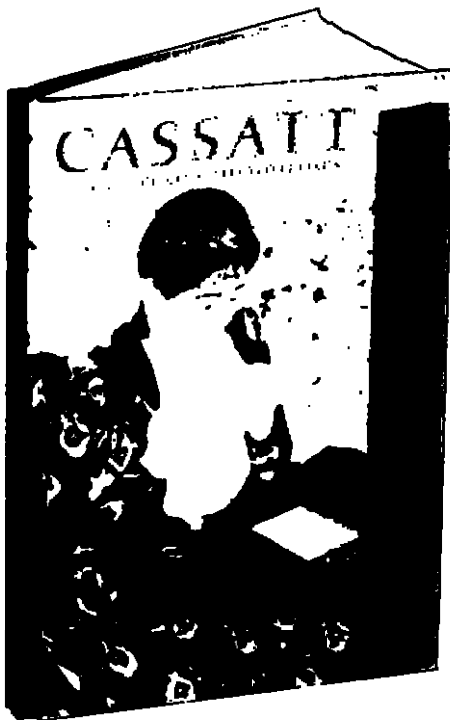
Not if we can somehow enact Northrop Frye's dream, or implement his rational argument. Looking into cultural history, or any kind of history, we judge a civilization's worth by the quality of its arts. The arts become durable and fine when they are passed through the fire of criticism that rises to meet them. Writers and painters across the country tell me often of their discontent that they send work out to ears and eyes that do not work as bard.

I call on universities and colleges to discontinue half of their almost innumerable creative writing courses, and replace them with courses in book reviewing. I urge the papers and magazines of Canada to demand as much of their book reviewers as they do of their layout designers and office furniture.

I may be naive, but I think it is possible to create a book reviewer. If we can put a mechanical arm in space, we can put a critical eye in the Regina Leader-Post.

—GEORGE BOWERING

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Your missing something if you favdur  
convention over logic: its quite clear that punctuators  
must proceed 'according to sense. ..'.

By BOB BLACKBURN

THE QUESTION of whether the period goes before or after the closing quotation mark is one on which I disagree with virtually all the editors I know. They think nothing of shifting a correctly placed period from the outside to the inside for no reason other than that it looks better.

It does look better. What's more, especially to the North American eye, it looks tight, simply because it has become the conventional form.

Fowler, who prefers to call quotation marks inverted commas, has this to say:

"There are two schools of thought, which might be called the conventional and the logical. The conventional prefers to put stops within the inverted commas, if it can be done without ambiguity, on the ground that this has a more pleasing appearance. The logical punctuates according to sense, and puts them outside except when they actually form part of the quotation."

Fowler of course favours the logical. He allows that in some constructions (e.g., where logic would require a period on each side of a quotation mark) "logic must respect appearances." But he says in conclusion, "the conventional system flouts common sense, and it is not easy for the plain man to see what merit it has to outweigh that defect; even the more pleasing appearance claimed for it is not likely to go unquestioned."

The heart of the problem is to be found in the phrase "... if it can be done without ambiguity. ...". (Note that Fowler is merely describing the convention, not condoning it.)

There are many editors who will exercise that sort of discretion. Then are many more, though, who will not; who will blindly follow the convention no matter what damage it wreaks on the sense of the text. To license the conditional flouting of rules is to invite trouble, but the majority of publishers do it. They are like the benighted teachers who tell their pupils that spelling and grammar don't matter as long as they can get their ideas across, thereby infesting the world with a generation of people who follow every statement with "You know what I mean?" Usually the appropriate reply is no.

Cosmetic punctuation (my own term for what Fowlers calls conventional) bothers me chiefly because it is illogical, but I use it in most of my writing, knowing that correct punctuation is certain to be changed, possibly in a way that will pervert my meaning. If it must be wrong. I prefer to make it wrong in my own way.

I cannot think about punctuation for long without getting around to the apostrophe, which is probably the most widely and frequently misused of all the marks. Perhaps this is because it has the two quite distinct major functions of indicating the possessive and of replacing missing letters in contractions. I have seen conscientious newspaper editors become quite demented by the frustration of being unable to train their employees to remember that it's is a contraction of *it is* and *its is* the possessive. This is surely the simplest of distinctions, yet the pages of our daily newspapers are riddled with examples of this error.

It's getting worse. I knew a reporter who had a B.A. in English from an excellent university, who had a full career in newspaper work, and who reached retirement age without ever grasping the fact that *you're*, not *your*, is the contraction of *you are*, and that the possessive is



*yours*, not *your's*. Every day I see *their's* and *her's* and the like in print. Even worse is the use of 's to form the plural. The authors of signs, posters, and menus are among the worst offenders in this as well as in the ridiculous misuse of quotation marks: Your *missing* something *if you haven't tried our "home-made" pie's and cake's!!!*

Gawd!!! 0

# SMOOTH BUT HEARTY

Like it or not, the flamboyant presence of Clyde Rose has become synonymous with book publishing in Newfoundland

By TERRY GOLDIE

IN □ owi-irov?i St. John's there is a building called the Murray Premises. It's the sort of thing seen around the world — an old warehouse turned by gentrification into a terribly tasteful shopping mall. The stores in it are also as one might expect: a florist's, a shop with all the right furniture, and a small book store, the retail outlet for Breakwater Books. Last December there was a friendly gathering there to launch a new Breakwater novel, *Lotus Man* by Gildas Roberts, and to promote a few other of the more recent Breakwater books.

It was the night before Christmas, and more than a few creatures were stirring. And a drop of the creature was to be bad, too, if you could find publisher Clyde Rose and his magic, ever-replenishing rum bottle. There was also come good old traditional Newfoundland music by the Breakwater Boys, one of whom was Pat Byrne, secretary-treasurer of the Breakwater board. By the end of the festivities, when there were plenty of drops in all of the creatures, Byrne had donned a Sante Claus suit and was serenading the shoppers with an accordion.

That's one example of book launching, Newfoundland style. Another was the party for Douglas Hill's novel *The Second Trap*, held in the small outpost of Port Kirwan, where Hill sometimes lives. Port Kirwan is about 100 kilometres from St. John's, "up the southern shore" (a mainlander who checks the map will find that this in fact looks to be "down," but to explain this would take a treatise on the Newfoundland-centred world view) and a good, wild time was had by all. The Port Kirwanites, seated at the rickety tables in the church hall, treated it like a slightly special version of the Saturday night "time." A local group played traditional and country-and-western music, and Pat Byrne was there again, this time singing an oft-requested ballad in the traditional style, *The Rocks of Merasheen*, penned by poet and vice-president of the Breakwater board, Al Pittman.

Not that Breakwater can't play typical publisher when it wants to. At the gathering for *Part of the Main* — an illustrated history of Newfoundland and Labrador by Peter Neary and Patrick O'Flaherty — there was a message from the premier and the presence of assorted dignitaries (including Roger Simmons, soon to be one of the more short-lived federal cabinet ministers). And, of course, the usual hangers-on — academics and artsy types — the usual cheese, and the all-too-usual wine.

The flamboyant, lushly produced *Part of the Main* was touted throughout the press as "Our 400th Anniversary Book," to mark 1583, when Humphrey Gilbert claimed Newfoundland for Britain. But it was also known by Breakwater as their 10th anniversary book, and it show just how far they have come in those 10 years.

In 1973 five professors in Memorial University's English department — Rose, Byrne, Pittman, Dick Buehler, and Tom Dawe — got together to form a publishing company. AU except Buehler were native Newfoundlanders, and all had become very concerned with the absence of Newfoundland material in print. Their reaction was an anthology, *Baffles of the Wind and Tide*.

There is more than a slightly amateur look about *Baffles*. Its most notable feature can be summed up in an adjective often used to describe Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders: feisty. The preface, by Rose, begins with an attack on Farley Mowat, but then turns to praise:

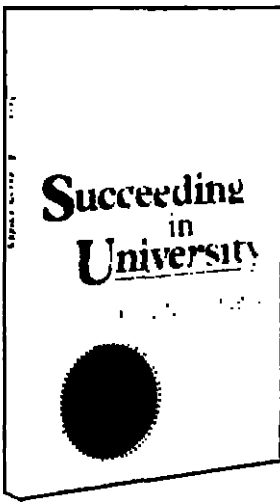
The decade of the sixties blossoms with literature about Newfoundland by Newfoundlanders. . . Daily, young writers are sprouting. For the first time in our history our children are enjoying writing poems about themselves. In my schooldays reading poetry was, like smoking, a furtive activity. Mowat's two-fold contribution is that he initiated a literary movement and he directed us toward the sources — the land and the people. Ourselves.



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Since then, Breakwater has gone along, with a few ups and downs, in a reasonably constant expansion. Pittman recalls that the original intention was to create a "small literary kind of thing, a book at a time." But it wasn't long before it got well beyond that. There was, for example, a disastrous attempt to get into large-volume paperbacks with *Williwaw*, a futuristic thriller by P.S. Moore. "The mass market gives me no pleasure," was Rose's comment on the affair.

Not so long ago, some believed that such questionable ven-

Rose is so closely identified  
with his company that  
opinions about the one are  
invariably shaped by  
opinions about the other

tures were leading toward the demise of Breakwater, and a few of the Breakwater authors were vocally upset about royalties, contracts, and a number of other issues. Much of the fuss could be assigned to the usual testy relationship between authors and publishers, but that amount of smoke would suggest a bit of flame somewhere. A story on CBC-Radio added a bit of gasoline. Then all stopped. Not a spark to be seen.

Rose points out that Breakwater has shown a profit for the last four years — which would date right after the kerfuffle. He also asserts that all royalties are up to date, and that all contracts have been honoured. AU of the authors from that period who were contacted have said that they have no complaints. The best description would probably be satisfied but not happy.

PART OF THE problem is Rose himself. To call him a Newfoundland version of Jack McClelland would not be far wrong. When Breakwater began, Rose, as president and publisher, decided to take a leave of absence from his teaching position. A few years later he resigned, and from then on Breakwater and Rose have been synonymous. Byrne and Pittman remain on the board but, as Pittman says, "Clyde makes the decisions." Rose is so closely identified with his company that opinions about the one are invariably shaped by opinions about the other.

Before Breakwater, Rose was best known locally as an actor, a role he continues to play when he appears with Pat and Joe Byrne and Baxter Wareham. They perform the music and he does a few recitations. Not that he can't join in on the tunes when the mood hits him. A few years ago, when the Breakwater Boys were making a large number of appearances, they featured an octogenarian Newfoundland fiddler, Rufus Guinchar. Breakwater also released a recording of Guinchar's music. There on the back cover, in a still from Peter Gzowski's short-lived television series, are Gzowski and Guinchar — and Rose playing the spoons.

This continuing flamboyant presence has meant that "everyone knows Clyde," but that not a few are put off by him. There is a beer in Newfoundland Dominion Ale, that claims to be "a Newfoundland tradition" and uses television ads with folksy themes. In some of them Rose, the actor, appears in rubber boots and watchcap as what a semiologist might call an ultimate signifier of Newfoundlandicity. As a result of this a number of locals refer to Rose with the same phrase as that claimed by the beer, "the old smoothy with the hearty flavour."


Such a remark is likely to come as part of an attack on "professional Newfoundlanders," a term snidely applied to whomever the speaker feels makes too much of his seafaring roots. The speaker is usually a native Newfoundlander, often some-

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## The next issue of BOOKS IN CANADA

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*Books in Canada* wishes you a fine summer of enjoyable reading.

one professionally involved in Newfoundland culture, who feels that certain Newfoundlanders — and particularly Rose — just "play the part" a bit too much.

There can be little question that Rose is inclined to the dramatic effect. Some of his comments about Newfoundland and himself as a Newfoundlander are at the very least hyperbole. But he is honestly proud of his background, and of his father's life as a fisherman in an isolated outport on the south coast. Now Rose lives in Portugal Cove, once an outport but now more accurately described as a bedroom community for St. John's. But there, in the harbour, is his boat. And it is not an overly romantic vision to say that when he is at book fairs in Bologna or Frankfurt, playing big publisher, a good part of him is back in "the cove."

Representative of the role he plays — or the life he lives — might be Rose's behaviour at the *Second Trap* launching. Port Kirwan is a "real" outport, and many of the "professional Newfoundlanders" from St. John's, regardless of their pedigrees, seemed as out of place there as any mainlander. The party split neatly between the group from St. John's, acting as if they were at any other cocktail party, and the locals, sitting at the tables with their beer.

Rose was able to move easily between the camps. A number of the locals remarked on "what a nice fellow that Mr. Rose is." Toward the end of the evening he brought out an accordion and, as a musician friend of his noted, "Clyde doesn't know many notes, but nobody can play with his kind of spirit." As the party wound down in the early hours of the morning, Rose took his accordion and led a c&d in a parade around the harbour. When the sun came up, he was to be seen sitting on the rocks looking over the water.

ROSE'S PERFORMANCE as the archetypal Newfoundlander would not be so important if it were not an essential part of what *Breakwater* has become: the closest thing to a major trade publisher in the Atlantic region. It is rapidly becoming a major educational publisher as well.

Breakwater has made periodic pretensions to represent Atlantic Canada, but so far its emphasis has been on Newfoundland. One partial reason would seem to be that most writers in the Maritimes appear satisfied with central Canadian publishers, while few Newfoundland authors of any stature have not made at least some appearance through Breakwater. Breakwater's biggest success to date is a very Newfoundland book, the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*. Elsewhere it is published by the University of Toronto Press, and on the mainland and throughout the world it is being marketed as what it is — a careful, scholarly work, the product of some 25 years of research. But in Newfoundland it was given the kind of emphasis usually reserved for an American best-seller. The hype in the book store was tremendous, with Rose appearing on television to urge Newfoundlanders to give a gift of their heritage.

Rose's arrangement with U of T Press went beyond simple distribution. He paid for the books directly to the printer, and they had the Breakwater name on the dust-jacket. Rose says, "It is such a strongly regional book that people naturally associated it with Breakwater. If a man in Placentia buys it, he wants it to be a Breakwater book."

Such strident regionalism may stick in the craw of a number of people, but it is the motivating force for Breakwater and for Rose. Breakwater's largest independent effort by far is *Part of the Main*, the illustrated history of Newfoundland. Rose's stated reason for publishing it is quite simple: "It is the book which gives a picture of who we really are."

Now Rose is expanding his picture, in an exploration of a number of connections to that "we." Some are with the Maritime. Recently the various Atlantic governments have decided to put more of their textbook money into the hands of local

**publishers, and Breakwater is trying to get as bii a share of that pie as possible.**

The **Maritime Provinces Education Foundation (MPEF)** represents an attempt by the **three** Maritime provinces- Nova Scotia, **New Brunswick**, and **Prince Edward Island**— to **put** their **dollars** together to **increase** their purchasing power for educational **materials**. Breakwater had hoped that Newfoundland **would be involved**, but the **government** decided to stay out. For a publisher with a desire for growth, it is **an** irritating example of one more time **when what could** have been "**Atlantic Provinces**" **remains** "**Maritime Provinces**." Rose's remedy has been to create Breakwater **Maritimes** in Halifax. Breakwater **Maritimes** has already put in a tender on one MPBF book, **Maritime Studies**, which **will require** 32,000 copier in 1937.

As with many publishers, education is **the bread and butter** for **Breakwater**, with the exception of **such** happy surprises **as the Dictionary**. **Rose seems** to have an honest **interest** in the **area**, as seen in **Baffles**, which **was originally intended** to make up for the absence of regional material that Rose **recalls** from his boyhood schooling in **Burgeo**. But Rose's main love is the trade side, a preference that has led **to** expansion on other **horizons**.

"The **kind** of book we're after," he **says**, "is a book that has some cultural worth, eminently valuable in the **reflection** of a **certain** people." To date that has been primarily **Newfoundlanders**, but the interest is **getting wider**, **although** it has

---

**'The sensibility of the  
Newfoundlander,' says Rose,  
'is more in tune with the  
Nordic countries than, say,  
southern Ontario or B.C.'**

---

yet to extend to central **Canada**: "I **think** the southern Canadian is **an** American — or **very** close to it." He **sees his** "**certain people**" — **Newfoundlanders** — not in the context of Canadians but of **northerners**: "The sensibility of the **Newfoundlander**, and of people from the Northwest Territories or the Yukon, **is more** in tune with the Nordic countries than, say, **southern Ontario** or B.C."

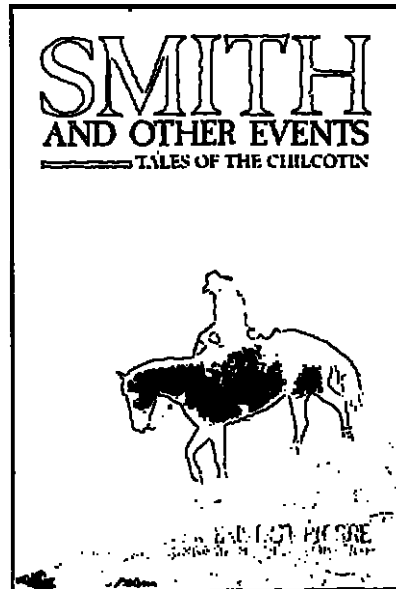
Which is the reason for **his interest** in a **work** like **Oil and Amulets**, an account of the **Inuit Circumpolar Conference** held last **July** in **Frobisher Bay**. It represents the **first work** in Breakwater's Arctic and Northern Life Series (the next will be a history of **whaling in the Arctic**), and **perhaps reflects** the **success** of **Breakwater's Folklore/Folklife series**. "**Success**" might be too general a term, as both quality and **sales** of individual **titles have varied** **neativ**, but they have been consistently **carefully presented in a very attractive** format. **The connection** created by the series has made for an interesting **continuity in what would** otherwise be a disparate grouping of reprints of **personal experience narratives, nostalgia pieces by contemporary writers, and academic ethnographies and song collections**.

In **other** words, a fine example of what a sharp, culturally and **commercially aware** publisher can do. "**We** are where we **are** because we have been very **agressive**," says Rose. "**We** have always given **equal** importance to **the** business side of our operation."

**BUT. AND THERE** is **always** that but ...

Besides the usual typos that plague any publisher, **Lotus Man** has a quite severe error in printing. The end of one chapter has been transposed onto the end of the **previous** chapter. The **novel** is "modem" enough in form **that many**

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readers might not notice the **transposition**, and Rose has decided that with 3,000 copies in print he will leave it. Hardly the reaction of a **major publisher**.

Of *Part of the Main* Rose says, "I knew that we had to do it right — get the best printer in the land, the best editor in the land, and naturally we are the best publisher: The "best publisher" would not accept a" error like the one that occurs in *Lotus Men*, but a good small publisher — one that must make choices — might. Breakwater has now reached six full-time staff, with a" annual turnover of about \$500,000. This represents a **significant growth** from the earlier days, but it is still difficult for such a small operation to achieve the complex production seen in *Part of the Main* and yet maintain a high quality throughout its large and disparate list. Some of the more "minor" titles have a" appearance that seems closer to the Breakwater of seven or eight years ago than to the Breakwater of *Part of the Main* and the *Dictionary*.

Breakwater has a clear sense of its geographical and political focus, but "ot as much of what kind of book it should be doing — books for the connoisseur of regional literature or for the coffee table. Thus, at times, its fiction and poetry seem to be getting short shrift. But, as Pittman points out, he has not stuck with Breakwater as a writer simply because he is on the board. He has had offers from mainland publishers, but he sees no reason to believe anyone else will do any better for him in terms of distribution and representation.

Another writer — Douglas 'Hi — who is much more at arm's length from the operation, agrees. Hi believes that distribution of his novel has been as good as he could have expected, and the royalties even better. Still, it doesn't mean he was totally satisfied: "A sensitive author probably would have walked off the wharf."

The problem faced by all the Breakwater authors is that so

much is dependent on communication with Rose. Hill says that he was confused about Breakwater's intentions with his manuscript until he found out it was already at the typesetter's. As Pittman says, "Clyde makes the decisions," but some authors seem to have had difficulty ascertaining what those decisions were.

Rose has developed a very able staff, that has been ready to stick with Breakwater through thin as well as thick. The managing director, Lois Penny, is often mentioned by Breakwater authors as making a major positive contribution to their experience with the company. But, like the board, the staff seems at least at one remove from the major issues. Most questions draw the response: "You'll have to ask Clyde."

There seems little question that Breakwater will continue, partly because of its recent financial success and partly because of its obvious potential in the burgeoning educational field. No other publisher in the Atlantic region is better prepared to meet schools' needs.

But a much more important reason is Rose himself. Pittman recalls the years of financial difficulties: "Clyde could have given up at any time and walked away from it proud of what he had done. I know what he sacrificed, financially and personally, to keep it going when it would have been much more sensible to let it go."

It is inconceivable that such a dramatic personification of the Newfoundlander as Rose will ever be acceptable to all people. And it is inevitable that any operation as dependent on the energies, the interests, and even the prejudices of one "old smoothy" will have a number of miscues or even worse. But Newfoundland, the Atlantic, and perhaps Canada would be much poorer without Breakwater. In order for it to continue, we should all be happy to accept a bit more of "the hearty flavour." □

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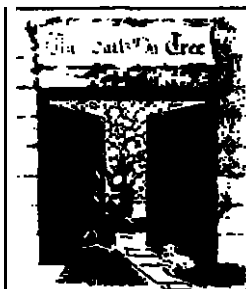


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# Findley's people

The characters in Timothy Findley's astound & collection of stories never question what happens to them. Instead, they devise new ways of dealing with their guilt

By **ALBERTO MANGUEL**

Dinner Along the Amazon, by Timothy Findley, Penguin, 3.56 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 140073 043).

**WE ALWAYS ARRIVE** too late or too early in Timothy Findley's stories. The event has already taken place, or will take place sometime later, once we have left the page, or perhaps it will never take place. "Sometime — Later — Not Now" is the title of one of the stories in *Dinner Along the Amazon* (which is one of the first four titles in Penguin's new Penguin Short Fiction series), and the title fits almost all pieces in this brilliant book. "...There are no beginnings, not even to stories," writes Findley in "Losers: Finders: Strangers at the Door." "There are only places where you make an entrance into someone else's life and either stay or turn and go away." This sense of distant continuity, of solidity in all of Findley's work, lends reality to the world he portrays. His characters have lives of their own, lives that come from a past we, the readers, are not asked to witness, and drift toward a future we are not invited to sham. Their history, which is also the history of Findley's obsessions, is taken for granted.

The background of Findley's world is ours, however; it is known to us, its features are common to our experience. Suburbia in our time, the world wars in our shared past: this chosen background enjoys the prestige of "having happened," of being true to life. The reader's disbelief is suspended from the very start: of course these houses exist, of course the war took place — and the reader is then left to wander in the maze he has accepted as real. But now comes the realization that the background is not the focus of our attention. Against it, in mid-speech, in mid-action, we see Findley's people. They are always occupied, a group obsessed with collecting whatever evidence about themselves is available — photographs, childhood memories, souvenirs in cardboard boxes — trying to understand their world.

**Suddenly the landscape is questioned,** and the reader is made to question it with them.

Chekhov (whom Findley mentions in his introduction as another writer pursued by obsessions) proceeds in the same manner: setting up an acceptable world and peopling it with characters who fail to understand it. The reader then joins the characters in the investigation of the story.

One of the finest stories in this collection, the macabre and moving masterpiece that lends its title to the book — "Dinner Along the Amazon" — is remarkable because of the many ways in

pertinent to the monologue of each of the others; one long sentence describing their mutual apprehension, whether it be about the past or the present or the future: arising out of the common literature which is the mind, peopled with common characters, moving over a common landscape, like a book they had all read — from which one of their voices began to quote aloud."

Their voices: the plural reveals another aspect of Findley's people. They are a conglomerate, a group functioning as one single being, each part unable to detach itself from the others, each however keeping its individual face, and yet



Timothy Findley

which 'it explores the paradox of the reader joining forces with the fictional characters to solve the riddle of their common world, a paradox illustrated by one of the characters, Fabiana: "She began in the middle of some interior monologue that perhaps had occupied her for some time — which yet seemed

depending on the others for survival, suffering the others' misfortunes and fears. Everything is shared, and yet the characters still feel lonely, like Siamese twins/each speaking a different language, each with his own memory. "Adult loneliness," says Findley "is the loneliness defined by remembrance."

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL ORENSTEIN

Even when a character succeeds in freeing himself from the knot of his fellow beings (as does the Snow White maid in "About Effie"), his influence is still felt by the rest of the group. "I don't know how to begin about Effie," says the child narrator (beginning, as is usual in Findley, after the fact), "but I've got to because I think you ought to know about her. Maybe you'll meet her one day, and then you'll be glad I told you all this. If I didn't, then maybe you wouldn't know what to do."

There seem to be two ways of entering Findley's world: through the eyes of a character whose reactions we follow ("Lemonade." "About Effie"), or on our own, with no interpreter ("Hello Cheeverland, Goodbye," "Dinner Along the Amazon"). In both cases the discovery of this world comes as a shock: we thought we knew it so well, and it is never what we expected. In most cases — unlike Effie — the characters share the shock and fail in their efforts to make sense of what is happening: their struggle, their passionate trying, makes the stories.

In Findley's world there is always a struggle, a war going on: historical or social, political or personal, a combat whose ends are not known. The war means different things to different characters: "war" is the name given to the machineries of fate. For Harper (in "Lemonade") war is a dream that has silenced his father; for Neil (in "War") it is a broken promise about skating. In



"Hello Cheeverland, Goodbye" it is a strict code of social graces, fought as absurdly and pathetically as the kind of war fought with guns.

To survive in this world, Findley's characters perform rituals we as readers are made to observe: Harper's morning wakening before he is allowed to kiss his wasting mother; Neil's escape into the hayloft to punish his father for betrayal; T.S. Eliot distilling words from his wife Vivienne in "Out of the Silence"; Ezra Pound purging in his cage the sin of visionary poetry in "Daybreak at Pisa." Some perform these rituals as imitations of life, as Annie Bogan does in "The Book of Pins." Others, especially the children, perform them to find a place in the world of adults.

For Findley's children the world has already happened: the laws and reasons that governed its construction have been forgotten, and what faces them now is

an incomprehensible theatre stage. Here actions are mistaken for other actions, and all intentions seem wrong. A poem — reminiscent of Stevie Smith's "Not Waving, Drowning" — introduces "Losers: Finders: Strangers at the Door":

Some lives  
are only seen  
through window  
beyond which  
the appearance  
of laughter  
and of screaming  
is the same.

The confusion of appearances provided a key to most of Findley's stories. In "Lemonade" Harper cannot understand why his mother lets her beauty die away and imagines that the jewels she has sold can restore her lost grace; in "War" Neil takes his father's enlistment as an act of unfaithfulness; in "The People on the Shore" the narrator assumes that a dying woman's last glance is a revelation. After the confusion comes the disappointment: the jealousy, the rage of unkept promises, the disenchantment. "Dinner Along the Amazon" is thickly layered with this sequence: the characters build their hopes on their assumptions, fall from grace, and rise again, in a seemingly everlasting pattern.

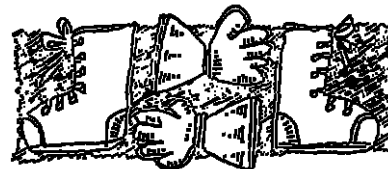
Because their assumptions are mistaken, their lives are never fulfilled. In "Sometime — Later — Not Now" Diana, the young artist with whom the narrator is in love, never becomes a great pianist. "No. They won't die," she says talking about the babies she will never have. "They just won't happen." It was her own epitaph," the narrator adds. It is also the epitaph of most of Findley's people. In "Lemonade" the neighbourhood witch mistakenly supposes that Harper is setting off on an adventure: "I've been waiting for adventure all my life," she says. "How lucky that you're so young." Adventure will never come to her (perhaps because she new sets out to find it) nor will it come for Harper. The solid background reality is inflexible, and when we leave the story — even though we will never know its true end — we realize that the characters will not succeed. Defeat seems to be the very essence of a Findley being.

The children are encroached by adults, the adults are encroached by war, the countryside (in the least successful of the stories in this collection, a fable called "What Mrs. Felton Knew") is encroached by the city. Danger is always there, lurking, ready to spring, bringing change. Change is to be avoided at all costs. The children do not want to become adults, the adults do not want to grow or learn too much: a

delicate balance maintains the social structure. Only the present counts: things are as they are, never as they might be. Michael, in "Dinner Along the Amazon," hates the future: "He hated anything he could not control: he hated anything he didn't know. Certainty was the only ally you could trust." And then: "The future was his enemy." Fear of change keeps Findley's people alive.

As a group, Findley's people believe they are guilty. They never question why whatever has happened, has happened to them; instead they try to explore new ways of living with their guilt. In "Losers: Finders: Strangers at the Door" the heroine tries to convince a stranger to come and live in her house and share her plants and her anguish; in "The Book of Pins" Annie Bogan purges her guilt through memory; in *The Last of the Crazy People* (Findley's first novel) guilt is paid for with death. As in Catholic confession, the assumption is always that we have sinned, that we are never guiltless.

Read after *The Wars* and *Famous Last Words*, *Dinner Along the Amazon* take 5 on another significance: it is not only a collection of extraordinary short stories — it is also a showcase of drafts, ideas, new developments, variations on the obsessions that make up Findley's chosen world. In his introduction, Findley says he was surprised to find that certain themes, certain "sounds and images," crop up again and again in his writing. It is true that what Henry James called "the figure in the carpet" repeats itself in Findley's work — dusty roads, solitary children, photographs, silence — but these images are not just samples of a collector's hobby. They constitute the certain, precise landscape of the writer, a dangerous landscape laid thick with traps, through which the characters have to pick their way. The roads have

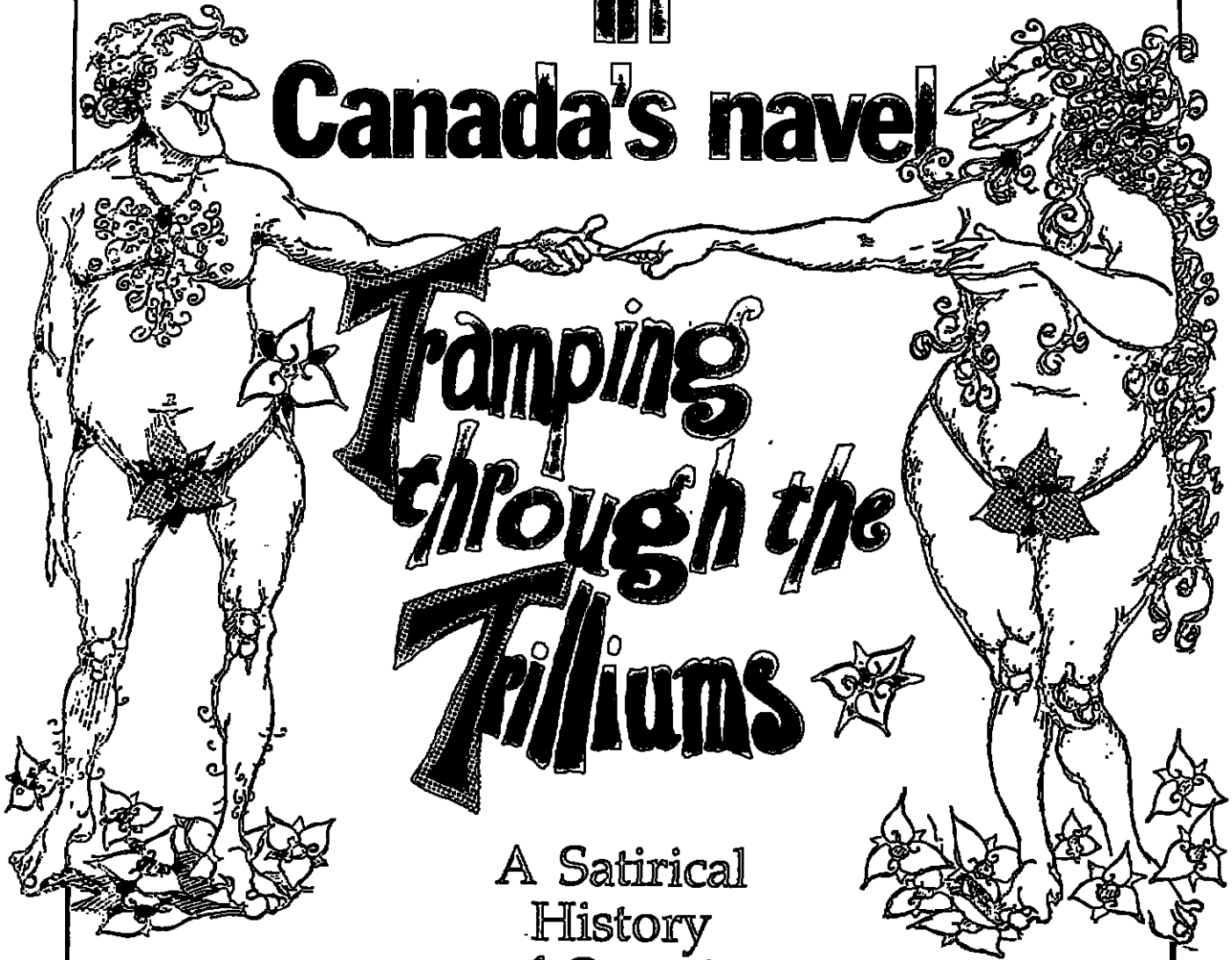


to be dusty because Nature here is not welcoming; the children have to be lonely because within the group speech carries no meaning, no comfort; the photographs are necessary because they are the only tangible evidence of these moments, these stories, with no ending and no beginning, moments snipped out of time; silence is essential because from the lack of words comes the words themselves (as in the Eliot story or in *Famous Last Words*). Silence is all-important. "Our world," says Findley, "had been secured for us by a World War that

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closed in a parable of silence."

To anyone approaching Canadian literature for the first time, it becomes painfully obvious that the quest for a national identity is a literary obsession. The reader has the overall feeling that most Canadian writers confirm their existence by constantly pinching their nationality, by making statements rather than showing a world. Timothy Findley is never guilty of rhetoric: his stories are wonderfully visual, like plays acted out on the page at a breathtaking pace. When his characters speak, they never explain: they explore, they talk, and their dialogue becomes the characters.

Certain writers, perhaps unwittingly, have defined a country through their literature: Paul Scott's India, García Márquez's Colombia, Malcolm Lowry's Mexico. Findley's world of missed historical events, assumed guilt and contrived ways of survival, of children besieged by paternalistic politics and culture, of adults deeply concerned with, but awed by, art and social graces — all this world seems to me an excellent definition of Canada. In his major novels, in this astounding *Dinner Along the Amazon*, Timothy Findley restores an almost forgotten power to the art of fiction: the creation of a deep, coherent world in which we see our own. □

R E V I E W

## From a seaside town

By ELWIN MOORE

Why Do You Live So Far Away?, by Norman Levine, Deneau Publishers, 128 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88879 100 3).

SORROW IS GAUDY, unconsidered, immediate as fire, a measure of loss; it passes. Sadness is reticent, reflective, pervasive as air, a measure of distance; it stays. And Norman Levine is a master of sad distances. *Why Do You Live So Far Away?* asks the title of this collection, and an earlier Levine title can be drafted as answer: *I Don't Want to Know Anyone Too Well*. Levine seems an expatriate spirit; a hard-eyed, clear-eyed tourist in his own life. Relentless as a camera, he records the distances between husband and wife, between son and mother, between the free rich man and the trapped poor man, between the rooted and

the rootless, between wish and fact. Levine maintains, too, an artful, unstated space between reader and narrator. And he likes to end his stories with departures — a last look, a turning away. "One is always disappointed by change," says Gordon Rideau, the impoverished guest of honour at a reunion of McGill grads, shortly before he begins to follow his old university brothers into the washroom to ask them for loans.

This book gathers five short stories first published in the 1960s, another written in 1975, and a 1981 revision of the 1961 novella "The Playground." Mostly early Levine, in other words — Levine in his time of long struggle, before his work began to win the attention it deserved. The dominant theme of the early short stories here is privation. A writer pawns his typewriter. A writer moves his family for the 14th time in five years. A writer stays indoors to avoid meeting creditors in the street. A miter's wife smuggler home chunks of firewood under the baby carriage's raincover. AU this in a determinedly flat, bare, direct, and factual style, for Levine long ago mastered the technique of lowering his voice so as to be better heard. These stories give an uneasy enjoyment. The reader keeps wondering how autobiographical they are. The effect is of a feast where the food is fine and the chef is much in evidence, and emaciated.

"The Playground" is set in 1959-60 in the seaside town of St. Ives, Cornwall, Levine's long-time home. We are given three seasons in the life of St. Ives and three seasons in the gossip and partying of an artists' colony that runs heavily to idlers, spongers, and pretenders. This story is almost as much a pastiche as a novella — Levine seems to have written many of its parts separately and then strung them together by inventing a narrator with the appropriate name of Bii Stringer. The people of "The Playground" don't amount to much. They're a matter of quick, usually undercutting sketches and a few good scenes. But Levine has appropriated the town. He knows it at all hours and from all vantage-points. He knows it from the castrated cats sunning themselves in the middle of summer streets to the outside house pipes painted to look like varicose veins to the gull caught head down between electric wires in October cold, "the neck arching with the wind like the neck of a kettle." The sense of place in this story is rich and dense and marvellous.

Levine's prose traditionally has been celebrated for its taut authority. Lately he seems to be letting a little more of the randomness of the world into his fiction. There's more ease in his telling. The change shows here in the 1975 story

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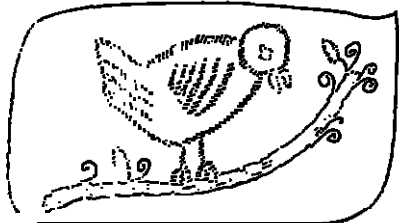
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"Continuity," and it showed too. In the 1930 collection *Thin Ice*. One critic found the language of *Thin Ice* "almost chatty." But I think Levine has gained by surrendering himself just a bit to his material. His recent stories seem subtler,



wiser, and more various in their effects.

Norman Levine came back to Canada to live in 1979, after 30 years in England, and Deneau Publishers of Ottawa, his old hometown, is steadily making more of his work available to Canadian readers. If Levine were a constitution, you might say that he is being gradually repatriated. But Levine is a writer, one of Canada's best, and an old friend of sadness and distance. He writes in the story "Continuity": "There are some people who belong to the place they live in. There are others who don't. They just pass through." □

## REVIEW

### Midnight at the oasis

By WAYNE GRADY

*Murder Before Matins*, by John Reeves, Doubleday, 186 pages, 917.95 cloth (ISBN 0 395 19377 7).

SOME DETECTIVE novelists succeed in re-creating entire cities: readers of Simenon know certain districts of Paris as if they'd lived all their lives across from the Quai d'Orfèvres, and the Amsterdam of Nicolas Freeling and Jan van da Wetering is as real and as mysterious as 16th-century London is to scholars of Shakespeare or, perhaps more appropriately, the Elizabethan pamphleteers. Other detective writers are more concerned with portraying particular segments of society: mobsters in the case of the Americans; the British aristocracy in novels by the so-called Queens of Crime, Dorothy Sayers, Margery Alling-

ham, and even Dame Agatha herself.

Still others seem more interested in institutions than in the societies they serve or the cities they inhabit. Sayers examined the rather rarefied world of advertising, for example, in *Murder Must Advertise*. P.D. James set her puzzles in such sealed cases as mental institutions, retirement homes, nursing hospitals, resort hotels. Ngaio Marsh wrote several novels in which the theatre was almost the central character — *Enter a Murderer*, for instance, or *Death at the Dolphin*. For Michael Innes and Edmund Crispin — both pseudonymous Oxford dons — it was the university.

It is among this latter group that the Canadian detective writer John Reeves belongs. His first book, *Murder by Microphone*, was more about the CBC as a nefarious institution than it was about the commission and detection of crime. And now in *Murder Before Matins* he takes us into the even more reclusive world of the religious monastery.

Tathwell Abbey, a modern monastery in Toronto, is the home of an equal number of male and female members of the Gilbertine Order, an 800-year-old contemplative sat not unlike the Benedictines except that monks and nuns share one establishment, though they are physically separated from one another by walls, locks, and rigid routines. Both sexes are ruled by an Abbess, and there are a Prior and Prioress, Sub-Prior and Sub-Prioress, Precentor and Precentrix, and so on, down to postulants, novices, and lay brothers and sisters. When the Prior, Dom Benet Holland, is found one morning at the base of the belltower, having fallen to his death from a tampered-v&h platform near the top, Inspector Coggin and Sergeant Sump are called in to investigate. The crime is eventually solved, but not before officers and readers are subjected to a seemingly inexhaustible supply of monastic history, geography, theology, and psychology. Matters of Catholic liturgy are discussed, specifically the retention of the Gregorian chant: "Most people . . . are content to just string along with the Solesmes tradition," observes one of the police officers, who just happens to have her M.A. in medieval monasticism, but the Gilbertines seem "to have incorporated some very interesting ideas from Cardine's researches on the Einsiedeln Codex." Heavy going, and little of it directly related to the crime and its solution. The question of traditional robes versus civilian clothing also arises, however, and is made relevant — but to say more here would be to break the mystery-novel reviewer's vow of silence.

Reeves seems to have genuinely en-

joyed the research and to like his characters: in fact, the novel's chief fault as a mystery is that we are treated to too many points of view. We are made privy to the inner cogitations of Inspector Coggins, Sergeant Sump. Constables Pringle and Doist — though cogitation may be too passive a term for the latter's mental acrobatics — and even of Doist's wife and an assortment of totally irrelevant monks and nuns. Sorting out what is and is not relevant is, of course, the job of the reader of mysteries, but this welter of perspectives makes the job unnecessarily burdensome. Even in Umberto Eco's similarly situated *The Name of the Rose* (ii which Eco was primarily concerned with recreating the thought of the entire 14th century) we are presented with the thoughts of only Eco's Holmesian detective and his Watsonian sidekick.

But *Murder Before Matins* is satisfying as a mystery. The monastery is an oasis of tranquillity in a chaotic world; there are names to remember, maps to read, even a crossword puzzle to solve (one of its clues is also a due to the murderer), and sufficient red herrings to intrigue the most avid of fishers. □

## REVIEW

### The miracle worker

By PHIL SURGUY

*Banting: A Biography*, by Michael Bliss, McClelland & Stewart, 336 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 1378 X).

IN OCTOBER, 1920, Fred Banting was 29 years old, an unremarkable graduate of the University of Toronto's medical school; painfully trying to scratch out a practice in London, Ont. To fill some of his ample spare time, he worked as a demonstrator in surgery and anatomy at Western University.

On the evening of October 31, after preparing a talk on the pancreas, he settled down with a learned article on the hypothetical internal secretion of that organ, which many researchers believed would be the key to understanding and treating diabetes. Later that night, inspired by the article, Banting decided

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that the internal secretion (if it existed at all) might be isolated by allowing most of a pancreas to atrophy and attempting to obtain an extract from the unatrophied part. The greater part of the pancreas produced strong, externally secreted digestive enzymes, which were believed to get in the way of attempts to isolate the internal secretion.

Banting took his idea to J.J.R. MacLeod, the associate dean of medicine at the University of Toronto, who knew the pancreas literature very well. MacLeod cautiously allowed that Banting's proposed experiment was worth a try and gave him permission to use university facilities for a couple of months during the following summer.

Banting was an inexperienced, comparatively ignorant, often sloppy researcher. He had no particular interest in the pancreas or diabetes. In the spring of 1921, unhappy and restless, he applied for a job with an oil exploration party in the Mackenzie Valley and toyed with the idea of joining the Indian Army Medical Service (perhaps thinking he might find something akin to the comradeship he'd enjoyed while serving as an army surgeon in the First World War). Nothing came of either notion, and by the end of May he was hard at work with a student assistant named Charles Best, trying to keep dogs whose pancreas had been removed (and who had thus become diabetic) alive with extracts from the atrophied pancreas of other dogs. Hardly a year later, Banting was the most famous man in Canada, revered the world over as the discoverer of insulin.

But, contrary to public belief, Banting was not the sole discoverer of the miraculous hormone. Two years ago, in his *The Discovery of Insulin*, Michael Bliss gave us a detailed history of the reluctant, strife-ridden partnership that was actually responsible for the great success. As Bliss argued then, and reiterates in *Banting*, "insulin emerged in 1921-22 as a result of a collaboration among a number of researchers, directed by J.J.R. MacLeod, who expanded upon and carried to triumphant success a project initiated by Banting with the help of Best. The single most important technical achievement was that made by [James Bertram] Collip in the purification of the extract. On their own, Banting and Best would probably not have reached insulin."

As the work progressed, it was even found that there was no need to atrophy pancreas to get the extract. But Banting was the one who'd got the ball rolling, and with the support of many well-placed friends, and his fierce, near-paranoid determination not to be robbed of the credit due him, he became

the Canadian Pasteur. Faith in him was so high that one of his boosters felt moved to warn the public not to be impatient, it would take Dr. Banting at least two years to produce another miracle.

But, after nearly two decades of research in a number of areas such as cancer, infant diarrhoea and silicosis, there were still no miracles to report. When he died in a plane crash in 1941, Banting was mainly an administrator, helping to organize the war effort of Canada's fledgling medical research establishment.

Michael Bliss argues that Fred Banting, the unsophisticated farm boy from Simcoe County who (much like his country) blundered rather spectacularly into the 20th century, was more interesting as a man than a scientist. In his foreword Bliss writes that Banting "seems to fit the novelist Joan Didion's definition of 'a great literary character' as 'a character so ambiguous and driven and revealing of his time and place that his gravestone might well contain only his name and nationality.'"

And that's what Bliss delivers: the story of Banting's upbringing, education, war service, work, politics, friendships, hates, and messy, incomplete love life reveals much about the five decades that he lived through. But Bliss is a scrupulous historian, and one of the pleasures of this book is in watching how he keeps his sense of Banting's possibilities as a literary character in check. He quite properly shuns all but the most elemental speculation, restricts himself to what he has learned for sure from primary sources. But Banting didn't confide his most intimate thoughts and



emotions to diaries and letters, so there are gaps, which Bliss has refused to fill with conjecture. Instead, he has fleshed out his picture of Banting and the time he lived in with a few allusions to and quotations from a nicely chosen range of fiction writers: Stephen Leacock, Donald Jack, Robertson Davies, F. Scott Fitzgerald and, most notably, Sinclair Lewis. Their presence enriches this valuable, fascinating story without distorting it. □

# Mud and metaphor

By **GEORGE GALT**

*Kerrisdale Elegies*, by George Bowering, Coach House Press, 152 pages, \$8.50 paper (ISBN 0 88910 265 1).

*Woman in the Dust*, by Patrick Lane, Mosaic Press, 64 pages, \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 88962 223 X).

YOUNG POETS can be excessive, brash, self-admiring, arrogant and ridiculous — and get away with it. They can fly off in all directions, rockets full of energy, burning up received wisdom in a wild bet on radical insight. Often we read them just to watch the risk-taking, the cutting loose, the lofting into their personal unknown. Occasionally they reveal something we can keep, but many beginning writers bum up so much fuel along the way that the trip seems more memor-

able for the noise and smoke than for its durable revelations.

George Bowering, I used to think, was such a young poet. Though he more than occasionally recorded worthkeeping, his early cosmic rockets generally described parabolas of heat, not light. Still wandering the universe in this his most far-reaching book, no longer young but still taking large risks, Bowering now can mix old wisdom and fresh insight without wasting an ounce of fuel. The scope of *Kerrisdale Elegies*, essentially one long poem broken into 10 parts, is breathtaking, and its accomplishment matches its ambition.

These meditations are offered in immediate, tactile language, which is not to say they are devoted to the immediate, tactile world, though that too. Mortality, but more interesting, the challenge of being fully conscious of mortality while being wholly alive, are the book's preoccupations. To be completely conscious, the poet suggests, is to be dead among the living: the living people one touches, and all the living selves one accumulates. We don't die once but every moment. Dying is the meat and magic of life, and unless we know it we're only half here.

*What happened  
to that smile that was on your face  
a minute ago?*

*God, there goes another breath,  
and I go with it,*

*I was further from my grave  
two stanzas back, I'm human.*

*Will the universe  
notice my unattached molecules drifting  
thru?*

*Will the dead poets notice our lines  
appearing among them,  
or are their ears filled with their own  
music?*

For this poet the vanishing present is born earthbound and heaven-connected, a dialectical mix of mud and metaphor in which the laws of *Kerrisdale* (described on the back of this book as "one of Vancouver's most gracious residential areas") are descended from the farthest star. Immersed in the immediate, his nose in the roses, he is also face to face with the transcendent beyond.

*Love is yearning for the stars,  
love is yearning  
by the night stars for a body full of  
blood....*

*Thou art lightning and low, she says,  
but the hunger in his face knot for her,  
nor  
was it given at his birth.*

*His thick lips  
around your nipple, girl, are not suck-  
ing you alone.*

*YOU are a wisp,  
your sudden coming mow him  
only to the beginning of his passion,  
he is in you,*

*yes, and now he k thru you.*

*True, you caught his breath with your  
fingers,  
but that groan you heard,  
that frightened lunge  
ran across the ether and up his spine,  
he's gone.*

About consciousness, these meditations are also about poetry. Writing about writing can be tedious to read, but when it is handled unself-consciously as a natural appendage of awareness. Like the houses and gardens of *Kerrisdale*, the writer is a neighbourhood artifact. His books, his papers, his bones are disintegrating as quickly as the trees in the yard. Only the permanence of words can leapfrog us backwards and forwards out of the dot of time our bodies inhabit.

There is lively wit in this book as in the echoes from Eliot when Bowering's robin is

*skidding across his own wakened air,  
like a pen across a modern poem.*

*Let us go then,  
heart and eye,  
to look as*

*always,  
attend as always,  
look at the world and never  
out of it.*

*It begins to fall down a little.  
We renovate and proudly show our  
friends.*

*It begins to fall down, begins to die.  
But this poet has the renovating gift,  
the ability (and felt responsibility) to snatch  
death out of slack-jawed everyday life:*

*It is no bed of roses,  
being dead.  
Your silent blood k a message  
from a dying messenger.*

*It is filled with words  
your tongue can move into sound,  
words your neighbourhood deserves.*

Patrick Lane's new book is a collection of drawings accompanied by 27 poems culled from previous books. It would be unfair to judge his poetry from the work reprinted here. Lane's finest poems, including a series written on the occasion of his visit to China in 1981, were published in his most recent new collection *Old Mother*. Only one of these appears in *Woman in the Dust*. Instead we are given some of his older, anguished love and death lyrics, few of which bear the attention lavished on them by this handsome book. There is a narrow concentration of pain and loss in most of these poems that Lane successfully enlarges in his later, richer work.

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tives of sex and death are the themes of these aggressive yet intricate images. They are characterized by a polymorphous lust that takes shape in stiff and floppy penises, worms growing out of eyeballs and noses, victors devouring victims, and so on. Some are designed to assault crudely. The first full-page illustration, which could be entitled "Hard-On for the Holocaust," shows an erect penis with a door and a window, two forlorn women nudging its shaft. The next pictures a man with a hook in his lover's stomach, a chain dripping over her ankle, and a stream of foetal beasties issuing from her skull. *Woman in the Dust* is not necessarily bedtime reading, but much of it has the taste of nightmare effluvia.

The drawings are bleak and often cruel, but many of them achieve a delicacy and complexity appropriate to Lane's better writing. This volume offers a well-produced display of the poet's accomplishment as a visual artist. □

## REVIEW

# Born again

By JOSEPH KERTES

*Book of Mercy*, by Leonard Cohen, McClelland & Stewart, unpaginated, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 2206 9).

MANY GREAT POETS have renounced secular life for religious faith. John Donne is a notable example and T.S. Eliot another. George Herbert went so far as to burn his secular verse and to leave behind one of the most laconic and beautiful theologies in literature. In the 50 prayers that comprise Leonard Cohen's *Book of Mercy*, his first volume in six years, there is evident a similar pattern. While the renunciation of a state of "sinfulness" may be an unusual development, readers of Cohen's work should not be entirely surprised by it. Though he has occasionally been accused of self-indulgence and egocentricity, much of Cohen's writing suggests an ethic based on selflessness and on a denunciation of differences among people and nations. As early as *The Spice Box of Earth* (1961), the poet was asking us to consider the evil inherent in our nature and, in *Flowers for Hitler* (1964),

enjoining us to assume responsibility for our darker side.

*Book of Mercy* carries these themes one step further. Cohen condemns himself for giving in to his own worst excesses: "I pace the corridor between my teeth and my bladder, angry, murderous, comforted by the smell of my sweat." And he offers himself to the deity of mercy:

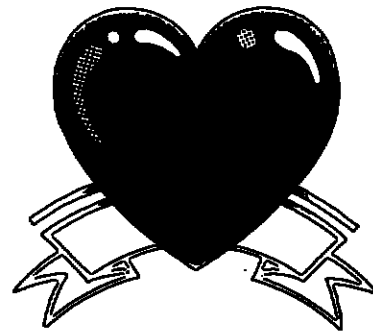
O master of my breath, create a man around these nostrils, and gather my heart toward the gravity of your name. Form me again with an utterance and open my mouth with your praise. There is no life but in affirming you, no world to walk on but the one which you create. Forgive me with these hours and this midnight. Give this thought a master, and this ghost a stone. And do not let the demons boast about your mercy.

Whether or not we associate the creator in this passage with the one who presides over the Judeo-Christian world does not seem to concern Cohen a great deal. Though there are distinct similarities, and though the poet often addresses the creator as "the Lord" and "God," he seems more concerned with locating and meditating on a source or embodiment of mercy than with adding his voice to those of the biblical prophets. In fact, he describes himself in the 22nd prayer as "the monkey struggling with the black tefillin straps" (used for prayer). The volume, therefore, is principally a quiet one — less caustic than any Cohen has written. In the 11th prayer, the poet sits in meditation and requests solitude: "He asked for his heart to be focused toward the source of mercy . . . His cat came back from the moonlight, flew softly to her place on his lap, and waited for him to come back from his prayer."

Mercy presents, for Cohen, the possibility of peace and harmony. Nationhood and selfhood represent the antithesis of harmony. Which of the nations will confess, asks Cohen, that they are "thieves of holiness . . . at war with Mercy . . . All bloated on their scraps of destiny, all swaggering in the immunity of superstition"? Jerusalem, for Cohen, is not a holy centre because it has fanned the embers of individuation:

*Jerusalem of blood*  
*Jerusalem of amnesia*  
*Jerusalem of idolatry*  
*Jerusalem of Washington*  
*Jerusalem of Moscow*  
*Let the nations rejoice*  
*Jerusalem has been destroyed.*

The job of the poet, as Cohen sees it, is to attempt to comprehend the nature of mercy and thereby to lead humanity toward harmony. The poet's blessing is that he has been "permitted . . . to suffer carefully." His curse is that it is virtually impossible to grasp the character



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of perfection: "Who **can tell** of your **glory**," the poet asks **in** the 10th player. end "who **dares** expound the interior **life** of god?" He must reconstruct the "word" and **learn** to spell the "Name" because the divinity of *Book of Mercy* represents the "**king of absolute unity**" and each person is but a "**portion**" of that unity: it is "**the Name that unifies demand**."

The poet, then, cannot create the world **anew**, es Cohen **realizes**: "You mock **us** with the beauty of your world." He can **merely invoke** the creator to inspire **him toward** a proper representation of the world that is free of individual **prejudice**: "Let me **raise**

the brokenness to **you . . . Do not let** the words be **mine, but change** them into **truth**." The wayward **traveller** will **arrive** only when his heart **has found** its "**homeland**":

The world is all **forgetting**, and the heart is a **rage** of directions, but your **name** unities the **heart**, and the world is **lifted** into its place. **Blessed** is the one who **waits** in the **traveller's heart** for his turning.

Whether or not this volume signals an end to **Cohen's** "secular" **life**, *Book of Mercy* will stand as one of the most **honest and courageous** attempts in Canadian writing to grapple with ultimate truth. □

## INTERVIEW

Sharon Butala on Prairie writing:  
'The horizon keeps you mindful you're not very important in the scheme of things'

By **GEOFF HANCOCK**

A **NEWCOMER** to the **growing** ranks of **Prairie** writers, **Sharon Butala** was **born** in northern Saskatchewan in **1940** and educated at the University of **Saskatchewan**. An **educational** psychologist, she **specialized** in **teaching** children with **learning** disabilities. Her **first short** stories **appeared** in *Coming Attractions*, edited by David **Heiwig** and **Sandra Martin** (Oberon Press), and her first novel, *Country of the Heart*, was published **this** spring by **Fifth House**. She **has** recently completed her second **novel**, and — es she told **Geoff Hancock** — now is at work on a **third**:

**Book:** in **Canada: Prairie writing has a strong sense of community. Do you feel part of this tradition?**

**Sharon Butala:** I'm definitely a part of it. In fact, I've fought hard for **all** writers **living** in isolation in **rural areas** — easy enough to do **in** Saskatchewan, since that's just about everybody who isn't in **Saskatoon** or **Regina**. **For those** of us who **are** isolated, it's important to feel **we are** as much a part of the writing community as **writers** who live in the city are.

**BIC:** *Writing for you, then, is an expression of the region.*

**Butala:** Definitely. If it isn't an **expression** of the region, then it isn't worth doing. I mean that in the **larger** sense, not that all the stories have to be about

milking cows. If people who were **born** and **raised** on the **Prairies** are writing about **their lives**, then naturally their work will be about Saskatchewan experience.

**BIC:** *Is the experience of the Prairies a state of mind? You mention the impact of a vast horizon on an individual in your stories.*

**Butala:** People who live in the **mountains** of B.C. must be shaped by the



**Sharon Butala**

grandeur all around them. But the **Prairies** cut you down to size. Even though I was **born** long **after** the **Depression** was over, the **Depression** shaped my **thinking** and that of everybody around

me. I was **born** in a **northern** outpost hospital, so the experience of the wilderness is part of my distrust of the city environment. In Saskatchewan you don't have to travel far to be **in** the wilderness. The work ethic is also there. The philosophy of the quick buck is not **found** on the **Prairies**. The **horizon keeps** you **mindful** you're not very important in the scheme of **things**.

**BIC:** *Prairie fiction creates travellers and explorers, I've heard. who want to discover what's in the spaces.*

**Butala:** *Not only to see what's over the next hill, but to go where the rest of the world is.* That's very much part of the **Prairie experience**. Even today, when we have a sense of being in a worthwhile place, we want to see what the rest of the world is **like**, especially when we're young. For me, I **went** and saw, and now I'm happy where I am.

**BIC:** *Do you find that reflected in your fiction as well? Do you choose the subject or does the subject choose you?*

**Butala:** The subjects choose me. I'll say, I'd like to **write a** story. I've got lots of ideas, but nothing I **can** work with. I'll be **pacing** around, and **something will dawn** on me. Usually it's ready-made. So I'm chosen by the story.

**BIC:** *What do you write about?*

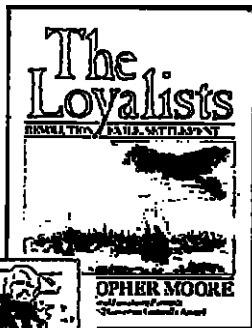
**Butala:** I hope I **write** about ordinary people. I want to **write** about the **fabric** and **texture** of their **lives**. I want to delve into the souls of ordinary people. I **think** that's **quite** good enough. *There's not likely to be murders in my stories, or great shocking events.* I don't need **car accidents**, or **bombs falling out** of the sky. What's going on in the soul of an ordinary person as she **washes** the dishes is interesting and **important** enough. I think it's more important.

**BIC:** *Does that also affect the style?*

**Butala:** Style, like subject matter, **finds** me. People say I have a style, but I don't know what it is. It also changes **from story to story** to **suit the subject matter**, to express the emotions of **characters**. For example, the **first story** in *Coming Attractions* is "Breaking Horses." I **wrote** that deliberately in a stiff, almost staccato style. In the **first paragraph**, I **mention** a **dry blizzard** blowing in **from** the west, blowing **more dirt than snow**. I didn't go on to say, "like the people, **these** dry, tough, laconic, bard people who suffer **in** silence." **Other times**, I would like to **write like** Edna Alford, lovely flowing **sentences** that make me think of cotton **candy** at the **fair**. It's so **beautiful**, so ephemeral. I'd like to **write like that**, though I don't know if I'll **succeed**.

**BIC:** *Could you tell us about your works in progress?*

**Butala:** My first novel found me. It's called *Country of the Heart*. I swear I



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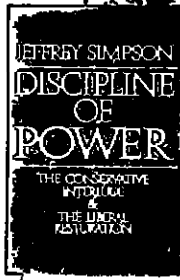
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didn't plan the **novel**; I just **wrote** it, then shaped it. The theme **is** love. That's **what was** important for me **to** write about. **Two kinds** of characters **really** interest me. One is the passionate person, **the other tries to rule** his life with reason. Some characters are one or the other. some. **war within** themselves whether the **mind or** the heart **will** rule. It's an old, old theme.. **That novel** I had **to write to learn how** to write.

I've just **finished** my **second** novel, *Upstream/Le Pays d'en haute*, which is about my **own** experience as a **child of a French-Canadian** father and **an Irish-Scots** Anglican mother who **converted to**

**Catholicism when she married.** My **grandparents came** from **Quebec** in 1911 **to farm six miles from Batoche.** Nobody has **written** about the French **Canadians** in **Saskatchewan.**

Now I have one more task. I'm starting my **third** novel, *The Gates of the Sun*. It's about the **ranching** country in southwest Saskatchewan, told **through** the life of one man. I want to place **this minuscule** subculture in the world at the **time**, and show how beautiful the short-grass country **is in** itself. **When** I've got that down, then I'll feel I've **paid** my dues. I **can write** and not **know** what's **coming** next. □

## POETRY

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Add to the accomplished voices of Sparshott and Woodcock a talented newcomer who returns political poetry to a higher plane

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By **DOUG FETHERLING**

**THERE IS MUCH TO** commend and enjoy in Francis Sparshott's poetry, and there is also something **wonderful** about **his** poetic personality, a **distinct** but of course related matter. I **finally** deduced what **the** something was **only** recently **when** reading *The Inner Ear: An Anthology of New Poets (Quadrant)*, edited by Gary Geddes. In his **introduction** Geddes wonders aloud about **the** depressed state of poetry reading and poetry publishing. "But who is listening in **Canada**?" he asks. "The poet gets **his** little **subsidy** to **write**, if he's lucky and **has** the **right** referees; the publisher puts his black or project grant towards the cost of printing; then, nothing happens."

**Those words, which** seem **born more** of a publisher's fatigue than a letter-to-the-editor-writer's anger, reinforce the gulf **between** the **professional** poet and the amateur — **amateur** in the best and seldom **appreciated** sense, **which** Sparshott, I believe, epitomizes **beautifully**. The most **familiar** writers, most of them **with a** base income **from** English departments, are sometimes so fully geared to literary production that the typewriter **is** a **monster** they must feed. the **book world** a school in **which t&must swim**. **Such** people, of course, **constitute** at any one time **nearly** all the **major figures**. It is a rare **bird** — Al Purdy for example — **who sustains himself** through other channels and **remains** just far enough

**outside** the infrastructure **to be** **his** own person. And yet there is **a** simple beauty to someone who writes, or at least publishes, only **when** occasion makes **necessary**. Working away oblivious to both **posterity** and survival sometimes gives **him** a freedom **from** organizing **principles**. **This can translate as an honesty** and as a certain type of dexterity.

Sparshott has taught **philosophy** at the **University of Toronto** for more than 30 years. His poems **touch on** **philosophy** from time **to** time, and he has **written** a great **deal of** **prose** about the **relationship** between **art** and philosophy and about the philosophy of art. But **his** **poetry really springs from a** different set of **impulses, has a life** apart **from** his other work, **certainly** has a different **audience**, and generally proceeds at its own **pace** and in its **own** language — a process on which, as a reader, once can eavesdrop. He moves along with **an** evident **delight in** doing **what** he does, **a wish** to be taken **seriously** (not solemnly) only when he's serious, and when he's not, not. The two newest **Sparshott collections** attest to all this.

The Cave of **Trophonius and Other** Poems (**Brick Books, 37** pages, **\$5.00** paper) is **Sparshott** at his **most** sober and perhaps **most** characteristic. The "other" poems of the title are only **three**. "Stations of Loss" is made up of **fragments having the tone of an inner** notebook. "At a Later Symposium" is

**dramatic in** form and has a Socratic theme. "**Netsuke**" returns **to the** **imagistic and is** reminiscent of **his 1979** haiku collection, *The Rainey Hills*. **Finally, the title poem, which won the 1981 CBC literary** competition in its category, seems to combine the **two** other approaches. The subject is **classical** (a note **informs** us that **Trophonius, son of Apollo, was** an oracle **from** whose **cave** supplicants returned **up** **conscious** and with **the** answers they **were seeking** mysteriously revealed to them). The **theme** is temporal, the concerns lasting, **and** the structure ordered, using short **sections that lessen** the **appearance of randomness**. But the most interesting aspect — and this is **also true** of Sparshott's much different book, *The Hanging Gardens of Etobicoke (Childe Thursday, 80* pages, **\$5.00** paper) — **is** the important question of **language**.

Sparshott's most recognizable traits are **his** word-play for serious purposes and the way he **mixes** standard English **with** the **vernacular**. In **these** he bears some resemblance to **Dennis Lee, though I think** it's **worth remembering** that Lee is only a **literary manifestation** of something that **has been** common for years **in the visual** arts: the attempt to **mix High Art and Low Art into a third** thing, something **central** to the work of, for instance, **Vera Frenkel, one of** Canada's senior video **artists. Here** in Sparshott's hook is some of the word-play one **finds** in Lee's **children's** verse: "In a **world** without vowels/" notes **Sparshott, "you would have to** live at the **Y."** And again **in** the title poem: "These **are** the seven wonders of West Toronto/Campbell's and Christie's and the Goodyear Co/and **the Lakeshore** Lions and **two I can't** remember/and the **Hanging Gardens of Et&coke."** It's not only the **gazetteer-like list of proper names** that's reminiscent of Lee but the "and two I can't remember" in **which** **modern diction intrudes** for a second and **clears its throat**.

This is **altogether** a **curious, delightful** book, a **xerographic** edition that **the publishers** claim will never be allowed to go out of print, if that's the term, but will **continue** to be **run off** as **desired, forever. It contains occasional** poems, such as one about **the Quebec** referendum, in the best tradition of **people like** Betjeman, and **ones representing** other half-forgotten **types**. Most of **them** record, perhaps even **celebrate in** a weary **sort of way, middle-class** urban life but **with a** **deliberately** potty, **slightly surreal** edge.. The tone is **enhanced** by D.J. **Knight's collages**, consisting of weirdly juxtaposed **pieces from Vi\* torian** steel engravings, **often with a clinical** flavour.

Whereas **there** is a division between **Sparshott's** philosophical works **on the**



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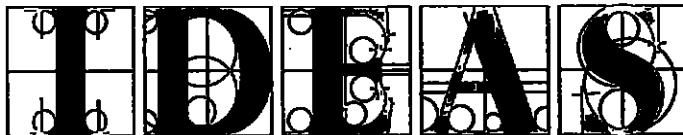
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one hand and his poetry on the other, there is no such **division** between his real poetry **and** verses such as these. Or, if there is, it is a trick of composition, not of impulse. Again the comparison with Dennis Lee **is** tempting. In the **compounding** of lofty language and the colloquial, Lee simply emphasizes the one in the **adult** poems but **brings** the other to the foreground **in** his children's poems. The **ingredients** are the same, but various recipes **call** for different combinations. **Sparshott** is like this as well; it seems to be part of his equipment as a poet who operates outside the poetic **mainstream**, quite **happily** and **fortunately** so. and who, **from** all one can infer, is joyfully **unconcerned** with his **own ranking**.

**George Woodcock** is another for whom **poetry** is not **life's** primary **activi-**Q. It hasn't been the backbone of his work since the **late 1930s**, though poetry has continued to feed his other **concerns** and to represent them in **crystallized** form. Of course, Woodcock **wrote** little poetry **during** a **20-year** period **beginning** in the **late 1940s**. He **attributes** the absence to being distracted by a friend's death ("Despair **is/inarticulate**"). When he **did resume writing** individual poems, rather than the verse **dramas** for radii that had **occupied** him instead, he did so **with** a **modern, Canadian style**, not the **rigid Audenesque** forms he had used in the **1930s**. For all these reasons, it has **been customary to see his poetical career** in two **distinct phases** not in communion with one another. This view is subverted by Woodcock's **Collected Poems** (**Sono Nis**, 244 pages, \$14.95 cloth), the latest of several retrospective **collections over** the years and one that comes equipped **with** its own **critique**.

What Woodcock has done is to **arrange** his output by subject under **10** headings and then **chronologically** within each category. That Woodcock **would** probably be one of the **first** to criticize excessive devotion to the thematic approach should not obscure the fact that, in this case, the scheme works quite well. Here Woodcock is **his own critic**, and **shows quite convincingly** that, in addition to a section of **autobiographical** poems and another of **translations**, he can point to cohesive areas that have developed **quite** naturally **over** the years. Examples are the **retelling** of classical **myth**, the horrors of **modern war**, end, of course, **anarchism**. It **is** **instructive** to 1001: **at** the poems within each **group** and see how the **British** poet of between the wars dealt with a subject differently from the **modern British** Colombian. The **political themes** seem **more appropriate** to the **figure** of the **1930s**, the autobiographical poems better suited to the older, **more stylistically** supple

Woodcock. Burled **here** somewhere **is** a **lesson** about the dangers of fashion.

In a society devoted to commerce and bulk trading, it is the fate of poets who also **write** a lot of prose not to be considered poets **first** or be associated with individual poems. But there are **several** of Woodcock's, particularly "To **Marie Louise Berneri**," "Black **Rose**," and "Kreutzer Sonata," that are remarkably **vivid prizes** caught on the wing and **ripe** for attention. By **synthesizing** and **illustrating** the progress of his ideas, **Collected Poems** is also a sort of reader's companion to Woodcock's whole **shelf**, **showing many** bidden connections and **offering** little tidbits of information. somewhat **the** way a good annotated bibliography does, and with a **utility** and status of **its own**.

To come full **circle**, I'm pleased to have read **Complicity** by Susan Glickman (**Signal/Véhicule**, 62 pages, U.95 paper), whose title poem was one of the most **striking** in the Gary Geddus anthology mentioned **earlier**. I **first** heard her name when she had a **single** poem in **Morris Wolfe's Aurora 1980**; it is not included **in** this her **first** collection, one of considerable **cumulative** power,

with the sections **falling** into one **another** like dominoes. **Her concerns** are **living** alone, **particularly in** a jumbled **city** environment. and the **heartlessness** of it all. In one poem, a box of old **letters**, **which** has somehow **survived** many **changes** of address, recalls a more optimistic stage of life.

*I am always 18, with a new passport.  
I still trust Michelin guides, and open  
my life  
to strangers.*

**Of particular interest** — but difficult to quote **from briefly** — is the **title** poem, which is recognizably **within** the anti-war tradition that stands up for **life** against death, but which **gropes** for reason far beyond the quick response, and **sees** the **complexity** as part of the dilemma. The **inevitable conclusion** is that "we are all **accomplices**, and so it goes on. . . ." **Political** poetry **seems** to have **waned** lately, possibly **under** the **weight** of its own **simplicity**. Glickman returns it to a **higher** plane and relates it to the general **difficulties** of living and makes it seem to belong there. **Complicity** should **certainly** be seen as one of the small **handful** of "bests" **among** recent poetry collections. □

## FIRSTNOVELS

Wild oats: the **subversive linguistic** charm of Mennonite Manitoba and the sexual obsessions **of** school-marmish Ontario

By **PAUL WILSON**

**Too Many Blackbirds**, by Ken Ledbetter (**Stoddart**, 189 pages, \$17.95 cloth), is a literary **mystery-cum-Gothic** horror novel set in a backwater town in the southern United States. The central event **involves** the **arrival** in town of a **stranger**, Morgan Ballard, **his** intensely **precocious little daughter**, Ophella, and a wife who is never seen. **Each week Ballard regales** the locals in the drag store and feed mill **with incomprehensible** but **gripping banter** that leaves them all **dizzy, suspicious, and fascinated**. Then **mysterious things** begin to happen. A boy **drowns** in his well, **apparently** with a smile on his face. The stranger's wife **dies** and is rapidly buried before anyone has a chance to discover what **happened** to her. **His** daughter, **tormented** at school by a gang of boys, **cuts an ear off** one of them **with a butcher knife**. The man marries two more

women — **one** the slow-witted daughter of the local banker, the other the **spirted** schoolteacher who has taken the **precocious** daughter under her **wing**. Both women die **violent** and **mysterious** deaths as well. **Finally**, a day **after** the death of his last wife, the man and **his daughter** perish when their **house** bums **down**.

**All this** is told **in** the **first chapter**, and **then** retold — **in** 16 different ways — by people in the town, some of whom, 40 years after the events, are still **obsessed** by them. Gradually, the **sinister innuendoes** take on **more solid outlines**, and the mystery is illuminated, **though** never completely solved. One of the strong **suggestions** is that the **evil** the **townfolk** see **in** the stranger is often a **concoction** of their own lurid **imagination**. **Nothing** he is suspected of — **from incest** to **murder** — **does** not already go on in the

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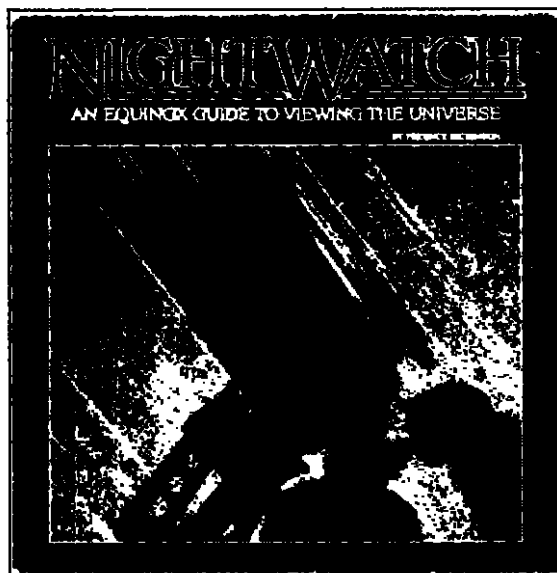


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town. In fact, one begins to suspect that certain citizens may themselves be responsible for the tragedies that have occurred.

Because Ledbetter has chosen to tell the same story through many different voices and points of view, his book stands or falls on how original and interesting he can make each of the monologues. When his story-tellers are vivid and interesting characters in themselves, the results are brilliant. Sometimes, though, a hokey, artificial folksiness creeps in and detracts from the power of what is being said. Occasionally, the professor of literature (which is what Ledbetter is) intrudes, particularly when he drops slightly twisted literary allusions (the title is one of them) like hankies throughout his text. One wonders to what extent such self-consciously literary features are then to woo the reader into an automatic sympathy with the stranger, who can quote from Shakespeare, Marvell, and Donne and discourse on the pleasure of *Moby Dick*, but whose mind is so crippled by dope, philosophy, and his own pain that he cannot, apparently, even muster a simple interest in the other human tragedies that go on around him.

The *Salvation of Yasch Siemens*, by Armin Wiebe (Turnstone Press, 176 pages, \$7.95 paper), takes us to brighter rural territory just north of the 49th parallel. It is a comic novel set in a Mennonite community south of Winnipeg, mostly in the late 1960s and early '70s, about how young Yasch Siemens, the narrator, grows up, chases girls, works, drinks, plays baseball, gets married, and settles down, all within the bosom of his own people.

The book is prefaced by an epigraph taken from Josef Skvorecky's essay "Red Music" in which Skvorecky describes one of his central preoccupations: a fascination and delight with the many ways language can be "buggered up." This prepares the reader for what follows. Armin Wiebe tells his whole story in the dialect of his region, a pungent English that has been subverted by the grammar, rhythms, and vocabulary of Flat German, itself a dialect of standard German spoken by the Mennonites. Having tried myself to translate similar passages of linguistic play by Skvorecky, I can attest to how difficult it is to bring off successfully. Armin Wiebe has hit exactly the right note with his "fractured English," and it becomes a wonderful instrument of expression, one that works equally well for broad humour or in more delicate, lyrical passages. Here's a sample, taken from a seduction scene:

Then Oata leans on me and . . . the

next thing we are in the moonshine on the wine-coloured sofa with the big flowers all over it and I am driving the double-dike along in a big rain. . . and the half-ton is schwaecksing from side to side on the slippery mud and the canal is half full with water and I am turning the steer from one side to the other as fast as I can and the truck plows through a deep mud puddle and the windshield is smattered full and I can't see nothing and the wipers only schmaus it full and I can say for son that looks matter nothing and the tires feel the slippery mud over a hump and I try the brakes to use but the truck is already going down and it is too late to be afraid of anything there could be to see and I just let myself feel what there is to know. Then the truck stops and the motor sputters and dies and I can bear my heart hammering away like an old John Deere two-cylinder driving along in mad gear. I feel the water seeping through the floor of the truck. But I just sit there till the water starts to leak into my boots and I turn and look out the window on the woman's side of the cab and I see the wild mustard blooming. . .

The result is a good book, a good story, and a hymn to the man of resource and humour who knows his own limits, is willing to settle for less than his large dreams, who can work hard without making a virtue out of it, and who never forgets where the real pleasures of life lie. I can't resist one more quotation, from the last chapter, wherein Yasch is now a regular married man reflecting on his lot:

Sure, Yasch Siemens isn't a big-shot farmer like the others, but it's not so bad, really, with only a half-section I can really farm it, and I don't think I have any more wild oats and mustard than the neighbours who use all that Avadex BW and Hoe-grass stuff they show sliding on a curling rink on TV. . . . A farmer always has worries but it sure doesn't seem so bad when you don't have to worry about feeding the bank manager's family, the lawyer's family and the Implement dealer's family. . . . Doft [his son] sometimes wants to know how come he can't have one of those games that you play with the TV like the neighbours' boys have but I just laugh and say that while those guys are playing with themselves on TV he can play with their girlfriends.

. . . While *Tulips for Lena*, by Elizabeth Verkoczy (Simon and Pierre, 163 pages, \$9.95 paper), is an erotic spy-story based on the plausible assumption that the KGB is using Canada as a base of operations against more important targets in the United States and on the less plausible assumption that, to do so, the Russians would go to elaborate lengths to involve an innocent woman in a hare-brained scheme having to do with a switch of identity. By the end of the

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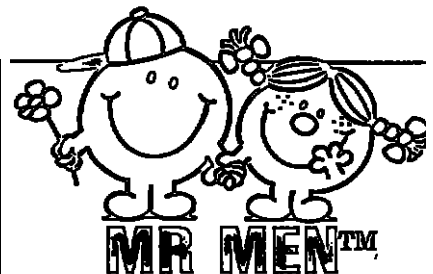
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novel, the heroine has enjoyed countless climaxes; the reader, unfortunately, is left waiting for his first one.

DAVID HALLIDAY'S experimental novel *Making Movies* (Press Porcepic, 128 pages, \$9.95 paper) purports to present, in the form of a TV documentary screenplay, the portrait of Samuel Bremmer, a renegade, independent film-maker of the kind Halliday obviously wishes we had in this country.

The book consists of two parallel texts, one a poetically abbreviated version of Bremmer's scenarios, representing "film-clips" from which we are supposed to get an idea of what his movies were like, and the other "talking-head" interviews with Bremmer himself and the members of Ids team of actors and crew, from which we may deduce the details of his life, ideas, and working methods. One of the seven scenarios that make up the book was apparently turned into a promotional video, the first of its kind in publishing, reflecting Press Porcepic's commitment to multi-media expression.

Halliday is skilful at parodying the documentary style, and his "film-clips" show that he is seriously interested in film as a medium of expression, but there is something hollow at the heart of this book. It is not just the implication that, because anglophone Canadian film-makers (with the exception of people like David Cronenberg and, more recently, Ron Mann) are still seen — erroneously, but never mind — as hewers of wooden docudrama end drawers of watered-down art cartoons, one can somehow compensate by creating mythological heroes of the cinema that might have been. The main problem is that the arguments raised in *Making Movies* take place in a vacuum. There is nothing — no "product" — to test them against, and therefore they seem more artificial and irrelevant than they were meant to. The missing dimension is film itself. Wouldn't it be ironic if the video meant to publicize *Making Movies* turned out to be more interesting than the book?

THERE IS a maxim in ancient Roman rhetoric that says that the excesses of youthful exuberance are more welcome than the spare precisions of a mature style because, like the overgrown tree, there will at least be something of value left when the excesses are lopped away. That is how I feel about *Goldenrod*, by a young (I assume) Ontario writer called Peter Gault (Elephant Press, 160 Greenfield Avenue, Unit 5, Willowdale, Ont. M5N 3C6, 221 pages, \$5.95 paper). It is an energetic, funny, and disarmingly candid novel about a young man going

through high school and university and being driven by lust and longing and a desire to make sense of it all. A very masculine book with a lot of polymorphous sexuality around the fringes, it is also one of the munchiest books I have read in some time. Some will no doubt find it offensive and crude, and for them the book should probably be accompanied (since it is, after all, about growing up oversexed in Ontario) by the kind of school-marmish warnings the Ontario Censor Board has taken to pasting onto movie advertisements. But people with curious and open minds should find *Goldenrod* a source of delight and perhaps even enlightenment.

In *A Bright Land*, by Alan Pearson (Golden Dog Press, 106 pages, 96.95 paper), is a brief novel about the kinky, fantasy sex-life of a UN translator called Claire who languishes in fashionable ennui among the expatriate jet-setters of rural Spain. Although tbm is a certain polish to the writing, it is difficult to get through the surface of this book to any substance that might be lurking underneath. Pearson appears to have assumed that an exotic setting and off-beat sexual appetites would be enough to sustain his readers' interest. This might have been true back in the '20s; unfortunately, he's about three literary generations too late. □

## IN TRANSLATION

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Two new hits out of three keep Lester & Orpen  
Dennys's International Fiction List  
at the top of a very competitive league

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By PAUL STUEWE

PUBLISHERS' SERIES can be like the guest lists for a holiday-season open house: what starts out as just a few intimate friends often becomes a more diverse gathering of neighbours, relatives, and slight acquaintances to whom one owes social obligations. McClelland & Stewart's New Canadian Library (NCL), for example, has never decided whether it wants to be a prestige line of high-quality literature or a refuge for books that don't quite merit a mass-market edition; and Macmillan's Laurentian Library seems to have no discernible principle of inclusion other than the publisher's ownership of paperback rights. An imprint that has succeeded in establishing a positive image is Lester & Orpen Dennys's International Fiction List (IPL), and its latest releases continue in this young but exemplary fashion with two hits out of a possible three.

"Hit" doesn't begin to express the impact of Jona Oberski's *Childhood* (\$15.95 cloth, translated by Ralph Manheim), a novel narrated from the point of view of a Jewish child in Holland during the Second World War. *Childhood* will inevitably be compared with *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and there certainly are similarities: both mesmerize us with their simple and direct responses to what we know to be encroaching horror, and both speak to our post-Holocaust and post-Hiroshima

awareness that innocence is no protection against destruction. Unlike Anne Frank's journal, however, *Childhood* is written by a mature survivor who aims at a synthesis and intensification of what he experienced as a child, and it is the brilliant accomplishment of these goals that renders the book a consummate work of literary art.

Oberski doesn't cheat on us by sneaking an adult's thoughts and perceptions into his protagonist's story, and whatever this loses in sophistication of detail is more than made up by the convincing emotional tone of the narration. Although the child does not understand all of what he sees and hears, he does record it for readers who can imagine what phrases such as "in the new camp we never saw my father" or "All of a sudden I heard shooting" mean in the context of Nazi-occupied Europe. In this sense *Childhood* demands active participation on the part of the reader, and it rewards it with a heartbreakingly powerful literary experience that I cannot recommend too highly.

Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler . . .* and *Marcovaldo* have already appeared on the IFL, and *Difficult Loves* (\$10.95 paper, translated by William Weaver and D.S. Came-Ross) is yet another engaging offering from this brilliant Italian writer. The book consists of nine short stories and two novellas originally published between

1957 end 1970, and there isn't a lemon in the bunch. The short stories are presented in the form of "adventures," each of which demonstrates how small rents in the social fabric can become major turning-points in individual lives. The two novellas take a more leisurely path through similar situations, while sharing in the magic-realist appreciation of the unity between the obvious and the profound that characterizes so much of the author's work. Calvino is very adept at making interesting mountains out of unpromising molehills, but he's also aware that within every mountain of apparent social significance there are molehills of mundane minutiae trying to evade explicit recognition. The way in which he organizes these small impressions and observations into symphonies of verbal nuance is wonderful to behold, and *Difficult Loves* should meet with the same critical and commercial success as its predecessors.

Shusaku Endo's novel *The Samurai*

(\$17.95 cloth, translated by Van C. Gessel) isn't in the same class as *Childhood and Difficult Loves*, although it may interest students of Japanese culture. The book describes the vicissitudes encountered by a trading mission to the West in the early 1600s, and it does succeed in recreating a vivid sense of the period. The psychology of the main characters, however, isn't so much inscrutable as simply unconvincing, and the relaxed pace of the narrative makes this more of an irritant than it would be in a swashing-and-buckling saga. The flat, unaffected prose style may be more the translator's fault than the author's, but regardless of responsibility it's another strike against a book that never bursts into animated fictional life. Since the Japanese consider Endo one of their most important writers, I can only suggest that *The Samurai's merits*, like the members of the mission it chronicles, have not succeeded in making a successful journey to the West. □

### COOKBOOKS

Cooks' tour: Hitting the culinary trail from Lebanon to Oregon, and a Canadian fish book that should put our kitchens on the map

By DuBARRY CAMPAU

IT'S TIME TO TAKE cookbooks seriously. Not only are more of them appearing than ever before, but people are increasingly aware not only of the nutritional qualities of food but also of its taste, texture, colour, and social value.

Certain culinary standards have been upheld for generations and should still be honoured. Therefore, anyone who writes and offers for sale a cookbook should have credentials. Making the best brownies on the block is not enough. Even sly ways of inducing the bridge dub to eat leftover tuna casserole disguised in sandwiches won't do, either, and anyone who cells something containing a cup of sugar and a heaping tablespoon of flour "mayonnaise," or a three-layer jelly mold a "salad" hasn't even read the simple dictionary definitions of those words. Come, come, ladies — serve your friends whatever you, or they, fancy, but until you learn the basics of kitchen terminology, don't have pretensions to publication.

Happily, there are people who have studied both the art and the fundamen-

tals of cooking, and their books deserve our respect and our interest. One of these is A. Jan Howarth, author of *The Canadian Fish Cookbook* (Douglas & McIntyre, 287 pages, \$19.95 cloth). Howarth has a degree in home economics from Edinburgh University, has worked in London and Paris, and in the 20 years she has been in Canada has been a home economist for Woodward's end a consumer consultant for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, where she developed and tested recipes for every commercial kind of fish available in this country. She spent five years of research on this book.

The result is handsomely presented and illustrated and includes information about buying, storing, preserving, and cooking fish. But, for me, the glory of it is in the imagination, freshness, and deliciousness of the recipes. Fish is, of course, the most versatile of all of our foods, but I hadn't realized its full potential until I saw such things as *Howarth's Oysters* Rockefeller seasoned with anisette. *roast mackerel* with wine



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BEAVERBOOKS

sauce, salmon French toast sandwiches with a dash of Tabasco, and clam soufflé with bacon and rosemary. Even a glance at this book and you may never serve red meat again. *The Canadian Fish Cookbook* contributes to our national pride and it deserves international acclaim.

Muriel Breckenridge is the author of *Total Value Cookbook* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 226 pages, \$14.95 paper), a systematic and solid approach to the business of feeding a family economically and nutritiously. It also includes time- and money-saving devices, instructions for freezing and storing foods, menu planning, and a shopping guide. Breckenridge not only has had the practical experience of running her own home but she has also spent eight years on research, recipe testing, speaking to groups, and leading workshops. Evidently she has had no time for frittering, nor do most women today who, like her, combine families and careers.

Her system requires a complete disregard for fads, forgetfulness, and impulse-buying. None of the recipes are extravagant, yet many of them are piquant as she uses herbs and spices imaginatively — they don't have the sad flavour of so much that we think of as "cheap" dishes. Her ham and noodle bake, for instance, made also with a cooked vegetable, green peppers, onions, oregano, curry powder, and old cheddar cheese, could give any restaurant a good reputation. Her desserts are simple but are based on real, unpackaged ingredients that give them a fresh, natural taste.

Two other Canadian cookbooks stem, exotically enough, from Lebanon. They are *A Taste of Lebanon* (A Taste of Lebanon Enterprises, P.O. Box 6110, Station E, Calgary, Alta., 194 pages, 81495 spiral bound), by Mary Salloum, and *Alexandra's Lebanese Cooking* (Alexandra's Lebanese Cooking, 48 Elwood Dr., Amherst, N.S., 86 pages, \$5.95 spiral bound), by Valerie Mansour.

Despite the strife of Lebanese politics, there seems to be almost total agreement in its kitchens. Both books feature recipes made with minced or finely diced meat — usually lamb — chick peas, Lentils, eggplant, and pine nuts. They also recommend roasting chickens with water and a preference for oil over butter. Salloum's recipe for stuffing made with rice, beef, cinnamon, and pine nuts is excellent and goes as well with veal and pork as with poultry. And a most unusual dessert is Mamoul, from Mansour's book — rich, sweet tarts with a walnut and rosewater tilling. Many suggestions from both books can add a pleasantly foreign touch to your menus.

Richard Nelson's *American Cooking* (New American Library, 446 pages, 523.00 cloth) is a good, solid volume containing more than 500 recipes that range geographically and gastronomically throughout the 50 states. You can find almost anything in it from aioli sauce to zucchini custard, and the recipes are all dependable and usually flavourful if not surprising. Compilations such as this one are a great solace to the cook who has run out of inspiration and needs a fresh approach to a routine dish. Nelson could well take his place on the shelf along with James Beard, Craig Claiborne, and Madame Benoit.

Now for the specialty numbers: Angela Clubb is *Mad About Cheddar* (Clarke Irwin, 88 pages, \$8.95 spiral bound) and writes almost 90 pages of recipes, incorporating that cheese, to prove it. Most of them, actually, amount to tossing a cup or so of grated cheddar into various soups, dips, casseroles, or soufflés, which I find, being mad about cheddar too, usually improves them.

*The Muffin Maker's Guide* (Firefly Books, 135 pages, 57.95 spiral bound), by Bruce Koffler, has almost 100 recipes for muffins, but many of them are variations on plain, sweet, bran, fruit, nut, and chocolate themes. The section on English muffins, however, is of real value for those of us who find the commercial kinds less and less tasty.

*Soup Time* (Soup Time Publishing, Box 525, Lumsden, Sask., 124 pages, 38.95 spiral bound) is Bob McNeil's contribution to the making of a food that, thick or thin, is found in every country in the world. His section on stocks and how to clarify them is valuable for those who want to begin from scratch, and some of his hearty, one-dish-meal soups are simple to make, delicious, and filling to eat. □

#### LETTERS

## Artifice and reality

I TAKE EXCEPTION to I.M. Owen's short-sighted review of my anthologies *Illusion One and Illusion Two: Fables, Fantasies, and Metafictions* (March). Any-one familiar with the nature and history of the short story will realize that both the writing and the reading of short fic-

tion has changed dramatically in the past 50 years. Metafiction is not a "nasty barbarism," as he suggests, but a highly regarded and seriously discussed term in current literary theory. Although I have not followed any one particular person's theory, my "editorial noise" is based upon well-known aesthetic and critical assumptions.

The reasons for the development of metafiction are based on the concept that "reality" is a formless chaos and



"fiction" is a self-conscious artifice, a technically manipulated form that represents "reality." In turn this led to the requirement of new critical ways to discuss fiction. Critics used to read fiction to "see what it meant" or "how the story worked." The metafictional writers include the perspectives of criticism into the fiction itself. The essential ideas, literary forms, and philosophical qualities of the story are discussed on the surface of the story. In other words, the metafiction becomes an inquiry into the writer's imaginative response to reality. Tensions are set up between not only traditional and non-traditional fiction, but also between what is fiction and what is "real," and even between the story and the reader, who is invited to react to the story.

Metafictions have many characteristics. Among them are a need to revitalize literary forms, a collage or fragmented method of juxtaposition to break down familiar patterns of order, lateral instead of linear cause and effect, no reliance on traditional character development, a denial of deep meanings, a suspicion about the clichés of language, and an implicit political dimension that questions the ideological status of the "real" world supposedly behind realistic fiction.

Critics have noted metafictional elements in Homer and Aesop, and drawn a clear line through Cervantes and Sterne up to Nabokov, Bskctt, Barth, Barthelme, and even our own Leon Rooke, George Bowering, Leonard Cohen, and Hubert Aquin (as well as many of the contributors to my anthologies). Metafiction most certainly precedes television. Reviewers in *Books In Canada* have a responsibility to keep abreast of current critical thought that might inform contemporary fiction.

Two other points: the acupuncture



and **flame image** is based upon my personal experience with **moxibustion**, in which a **burning herb** is placed over a **meridian point** to extract energies. **Lirlian photography confirms** such an energy flow. This **image** is central to my thesis that there is still much to be discovered about the nature of Canadian short **fiction**. The "ancient monsters in the psyche" refers to the often **apocalyptic vision** of the **metafictional writers**, sometimes based upon the Book of Revelations. Nineteenth-century **liberalism and social justice** have been defeated by **modern history**. The **metafictional writer** moves on to a visionary world. Since history is going into nothing, **metafictional writers find their dramatic conflicts** in the imagination.

One **final point**. Strictly speaking, "barbarians" are those cultures from Megalithic to Celtic times which, unlike **Egyptian, Greek, or Roman societies**, had no apparent reading or **writing skills**. But they were **imaginative peoples** whose **menhirs, dolmens, stone circles, and hill figures** still cause us to wonder and speculate. Owen's intended term of disparagement is actually a compliment to the different ways in which the human race **views the world**.

Geoff Hancock  
Editor, *Canadian Fiction Magazine*  
Toronto

### If only . . .

IN RESPONSE TO Richard Plant's review of my book *Second Stage: The Alternative Theatre Movement In Canada* (April), I would like to state that his negative comments might have given me pause for thought had they carried greater credibility. "If only," indeed!

If only Plant had taken the trouble to register that the book begins with a lengthy introductory chapter that puts the **Canadian alternative theatre movement** into a historical and international context, and **also provides separate chapters** in which the **evolution** of the movement in **English and French Canada** is discussed in some detail, he would hardly have described it as "a spotty overview of what has happened chiefly in five 'alternative' theatres in Canada."

If only Plant had observed that **elementary rule of teaching and criticism** — i.e., that **negative criticism in a vacuum lacks credibility** — he might have backed up his contention that **theatres and plays that do not fit certain categories were arbitrarily left out** of the book by pointing out **names of companies and titles of plays** whose **inclusion** would have been essential.

If only Plant had stopped to consider that most of the material under **discus-**

**sion** is unpublished, and likely to remain unpublished, and thus **inaccessible** to the reader, he might have understood the **raison d'être** of plot **outlines** included in the discussion.

If only Plant had grasped the purpose of the **book, which is to examine a recent phenomenon of Canadian theatre** from a **global view**, so as to provide a **clearer picture** of that phenomenon — too **recent** for the meaningful **conclusions he demands** now — for future scholarly **discussion**.

In **conclusion**, let me just express **some slight surprise** that Plant **seems to consider** so woefully inadequate a volume that has **gone through careful assessment** by readers at University of British Columbia Press, and was also endorsed by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities, after further scrutiny by another group of readers; I am sure all of these **scholars will be duly crushed to learn** that what they mistook for an **academically respectable and useful book** has been discovered by our colleague Plant to be **no more than a "primer"!**

Renate Usmiani  
Halifax

### stormy weather

I WISH TO comment on Kristjana Gunnars's review of Lorna Crozier's work in your **March** issue.

This review is ostensibly of *The Weather*, **Crozier's new poetry collection**. Why then are we subjected to a putdown of everything she has **ever** written, put-downs that don't even make **sense**? Like this **statement** about *Inside Is the Sky*, published in 1976: "At the **time** of its appearance the dynamics of **male-female relationships** may have been fresh, but now that cry is **overdone**." Since it has obviously escaped **Gunnars's attention**, I'd like to **point out** that the book appeared at the **time** of its appearance.

The **spiteful tone** that **permeates this piece** from **beginning to end marks it as a personal attack** and therefore **not to be taken** seriously. The suggestion that **Lorna Crozier writes to her male audience was particularly nasty**. If I had to describe this poet's **work** in one word only, that word would be **honest**.

About **Crozier's long poem, "The Foetus Dreams"**, Gunnars says — referring to **her own convoluted interpretation** of the poem — "The **poem** can only be read with a **sense of humour**." So can **this review**.

Lois Simmie  
Saskatoon

*Kristjana Gunnars replies:* If **Lois Simmie goes back and rereads my review**

of **Lorna Crozier's work** she will find herself **mistaken on all counts**. This was a full **review of all of Crozier's work to date** **excepting her** m-authored book. The intention was to take a "put-down" overview of her development as a poet in light of her **latest work, The Weather**. Simmie will find there much **praise of Crozier's abilities and accomplishments** and nowhere what she **terms** a "put-down." To **see spitefulness of any sort** in the review is baffling to **me and most disturbing**. I had hoped my admiration for **Crozier's poetry** would show **better than that**. While it is considerate of **Simmie to jump to Crozier's defence** I think she should **rest easy since** no "personal attack" was intended at all. I **agree Crozier's work is "honest,"** indeed if this were not so I should **hardly** have bothered to study her work in the **first** place. I am glad **Simmie is able to laugh**, since it must be bleak for her to see vengefulness where it is "not." I assume I **am living** in a culture where open and fair discussion is a contributing factor to the **arts**. The **tone of Simmie's letter leads me to suspect we have not reached that point of maturity** yet. We have **some work ahead of us, for I would like this to be such a country**.

### CANWIT NO. 94

The **limpid, lucid, rotund moo**", resembling an **oversized marshmallow**, **rose diffidently amongst the dark rain-pregnant clouds** which **scuttled across the tropic sky** like cockroaches **fleeing from an insect spray**.

THAT **EXECRABLE** piece of work was written by **one of the finalists** in the international **Edward Bulwer-Lytton bad writing contest**, which asks its **entrants to compose an opening sentence to the worst imaginable novel**. We have faith that our readers can sink to even **greater depths**. We'll pay **\$25 for the most abominable first sentence** to reach us before September 1. Address: **CanWit No. 94, Books in Canada, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3x9**.

### Results of CanWit No. 92

**WAS IT THE weather? Or were hundreds of entries lost in the mail?** Whatever the case, the **results of our request** for collaborative poetry were **underwhelming**, to say the least. The **winner is W. Ritchie Benedict of Calgary**, whose **verse combines parodies of Rudyard Kipling and Robert Service**

*There are strange things done in the  
Calgary Sun  
By the men who molt for gold.*

*The political fights make very queer sights,  
But the strangest they ever did see  
Was the night Pierre and me appeared  
on CBC  
And criticized Allan McFee.  
Oh, East is East and West is West,  
But sometimes the twain shall meet,  
As when Berton and Mitchell meet  
presently,  
And agree on the price of wheat.*

## 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

Three Times Five: Short Stories by Beverly Harris, Gloria Sawai, and Fred Stenson,

## CLASSIFIED

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edited by Douglas Barbour, NeWest Press. If there is any thematic connection to these stories (aside from their Prairie locales), it is the way in which people become prisoners of their emotions. But thematic connections are hardly necessary. This is an absorbing collection that serves as an excellent introduction to three writers worth knowing.

### NON-FICTION

The Trials of Israel Lipski, by Martin Friedland, Macmillan. It took the jury only eight minutes to convict Israel Lipski of murder, but was he really guilty? His second trial — the one that occurred outside the courtroom as he awaked the hangman — proved so spectacular that for a few days it threatened to topple the British government. The twists and turns are staggering, but Prof. Friedland (of the University of Toronto Law School) retells them lucidly.

### 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:

The Action of the Tiger, by David Gurr, Seal.  
Albert Camus: An Analysis of His Thought, by Marcel Mélançon, translated by Robert Dolé, Tecumseh Press (1983).  
Alison's Ghosts, by Mary Alice and John Downie, Nelson Canada.  
Always Ask for a Transfer, by Vance Kasper, Nelson Canada.  
Anbus, by Penny Kemp, Caitlin Press (1983).  
Asthma, by Abraham R. Rubinfield et al., Copp Clark Pitman.  
Back Pain, by John Murlagh et al., Copp Clark Pitman.  
Backroads of Ontario, by Ron Brown, Hurll.  
Backwoods Bostes, by Bud Ingalls, Lancelot Press.  
Belag Fennata, by Helen Farrer et al., Copp Clark Pitman.  
The Best Hiking in Ontario, by Doug Robertson, Hurll.  
A Bird-Finding Guide to Canada, edited by J.C. Findlay, Hurll.  
Birth Control, by Kay Dunn et al., Copp Clark Pitman.  
Black Hat and the Willis Chronicle, by Mary Ann Lipscombe, Borealis (1983).  
Boston: The Canadian Story, by David Blaikie, Seneca House Books.  
Breaking Smith's Quarter Horse, by Paul St. Pierre, Douglas & McIntyre.  
Byron and His Balloon: An English-Chipewyan Counting Book, Tree Frog Press.  
Canadian Parliamentary Handbook 1983-84, by John Bejerrod, Borealis (1983).  
Canadian Viewpoints: An Anthology of Canadian Writing, British Columbia Ministry of Education (1983).  
The Canadian Writer's Market, by Eileen Goodman, M & S.  
Change of Life: A Psychological Study of Dreams and the Menopause, by Ann Mankowitz, Inner City Books.  
Chiloutin Holiday, by Paul St. Pierre, Douglas & McIntyre.  
Class Acts, by Eve Drobot, Avon.  
Clearing the Grounds: English-Canadian Literature After Survival, by Paul Steewe, Proper Tales Press.  
A Comedy of Errors, by Virgil Burnett, The Porcupine's Quill.  
The Compressor's Report, by Martyn Burke, Thomas Allen.  
The Connecticut Countess, by David Walmough, The Crossing Press (U.S.).  
Coping With Stress, by Bob Montgomery, Copp Clark Pitman.  
Country of the Heart, by Sharon Butals, Fifth House.  
Diabetes, by H.D. Bredahl et al., Copp Clark Pitman.  
Discipline of Power, by Jeffrey Simpson, Macmillan.  
Dome, by Jim Lyon, Avon.  
The Dreadful Dragon of Dismal Rock, by Bette Storin, Borealis (1983).  
Dry Water, by Robert Stead, The Tecumseh Press (1983).  
Escape to Honour, by Hans Nitt et al., Macmillan.  
Essays in Canadian Business History, edited by Tom Traves, M & S.  
Ethics and Economics, by Gregory Baum and Duncan Cameron, James Lorimer.  
Feithille, by Derk Wynand, The Porcupine's Quill.  
Fishes' Tales, by Gord Deval, Simon & Pierre.  
Following Historic Trails: James Hector Explorer, by Bruce Hoig, Detselig Enterprises Ltd. (1983).  
Gearing of Love, by John Oughton, Mosaic Press.  
Glory and the General, by Nancy Freeman, Borealis (1983).  
Goodbye Pussfoot, by Millie Gaudet, Lancelot Press.

The Growing Dawn, by Mark Frutkin, Quadrant Editions (1983).  
A Heart of Names, by Robert Billings, Mosaic Press.  
Here's How Things Look to Dick Smyth, by Dick Smyth, M & S.  
Hey Malarek!, by Victor Malarek, Macmillan.  
Hlx Nlx Six Plx, by David Liewellyn Bardett, Deneau Publishers.  
Home Game, by Paul Quarrington, Penguin.  
How to Write a Best Seller, by Richard Rohmer, M & S.  
Interim, by Margaret Atwood, Oxford.  
Isabella Valancy Crawford: The Life and the Legends, by Dorothy Farnice, The Tecumseh Press (1983).  
Kidnapped in the Yukon, by Lucy Berton Woodward, Nelson, Canada.  
Kids and Libraries, edited by Ken Haycock and Carol-Ann Haycock, Dyad Services.  
The Language of Silent Things, selections from Charles Baudelaire's Les Fleurs Du Mal, translated by Patrick Bernard, Quadrant Editions (1983).  
The Last Best West, by Ellene Leslau Silverman, Eden Press.  
Looking for the Garden of Eden, by Fernando Monte, Ezra Publications.  
Louis Robichaud: A Decade of Power, by Della M.M. Stanley, Nimbus.  
Luna-Verse, by Catherine Ahearn, Aya Press.  
The Marigot Run, by John Ballen, Ballantise.  
Marked by the Wild, edited by Bruce Littlejohn and John Pearce, M & S.  
The Martha Landscapes, by Colleen Thibaudan, Brick Books.  
Mephistos, edited by David Rosen, Eden Press.  
Mice at Centre Ten, by Bette Salata, Nelson Canada.  
Middle Years: The Female Menopause, by Jean Hailes, Copp Clark Pitman.  
Modern Canada 1930-1960's: Readings in Canadian Social History Volume 3, edited by Michael S. Cross and Gregory S. Kealey, M & S.  
More Poems, Mostly Lighter, by Freda Newton Bunker, published by the author.  
Morning and It's Summer, by Al Purdy, Quadrant Editions, (1983).  
The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English, chosen by Margaret Atwood, Oxford.  
9 Resources for Native Peoples Studies, by Nora T. Corley, Canadian Government Publishing Centre.  
The North American Animal Almanac, by Darryl Stewart, General.  
Not Working, by George Szanto, Avon.  
Nutrition During Pregnancy, by Brenda Shields, Copp Clark Pitman.  
Oenaves of Narcissus, by Elizabeth Harper, Fiddlehead Poetry Books.  
Of Time and the Turtle, by H. Gordon Green, J.G. Publishing.  
Offshore Islands of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, by Allison Mitcham, Lancelot Press.  
On The Job: Modern Office Simulations 1 and 2, by Rosemarie McCaulley, Copp Clark Pitman.  
One John A. Too Many, by Richard Wright, Nelson Canada.  
The Orwellian World of Jehovah's Witnesses, by Heather and Gary Bouling, U of T Press.  
Patient Beware, by Cynthia Carver, Prentice-Hall.  
Peasant Butler Is Forever, by Melanie Zola, Nelson Canada.  
Pictures, by Lois Simile, Fifth House.  
Pieces of Dreams, by Charlotte Vale Allen, M & S.  
Precautions Against Death, by Maria Jacobs, Mosaic Press.  
Quebec 1759: The Siege and the Battle, by C.P. Stacey, Macmillan.  
Quebec State and Society, edited by Alain G. Gagnon, Methuen.  
Red Shoes in the Rain, by Jan Coan, Fiddlehead Poetry Books.  
Ripolatto, by Giuseppe Verdi, translated by Marie-Therese Paquin, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.  
Russian Canadians, Their Past and Present, edited by T.F. Jelezky, Borealis Press (1983).  
Seasons in a Guller's Life, by Jim Nelford, Methuen.  
Second Wife, Second Best, by Gynnis Walker, Doubleday.  
The Secret of Marie Bronnard, by Eileen Murphy, Borealis (1983).  
Segments, by Fernando Monte, Ezra Publications.  
Small Expectations: Society's Betrayal of Older Women, by Leah Cohen, M & S.  
Spirit of Toronto 1834-1934, edited by Margaret Lindsay Holton, Image Publishing.  
Structure and Change, by Robert Armstrong, Gage Publishing.  
The Sunday Before Winter, by Marilyn Bowering, General Publishing.  
Terror of the Cocos, by Judy Stubbs, Borealis Press (1983).  
Thérèse and Pierrette and the Little Hanging Angel, by Michel Tremblay, translated by Sheila Fischman, M & S.  
The Toronto Puzzle Book, by John Robert Colombo, M & S.  
The Traveller's Guide to Canadian Bed and Breakfast Places, by John Thompson and Patricia Wilson, Grosvenor House Press.  
Twice Around the Pan, by J.D. Williamson, Williamson Publications.  
Vanguard of Dreams, by Seymour Mayne, Sifriat Pealim Ltd. (Israel).  
Voices: A Guide to Oral History, edited by Derek Reimer, Provincial Archives.  
Who Is a Québécois?, edited by R. Vachon and J. Langlais, translated by Frances E. Morgan, Tecumseh Press (1983).  
Wilderness Man, by Lovat Dickson, Macmillan.  
Words for Elephant Man, by Kenneth Sherman, Mosaic Press.  
World Economy in Crisis, by Lorie Tansik, James Lorimer.  
The Writer and Human Rights, edited by the Toronto Arts Group for Human Rights, Lester & Orpen Denys.  
You Will Live Also, by J. Lloyd G. Brown, Lancelot Press.  
Your Baby, by David B. Thomas, Copp Clark Pitman.



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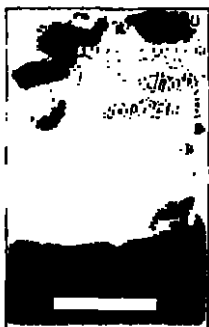
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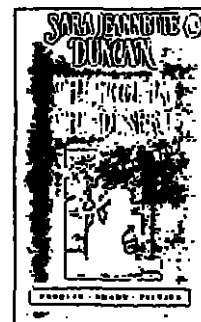


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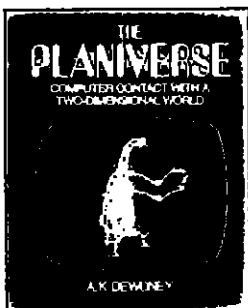


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