

A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

BOOKS IN CANADA

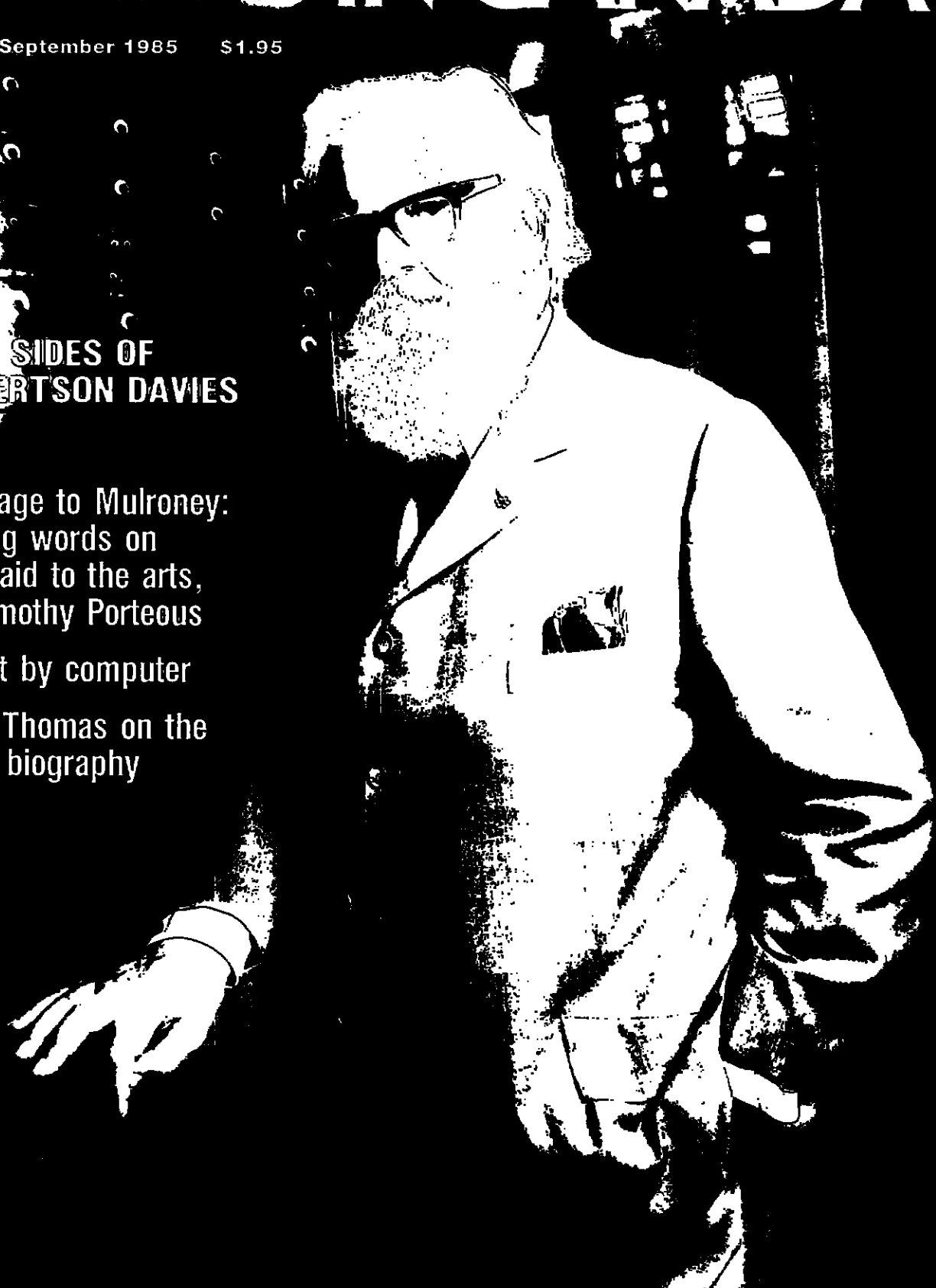
August-September 1985 \$1.95

TWO SIDES OF ROBERTSON DAVIES

Message to Mulroney:
parting words on
state aid to the arts,
by Timothy Porteous

CanLit by computer

Clara Thomas on the
art of biography



Question: Where else can you find articles on all of the following: Abenaki... Aerodynamics... Lake Agassiz... Alfalfa... Brother André... Annelida... Syl Apps... Benedict Arnold... Auk... James Baby... Bait Acts... The Band... Carling Bassett... Robert Bateman... Ian Willoughby Bazalgette... *Beautiful Losers*... Beekeeping... Marilyn Bell... Beringia... Buzz Beurling... Barnabas Bidwell... B.C. Binning... Birch-Bark Biting... Bitumen... Peter Biyiasas... *Books in Canada*... Liona Boyd... Bunkhouse Men... Canadarm... Cartoons... A.J. Casson... Chambly... Chilkat Blanket... Christadelphians... King Clancy... Club Moss... Two Gun Cohen... Alex Colville... Comox... Cree Syllabics... David Cronenberg... Cupids... Day Care... Punch Dickins... Freda Diesing... Dollar-a-Year Man... The Donnelly's... Jean Drapeau... Edmonton Oilers... Kosso Eloul... Esker... Expo 67... Ivan Eyre... Percy Faith... Marcelle Ferron... *Fifth Business*... Foreign Investment... Maureen Forrester... Frezenberg Ridge... Gambling... Gratien Gélinas... Geothermal Energy... Gimli... Glooscap... Glenn Gould... Nancy Greene... Guess Who... Arthur Hailey... Hagood Hardy... Hell's Gate... Gerhard Herzberg... Hippies... Homesteading... Honeysuckle... Hydrology... *I'm Alone*... Intercolonial Railway... Gershon Iskowitz... *Jalna*... Jansenism... Diamond Jenness... Jiu-jitsu... Pauline Julien... Karen Kain... Kelowna... Kinglet... Kitamaat... *Komagata Maru*... Newsy Lalonde... Larch... Calixa Lavallée... Irving Layton... Larch... Dennis Lee... Lemming... Monique Leyrac... Libraries... Beatrice Lillie... Lobster... Locoweed... Frances Loring... Loup-Garou... Lundy's Lane... J.E.H. MacDonald... John McIntosh... Murray McLaughlan... Aimee Semple McPherson... Manitou... *Marco Polo*... Mungo Martin... Wop May... Mennonites... Metric Conversion... Mi-Carême... Mistletoe... Monashee Mountains... L.M. Montgomery... Mountain Beaver... Alice Munro... Muskellunge... Kazuo Nakamura... Native People... Hilda Neatby... Bert Niosi... Nordicity... Alden Nowlan... Nuclear Safety... Ogopogo... Okak... Opera... Bobby Orr... Oystercatcher... Painters Eleven... Parti bleu... Patronage... Peavey... Pewter... Phlox... Pika... Peter Pitseolak... Jacques Plante... Playing-Card Money... Porkeater... Powwow... Mark Prent... Prostitution... Pugwash... Arthur Puttee... Québec Nordiques... *Quill & Quire*... Racquetball... *Rainbow*... Resource Management... Mordecai Richler... Lucien Rivard... Rockslide... Rough Trade... Gabrielle Roy... George Ryga... Sasquatch... Jeanne Sauvé... Scotian Shelf... Sculpin... Willie Seaweed... Serpent Mound... Shimplasters... Sicamous... Silviculture... Titus Smith... Hank Snow... Solomon's Seal... Speed Skating... Stress... Sarain Stump... Donald Sutherland... Anna Swan... Texada Island... Tom Thomson... Thorbergur Thorvaldson... Thule Culture... Tidnish... Touch-me-not... Michel Tremblay... Tuktoyaktuk... Twillingate... Unemployment... Uxbridge... Vetch... Video Art... Voltigeurs... Miriam Waddington... Hardolph Wasteneys... Homer Watson... Whelk... Healey Willan... Adele Wiseman... XY Company... Yarrow... Neil Young... and over 7800 others?

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Books in Canada is published nine times a year, with the assistance of the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council, by the Canadian Review of Books Ltd., 363 Adelaide Street East, Suite 432, Toronto, Ont. M5A 3X9. Telephone: (416) 363-5426. Available to the public free in subscribing book stores, schools, and libraries. Individual subscription rate: \$13.95 a year (\$16.95 overseas). Back issues available on microfilm from: McLaren Micropublishing, P.O. Box 972, Station F, Toronto, Ont. M4Y 2N9. Indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index. Member of the CPPA. Member of the Bulk Distribution Audit Division of CCAB. Material is commissioned on the understanding that both parties are bound by the terms of the standard PWAC contract. The editors cannot be held responsible for unsolicited material. Second Class Mail — Registration No. 2593. Contents ©1985. Typesetting by Jay Tee Graphics Ltd.

ISSN 0045-2564

No end to the affair

A native *Niçoise* discovers that much has changed in her home town, especially in the aftermath of *l'affaire Greene*

Let me issue a warning to anyone who is tempted to settle for a peaceful life in what is called the Côte d'Azur. Avoid the region of Nice which is the preserve of some of the most criminal organizations in the south of France. They deal in drugs. They have close connections with the Italian Mafia.

— Graham Greene, *J'Accuse*

"ello, Graham Greene?" I asked in English.

"No, this is not Mr. Greene and what has he done now?" a crabby *Niçois* voice replied in French.

The man had inherited Greene's previous phone number. He got a lot of unexpected calls and, despite his peevishness, may even have enjoyed the attention.

Why did I want to reach Graham Greene?

It has to do with my being a native *Niçoise*, and with just having read *J'Accuse*, his story of a young Nice resident, Martine Guy, and her ex-husband Daniel, who threatens, insults, and beats her. He even kidnaps their oldest daughter, six at the time. He boasts that he has police connections. Martine consults several lawyers, who fail to help. Finally, she flees to Switzerland when Daniel threatens also to take their baby.

Greene, a long-time family friend, decided to help Martine by writing *J'Accuse*. Claiming that Nice is corrupt, he tells the whole story in a booklet of less than 35 pages.

Reading it, I had trouble recognizing Nice, the elegant playground of international high society, the comfortable and fun-loving town where I spent my youth. I was bewildered. How could a whole town change so completely in a few years? And how did the *Niçois* react when they heard the accusations? Going back to visit my mother in Nice, I decided to find out.

When *J'Accuse* came out in June, 1932, some were shocked, or pitied Martine Guy. Others were resigned to there being a few crooked policemen and officials. But Daniel Guy was not philosophical. Furious, he hired a lawyer and succeeded in getting the book banned in France. Jacques Médecin, Nice's mayor, got Greene to write a letter, later published in *Nice-Matin*, to say that the case in point did not prove corruption was

widespread throughout the city.

Of those I talked to, some objected to a foreigner, Greene, criticizing their town. One, a neighbourhood book dealer, said, "If he didn't like it here, why didn't he go home?" But Anne de la Vallette, a special interviewer at nearby Radio Monte Carlo, thought the booklet was a tempest in a teapot. She advised me to read *Nice, Baie des Requins* (*Nice, Bay of the Sharks* — Nice is actually on the *Baie des Anges*, Bay of the Angels). I came to realize that Nice has been rocked by so many scandals since I left that Greene's story by comparison is almost trivial.

Nice, Baie des Requins, by Michel Franca, is fascinating. One chapter describes the casino war that Greene briefly summarizes in *J'Accuse*. A complicated, nasty tale, its main plot concerns Jean-Dominique Fratoni, a casino manager who did everything possible to eliminate a rival casino run by Mme Renée Leroux. He got Maurice Agnelet to seduce Renée's daughter Agnès, who, after receiving money to turn against her mother, was persuaded to open a joint bank account with Agnelet. Soon Agnès disappeared, and Agnelet, with a good share of the cash, moved to Canada, where he was picked up by the police six months later. (He has a wife still living in Montreal; Agnès, after seven years, is presumed dead.) As for Fratoni, he is being sought by the police for tax evasion and other charges.

I spent a sad afternoon talking to Mme Leroux. The woman has devoted her life to trying to discover what happened to her daughter. Agnelet was back in Nice, awaiting trial, but Agnès's body was never found, so there is no evidence of a crime. Mme Leroux was bitter, though she too has the help of Graham Greene. As with Martine Guy, when he heard of her efforts he contacted Mme Leroux, and has supported her ever since.

My next step was to try to see Jacques Médecin, the mayor of Nice and heir to a local political dynasty. (Jacques's

father, Jean, preceded him as mayor.) A powerful man and prominent right-winger, he appeals to many who are disappointed with the Mitterand regime. Among his friends — and with whom he admits he is regularly in touch — is the fugitive casino manager Jean-Dominique Fratoni.

Like Fratoni, Médecin proved an elusive subject. Reportedly touring in England, then Switzerland, he was unavailable for an interview. After I told his secretary that I was interested in *l'affaire Greene*, she said it was over: the book was banned. I asked her if she was aware that *J'Accuse* was selling well in Monte Carlo, nine miles away, and even better in Canada. She was upset.

I did get to see Mme Médecin. A charming woman, who chatted about astrology, fashion, and California — her former home — she lives in a beautiful house at the top of one of the many hills that overlook Nice and the bay. She did not relish discussing Greene and his book. She thought he was a bit senile. He was just after publicity, she said. Finally she confessed that she found anyone who criticized her husband to be boring.

I said, "I think he just mentioned his name."

"Yes," she replied, "but he criticized Nice, and Jacques is Nice."

I wrote to Greene about my visit with Mme Médecin and received a pleasant note in return:

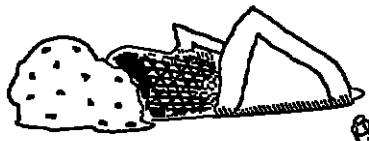
I'm amused to hear that you spoke to Mrs. Médecin and that the secretary was a bit upset about the sales of *J'Accuse* in Ontario.

The child [Martine Guy's] is not yet permanently back with her mother in Switzerland but we have great hopes of the result of the *procès* in Nîmes in early June.

Mother and child were reunited last year.

But in the process the image of Nice — where the crime rate now is higher than Chicago's — perhaps did not fare so well. When I asked a friend of my mother's who works at the Nice town hall what he thought of *l'affaire Greene*, he answered: "I gave up a long time ago finding out who is lying and who is not, so I just float. . . ."

— ANNE VERRIER-SKUTT



The real Jane Marple

"A very harmless old creature."
— *A Murder Is Announced* (1953)

"The most frightening woman I ever met."
— *Nemesis* (1974)

"A SMALL BODY of fictional biography has been building up over the years, dealing with make-believe detectives," says Anne Hart over breakfast at the Hotel Newfoundland's Outporter Restaurant. "There've been biographies of Nero Wolfe, James Bond, and Sherlock Holmes. Several years ago I thought it would be fun to write one about a woman detective, and Agatha Christie's Miss Marple immediately came to mind."

At that time Hart hadn't read all of Christie's novels and stories that feature Jane Marple. She set about methodically to collect what she now calls "Marpolitan literature." There are 12 Miss Marple novels and 20 short stories. "I had five years of happy research, building up a collection of file cards and notes, putting together a picture of Miss Marple, before I did any real writing."

The result is *The Life and Times of Miss Jane Marple*, to be published this fall by Dodd, Mead of New York. A volume of Miss Marple stories is to be released at the same time. The publishers plan worldwide distribution. One of her editors told Hart that this is practically unheard of for an unsolicited manuscript, let alone a first book.

For a long time after the manuscript was completed, Hart and her friends in the Newfoundland Writers' Guild feared it might never reach the book stores. She had been advised that it would be impossible to publish it without the Christie family's permission. Agatha Christie's publishers and agents, faced with a rash of books purporting to be about the author's life, her work, or her characters — most written without the authorization of her publishers or her estate — were reluctant to permit other writers to draw on her material.

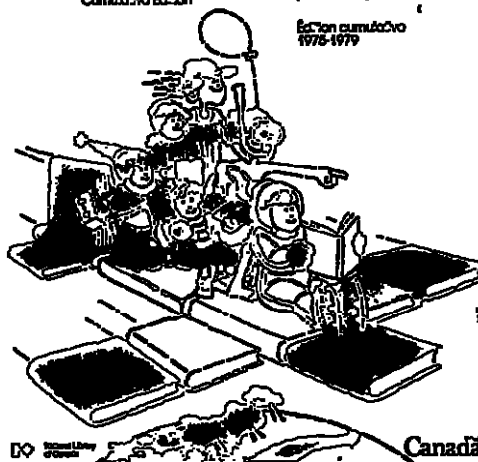
Last October Hart sent the manuscript to Christie's U.S. publishers, Dodd, Mead. They sent sample chapters to the London agents. Within two weeks Hart received word that Christie's daughter, Rosalind, chairman of the board of her mother's estate, loved the book and had given Dodd, Mead the go-ahead.

A librarian by training and now head of the Centre for Newfoundland Studies

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at Memorial University in St. John's, Hart has built her book on meticulous research. Part of its success is due to her obvious love and enjoyment of what she is doing. The reader soon forgets that Miss Marple never really existed, just as many of us have forgotten that Sherlock Holmes lives only between the covers of Conan Doyle's books. "One has to take it seriously," says Hart, "and get things right. I studied Miss Marple's likes and dislikes, what she ate for her breakfast and her tea, her relatives and friends, what she did in her spare time, how she went about solving murders."

What did Miss Marple look like? What sort of person was she? What kind of things did she do and say? "As we have seen," writes Hart, "the old Victorian lady of the Tuesday Night Club days and the other early short stories

who sat by the hearth in a long black dress with lace mittens on her hands and a lace cap on her piled-up snowy hair evolved into a more contemporary and somewhat younger Miss Marple of about sixty who then proceeded, over the next forty years or so, to reach the age of about eighty."

Hart is adamant that "She was not the sensible tweedy and/or jolly blundering person masquerading under the same name that many of us have seen in movies and on the stage." Miss Marple often used her appearance and ladylike demeanour to trick observers into believing her to be a twittery old lady, not to be taken seriously, rather than the sharp, perceptive individual that she actually was.

Was she a snob? "She had very definite opinions on one's proper station

in life. . . . Servants were expected to be deferential, police officers polite, and people of what she delicately called 'our own class of life' to be ladies and gentlemen. As for foreigners, one never really *knew*." Was she a feminist? "Apparently not, which is a pity since she was such an endearing example of an independent woman competently running her own life. She did once say, however, 'What I do realize is that women must stick together — one should, in an emergency, stand by one's own sex.'"

Hart feels that elderly people, especially elderly women, don't have much status in life: "It must be heartening for older women to read about Miss Marple. She uses her age — claims one can get away with spying and other generally unacceptable behaviour when one is old." — HELEN PORTER

ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Who's who

If that was the problem which we set out to solve, then who is the commentator that can set us straight?

By Bob Blackburn

IT IS THE curse of the writing class that being right is not enough. You must be *perceived* to be right.

A reader who is also an editor has drawn my attention to the opening sentence of a subscription-renewal notice from a magazine for children: "Last year you sent a present to a child that, unlike so many others, brought pleasure all year long."

At a glance, it might appear amusing, if you think that *that*, because of proximity, could refer to *child* rather than *present*. In reality, no gentleperson would use *that* to refer to another person, save with intent to disparage. It is evident there could be no such intent here, so the reader's perception of ambiguity reflects a measure of inelegance that I would hesitate to comment on were I not encouraged to take critical licence by the fact that we happen to share a roof.

I discussed the *that-which* problem here some time ago, pretending, with my customary cowardice, that it could be treated by itself. Actually, it's the *that-which-who* problem, and the *who* makes it stickier.

I'm not the first person to turn chicken on the subject. In *The Careful Writer*, Theodore Bernstein frets at length over *that-which*, but dismisses *that-which-who* by quoting a grade-

school saw: "*Which* normally refers to things, *who* to persons, and *that* to either persons or things," to which he adds, "The point is elementary and needs no elaboration."

I find that amusing, in view of the fact his *that-which* essay draws heavily on Fowler, but when it comes to *who*, he suddenly goes blind.

Fowler, having dealt at length with *that-which*, goes on to agonize about *who*:

It would be satisfactory if the same clear division of functions that can be confidently recommended for *that* and *which*, viz. between defining and non-defining clauses, could be established also for *that* and *who*; this would give us *that* for all defining clauses whether qualifying persons or things, and *who* for persons but *which* for things in all non-defining.

There are no real rules here. In general, *who* serves well in reference to one human or more, but *that* is by no means ruled out. The two can be interchanged to achieve effective nuances, but Bernstein's rule of thumb is not a bad one.

Things get ugly when collectives are involved. That problem has more to do with collectives than with *that-which-who*, but it certainly is a problem. I know of no easier way to find an example of it than to read or listen to a few business news reports, which are replete

with the following kind of atrocity: "General Motors is expected to announce a cutback in production of their heavy trucks. Its board of directors says their decision was inevitable because the UAW is refusing to lower their wage demands." And so on.

Let's see you stick a *who* or *which* or *that* clause into *that* paragraph.

So the whole *which-that-who* area is a swamp, but you can usually get through it safely with the aid of a little logic.

The experts in stylistics tell us that one of the greatest problems facing the communicator is that of defining the audience. The writer of the sentence that inspired this piece was not a student of stylistics. Indeed, I doubt that the writer was even aware of being technically correct.

What I would have demanded, had I been the employer of that writer, would have been his or her awareness that the letter would be read by some dotting donor who bought the original subscription in the hope that it would encourage the small recipient to be a *reader*, and that, therefore, the donor might be put off by the *perception* of careless writing on behalf of the publisher.

And that is what happened.

TODAY'S EXERCISE: Would you, in the second paragraph, have isolated *who is also an editor* with commas? □

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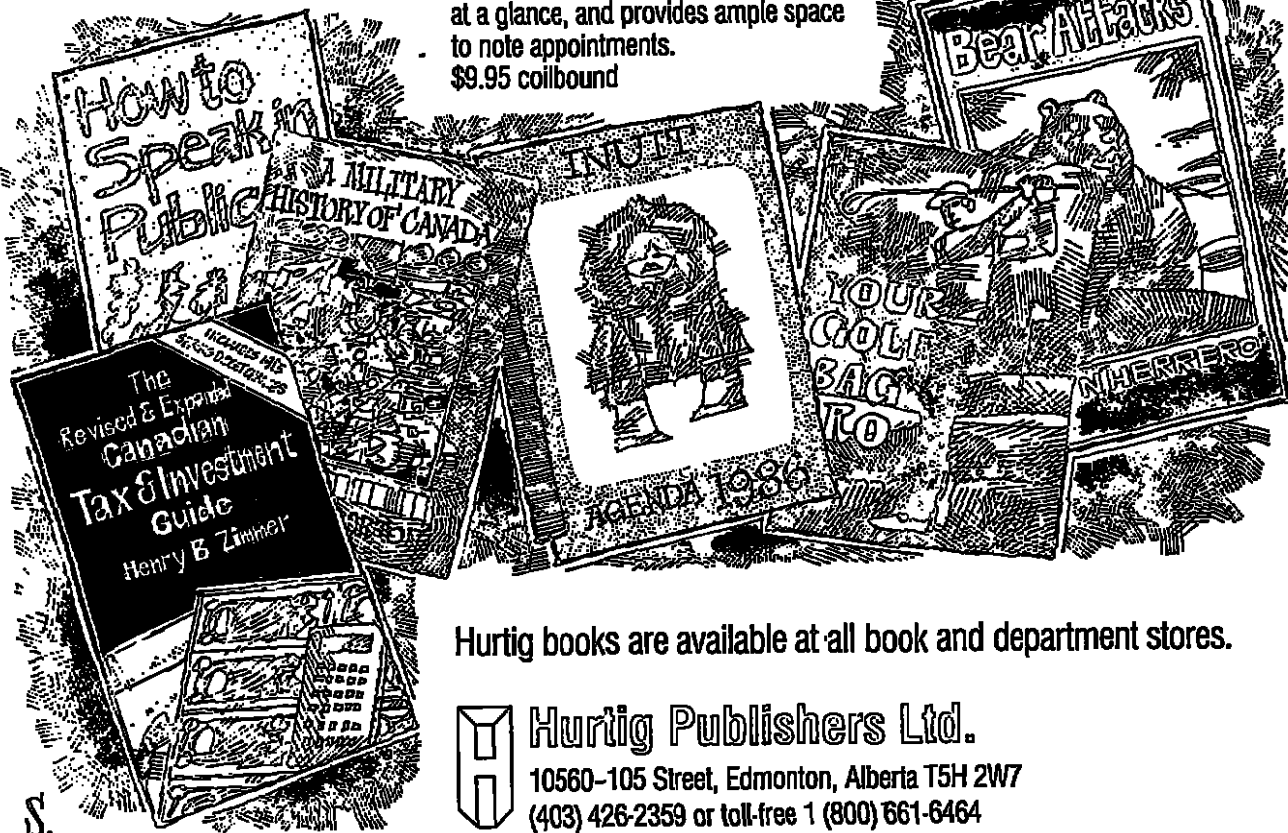
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The old master

At 72, Robertson Davies still displays the wit and eccentricity of a public man of letters, but his latest work also casts shadows of doubt

By Bronwyn Drainie

IN HIS SECOND-floor study at Massey College in Toronto, the Master Emeritus gloomily contemplates the rain drenching the quadrangle. "Come autumn both my publishers — Macmillan and Irwin — have promised that my life will be that of a dog right up to Christmas. Not just tours — signing sweatshirts, every mortal thing." At 72, Robertson Davies has spent the better part of a lifetime raising physical inactivity to an art form, and anything beyond a stately amble seems out of character. But the hype gets noisier with every book, and this fall he has not one but two titles appearing. The man who was *Fifth Business* now is *Big Business*.

Except at book-flogging time, Robertson Davies's exterior life has slowed

down considerably. After 26 years as editor and publisher of the Peterborough *Examiner* and 18 years as the first and singular Master of Massey, he retired in 1981. He and his wife Brenda bought a modern apartment in midtown Toronto, but they spend as much time as possible at their country place in the Caledon Hills. It's called "Windhover" after Gerard Manley Hopkins: this area of the Niagara escarpment is full of wheeling birds of prey. Here is where Robertson Davies writes, and where he prefers to be left alone. ("I agree with Farley Mowat on this. A writer needs his privacy very much.") His children are no longer a daily concern, though they are certainly their father's daughters: Miranda is studying to be a Jungian psychologist in England, Jennifer creates tapestries and teaches tapestry-making in Ottawa, and Rosamond is also a Jungian scholar, living with her four children in Oakville, Ont.

Davies still maintains his links with Massey. The college has provided him with a comfortable second-floor room, not large, that houses some of his library and a spacious worktable, more for correcting proofs than for writing. Here he meets once a week with students, journalists, and editors, or he works on his manuscripts with his secretary of more than three decades, Moira Whelan. (She had been working for a lumber company in Peterborough when Davies hired her to work for him at the *Examiner*. She followed him to Toronto and has become as much a fixture of Massey College as Davies himself.)

After juggling his public and private careers for more than 40 years, Davies now has the luxury of living the literary life full-time. It seems to agree with him. He's a little more portly now, and a cataract on his right eye has caused doctors to outfit him with a blacked-out lens. This only enhances Davies's carefully-wrought image: part Satan, part Daedalus, part Prospero.

Many readers were astonished by the turn that Davies's writing took in 1970 when the first book of the Deptford trilogy came out. His reputation was that of an old-fashioned Victorian word-monger whose plays and novels were frothy concoctions of wit and manners, echoing the 18th-century dramatists of whom he is so fond. With *Fifth Business*, readers found themselves plunged into a world that owed much more to the lurid English melodramas of the 19th century, a world of passion, magic, religion, and mystery. What possible connection could there be between the public man of letters, the pompous and speechifying editor of the Peterborough *Examiner* and then Master of Massey College, and the brave and serious novelist who was prepared to dive right to the bottom of his own and his characters' souls in the name of fictional truth? This fall readers have a rare opportunity to place the two Davieses side by side to see if there really is such a chasm between them.

ONE OF THE new books is Davies's fifth novel in the last 15 years, *What's Bred in the Bone*. It's the second instalment of a trilogy that began in 1981 with *The Rebel Angels*. (A first trio, written in the '50s, was made up of *Tempest Tost*, *Leaven of Malice*, and *A Mixture of Frailties*; in the '70s, *Fifth Business*,

Robertson Davies



PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL ORENSTEIN

The Manticore, and *World of Wonders* comprised the Deptford trilogy.) With *What's Bred in the Bone*, we are in familiar Davies territory: a spiritual and aesthetic quest that takes readers from a small Ontario town to Toronto, Oxford, and pre-war Germany, with side-trips into alchemy, astrology, iconology, and the international art world.

The other book is the re-edited and re-issued *Papers of Samuel Marchbanks*, most of which have been out of print for close to a decade. Here is Robertson Davies at his most playful and superficial, wrapped in the irascible guise of a journalist who hails from Skunk's Misery, Ont., who has no qualms about holding forth on many subjects that Mr. Davies, the respected editor of the local newspaper, wouldn't touch with a barge-pole. Marchbanks first made his appearance in 1940 as author of a column on the arts in the Kingston *Whig-Standard* and the Peterborough *Examiner*, both papers owned by Davies's father, Senator Rupert Davies. But it wasn't until 1943, a year-and-a-half after Rob took over the editorship of the *Examiner*, that he invented Samuel Marchbanks's diary, which appeared regularly on Saturdays for the next 10 years.

The format of the diary was always the same: seven entries for the days of the week. Davies's biographer Judith Skelton Grant says, "They were an exercise in paragraph-writing, and they share the technical elegancies of the early novels." That's critical hindsight talking. At the time they were "a sort of weedy blowing off of steam," says Davies, who had to walk a fairly narrow editorial path in what was, and still is, one of the most conservative cities in the country. "Readers in Peterborough used to stop me on the street, if I'd expressed any opinion that was getting near the 20th century, and they'd say, 'I wouldn't have thought a man of your education would say a thing like that.' I realized that their idea of education was something that made you like them but more backwards, a method of defending the past." Not that Marchbanks is a progressive. Quite the contrary. He stands in that small-tory tradition of Swift, Evelyn Waugh, and Stephen Leacock. He simply won't suffer fools:

A Health Nut assailed me today. "Really you are just a big lump of carbon, with a few salts and minerals thrown in. I could buy all your ingredients at a drug store for about sixty cents." "Vain man," I cried, "in the hereafter we shall see what I am, a dollar's worth of slops and condiments, or one of the Sons of the Morning. Go, pinhead, lock yourself in a room, and stay there until some infusing of the greatness of the human spirit dawns upon you, then see if you can buy THAT in a drug store."

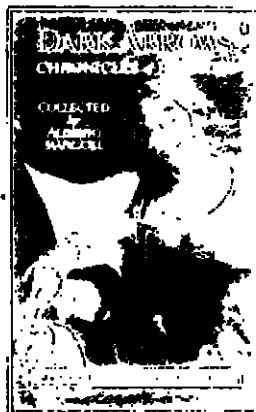
Like almost every comic writer who ever lived, Marchbanks is anti-democratic ("Only individuals think; gangs merely throb"), antisocial ("He seated himself in the uncomfortable chair I keep for guests"), and anti-feminist ("Does an enthusiasm for Women's Rights kill beauty, or are none but plain women interested in the acquisition of Rights?"). He is also delightfully anti-canine:

When I meet a dog socially with its owner, I am prepared to pat it once, and to allow it to smell me once, and then, so far as I am concerned, the matter is closed. Dogs which go beyond this limit are asking for a kick in the slats, and they usually get it.

Marchbanks seldom discusses politics, religion, or social welfare. Ideas, language, manners, and the endless foibles of mankind are his turf, along with endless entries on domestic matters such as his furnace, his garden, and his hypochondria. His alter ego, Davies, describes him as a "man of fiercely disputatious character who has few friends" — and we can understand why when Marchbanks, holding forth on the subject of divorce at a dinner party, asks his female companion, "Are you a discard or a discardee?"

Davies began collecting the Marchbanks columns in the late 1940s. Clarke, Irwin brought out *The Diary of Samuel Marchbanks* in 1947 and *The Table Talk of Samuel Marchbanks* in 1949. Both were instantly popular, and sold steadily for years.

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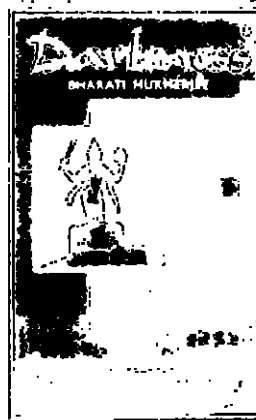
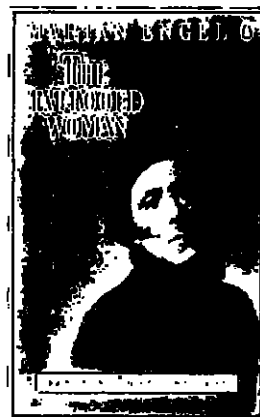
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They were re-issued in paperback in 1966; and in 1967 a third collection, *Samuel Marchbanks' Almanack*, was published by McClelland & Stewart. It was in correspondence form, which allowed Davies to introduce new characters with ridiculous names: Dick Dandiprat, Mrs. Kedjiah Scissorbill, Haubergeon Hydra, and Amyas Pilgarlic. In many ways, it's the strongest and funniest of the Marchbanks writings. The *Almanack* is still available in New Canadian Library paperback, but *The Diary* and *The Table Talk* have been out of print since about 1977.

In 1970 Davies changed publishers again, this time to Macmillan, which has published his five most recent novels.

'Every man and woman is a mystery,' wrote Marchbanks, 'built like those Chinese puzzles which consist of one box inside another. . . .'
Davies had no intention 40 years ago of opening those boxes

"Of course we would have liked to get our hands on Marchbanks," admits publisher Doug Gibson. "We approached Clarke, Irwin a couple of times after the books went out of print, but it was definitely a case of possession being nine-tenths." Clarke, Irwin folded in 1983, and John Pearce, editorial director of Irwin Publishing, which rose from its ashes, picks up the story. "I knew Clarke, Irwin wanted to re-issue, but they felt it needed a new treatment. But there was a residue of bad feeling left over from Davies's departure, and he was uncooperative when they approached him. And obviously they were reluctant to sign the material over to

anyone else." Now, with the company under new management — and with the inducement of a very healthy advance — Davies was persuaded to rework the material. Everyone stands to profit.

"Robertson Davies has become a name to conjure with," says Pearce. "There is certainly a Davies canon now in the U.S. and increasingly in Europe. We want this Marchbanks book to travel the world." What Irwin is bringing out (in mid-October) is a fat, solid volume with a ribbon in it. ("That's Bible stuff," Davies chuckles. "You can't get better than that.") It contains most of *The Diary* and *The Table Talk*, and a reworking of the *Almanack* material. Davies has written a "biographical introduction," and the text is larded with explanatory and editorial footnotes.

The general effect of the footnotes is curious. One might expect a writer who was re-approaching materials he wrote four decades ago to smile ruefully over the excesses or naïveté of his 30-year-old self. With Davies this is out of the question. The persona was there, full-blown and uttering stentorian pronouncements, certainly from the early '40s. How much further back did it extend? "I think," says Judith Skelton Grant with some caution, "that the clear signs of the Davies personality are there from the age of five on. His is an extraordinarily integrated character."

But if the Marchbanks of the '40s and the Davies of the '80s are virtually identical, why does there appear to be such a gulf between those newspaper columns and the later novels? Marchbanks hints at the reason, in one of his rare introspective passages: "Every man and woman is a mystery, built like those Chinese puzzles which consist of one box inside another, so that ten or twelve boxes have to be opened before the final solution is found."

Davies had no intention 40 years ago of opening those boxes. As Hugo Macpherson wrote in an astute essay in 1960, Davies "shows us little more than the bows, the gaudy seals and the tissue of ideas that conceal the deepest reaches of Marchbanks' character. . . . [He] appears as an essentially theatrical creation who strikes attitudes instead of expressing convictions; who screens identity rather than revealing it." If you ask Davies now why that process of concealment was necessary, he says with refreshing candour, "I had to wait until my parents were dead before I could start digging. They were very influential in my life, and if I'd written anything that displeased them, believe me I'd have heard about it."

Davies's mother, Florence, was 42 when he was born. "She had had great problems in her life," says her son, "and she spent many years as an invalid, with asthma. This makes for a difficult relationship." She died of cancer in 1948. His father, the Liberal senator, started out in Canada as a printer's devil off the boat from Wales, who managed to parlay first one, then a string of newspapers into a multi-million-dollar fortune. Rupert Davies died at the age of 88 in 1967. Sure enough, that was the year his son began writing *Fifth Business*.

HIS NEW NOVEL, *What's Bred in the Bone*, was written by a man with biography on his mind. After breaking down traditional narrative structure in *The Rebel Angels*, Davies has returned here to the *Bildungsroman* format of the novels in the Deptford trilogy, focusing once again on a single man and the forces that have shaped his life. The fun for readers is to pick out elements of Marchbanks in the novels. They're not hard to find.

Sam dislikes shaking hands ("I take note that you have extended the Right Hand of Fellowship. I have examined it. Take it back and wash it."), and in the opening pages of the new novel, we find that the protagonist Francis Cornish has an obsession about the practice: "He did once tell me he hated shaking hands. Said he could smell mortality on his hand when it had touched someone else's." Sam thinks it is inadvisable to

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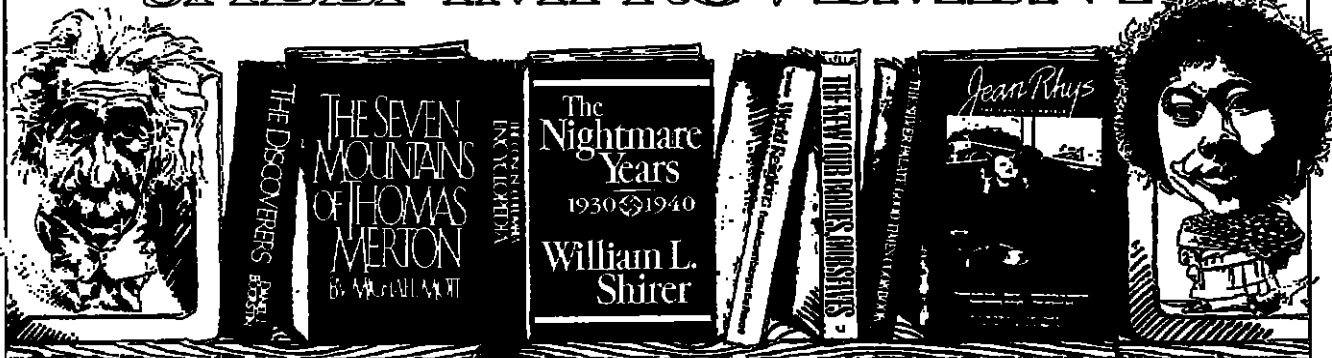


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be too healthy. ("Everybody should have some slight, not too obtrusive ailment, which he coddles. . . . [This] enables him to husband his strength. . . and live to a ripe old age.") Davies gives his hero Francis a good bout of whooping cough in order to "put our young friend out of the world of action for a while and introduce him to the world of thought and feeling." Marchbanks reminisces: "Once, in the bleak past, I cherished a desire to be a magician. . . . I laboured before a mirror with coins, cards, eggs, handkerchiefs and billiard balls for weeks, my arms aching. . . ." In the shadows we catch a glimpse of 14-year-old Dunstan Ramsay clumsily doing magic tricks for four-year-old Paul Dempster, a.k.a. Magnus Eisengrim, in the Deptford library.

Parallel to the writing of this novel, Davies has been cooperating with Judith Skelton Grant in the research for her major literary biography of him, which Grant expects to have completed within the next two years. "As she comes and talks to me," says Davies, "I am extremely conscious of the great difficulty and indeed almost impossibility of writing a biography that conveys the reality of the subject. There are so many things that vanish. Fictional biography is so much easier."

In *What's Bred in the Bone* Davies has two angels tell the story of Francis's life: the Angel of Biography, known as the Lesser Zadkiel, and the Daimon Maimas, who is responsible for Francis's personal fate. It's a twist on the use of the omniscient, impersonal narrator — one that allows Davies to interrupt the action from time to time so the angels can discourse about fate, coincidence, luck, and other monkey-wrenches in the affairs of men.

Francis Cornish plays a bit part in *The Rebel Angels*, but only as a corpse. He is the wealthy art patron who dies at the beginning of the book, setting off an extraordinary chain of events as his executors try to make sense of his priceless but chaotic collection. *What's Bred in the Bone* takes us back to Francis's origins in the town of Blairlogie in the Ottawa Valley. If Deptford was Thamesville, in southwestern Ontario, where Robertson Davies was born, then Blairlogie is Renfrew, where he lived from the age of five to 12. "In Europe," says Davies, "it would be like moving from Bavaria to, say, Poland. A hard, hard place."

Francis's birthright is a tangle of contradictions: he's half-French, half-English, half-Catholic, half-Protestant. He is very rich. His Shadow (Davies's readers are by now conversant with these Jungian terms) is a grossly disfigured and retarded bastard brother who lives in the attic. The setting is doggedly Canadian, but the resonances, as in all Davies's fiction, are timeless and mythic: "Whoever lives in the finest house in a small Canadian town dwells in a House of Atreus." Francis is totally neglected by his parents, and mercilessly persecuted by the farm children at the local school. He finds his refuge in painting, first in the crude Roman Catholic art his pious aunt covers the walls with, later in the Grail paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites, and finally in the complex iconology of the Old Masters.

Escaping from Blairlogie, Francis is educated at Colborne (Upper Canada) College in Toronto, where his history master is one Dunstan Ramsay; then at Spook (read Trinity) College in the University of Toronto. Finally, as for all Davies heroes, he's off to Europe, first to Oxford and then to pre-war Germany to help in an elaborate art scheme to defraud the Nazis. His mentor is the most famous art restorer in the world, Tancred Saraceni, who teaches him the techniques of the Old Masters and much more besides.

Without ever quite intending it, Francis finds himself embroiled in the faking of masterpieces. He takes his place beside Mamusia in *The Rebel Angels*, with her bogus Stradivarius, and beside Ramsay and Magnus Eisengrim, who create an entirely false past for Paul Dempster "because it satisfies a

hunger that almost everybody has for marvels." Here is Davies once again paying tribute to Thomas Mann, who first gave him the idea that an artist might also be a crook. "There's a sort of underground link," he explains, "because they're both children of Mercury. They are people who somehow or other take the left-hand way."

But whereas Davies has always defended the "left-hand way" as part of the mystery and the fun of life, now there is doubt about the morality of it all. In fact, *What's Bred in the Bone* is full of doubt, and that's rather new for Davies. As E.W. Powe has said about his previous work, the writing "comes from a man whose mind is mostly made up. . . . And an artist whose mind is [mostly] made up will inevitably lean towards games-playing." Powe cites Joyce, Borges, and Nabokov as Davies's legitimate companions. In this novel, the games are still there, but when they are unmasked we no longer face the exuberant defiance of a Magnus Eisengrim, but a shrill querulousness instead:

How else was I to get attention for my picture? If I had made it known that [I] had painted a great painting in an old style, how many of you would have crossed your doorstep to see it? Not one! Not one! But as things are you have used words like masterpiece, and transporting beauty. At what were they directed? Toward what you saw, or merely toward what you thought you saw?

And Francis has other concerns. He is consumed by the fear of being second-rate because his aesthetic impulse takes him entirely toward the past rather than the present. The hodge-podge of his Canadian lineage gives him problems as well. His teacher Saraceni puts his finger on it: "The half-Catholics are not meant to be artists, any more than the half-anythings-elses." In the end, Francis abandons painting and uses his vast wealth to become a collector, ending his days in the lonely

chaos of his Toronto apartment, jammed to the rafters with priceless manuscripts and canvases.

This is the darkest of all Davies's novels, but not in the sense of the exotic darkness of the bear cave in *The Manticore*. *What's Bred in the Bone* is probably as close as Davies will ever come to the Age of Anxiety. The wit, the eccentricity, the *arcana* are all still present, but much subdued, and behind them you sense a man totting up his personal accounts.

In conversation, he prefers to steer you toward the next novel, unwritten as yet, the third novel of the third trilogy. It will be, from Davies's account, a true epithalamium, a song of praise to the marriage of true minds, focusing once again on the newlyweds from the end of *The Rebel Angels*, Maria Theotoky and Francis's nephew, Arthur Cornish. A proper comedic resolution is what Davies obviously has in store for the readers who have gone this long journey with him. *What's Bred in the Bone* is a sombre detour through a life lived more in fear than in joy, but anchored in greatness and brushed, ever so briefly, by love. It shows one more troubling but essential aspect of a complex and gifted writer.

In the basement of Massey College, the library has been renamed The Robertson Davies Library. An enormous bust, sculpted by Almuth Lutkenhaus, looms at the entrance. The face is handsome, intelligent, serious, with its pointed beard almost Shakespearian in effect. But it's missing the vital spark: the humour and mischief of the original, who sits 100 yards away in his book-lined study, humming "Yes, we have no bananas." In the constant tug-of-war between the two sides of Davies's persona, it's Samuel Marchbanks who comes out ahead by a hair. "Depressing though it may seem, I am quite ready to go on being my curmudgeonly, reclusive, grudge-bearing, suspicious, happy self." Can Robertson Davies describe himself any better? □

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By Timothy Porteous

Strange Bedfellows: The State and the Arts in Canada, by George Woodcock, Douglas & McIntyre, 207 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88894 456 X).

Sept. 1, 1985

The Right Honourable Brian Mulroney
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Dear Prime Minister:

It has been some time since we have had an opportunity to talk about matters of common interest. When we were practising law in Montreal in the far-off '60s, you were a useful source of information about government and politics. In this letter I would like to return the favour.

Prime minister's schedules, as I have reason to know, are always overcrowded. You have to absorb so much information just to keep up with the present that you have little time or energy for the longer run. Among all the subjects with which Canadian prime ministers are expected to deal, arts policy does not loom very large. And yet, when history comes to mark your report card, your attitudes toward the arts and your government's policies to support them will probably count for more than the purchase of new military uniforms, the maintenance of uneconomic rail lines, or the paving of roads in Manicouagan. You would be well advised to devote some attention to the subject. (By the way, do you have a staff member who can advise you about the arts and artists? No prime minister should be without one.)

If you have time for only one book on Canadian arts policy, it should be George Woodcock's *Strange Bedfellows: The State and the Arts in Canada*. It contains everything you always wanted to know about the topic but didn't know who to ask.

George Woodcock, although he has never become a media star, is one of our most accomplished and prolific writers. He is a passionate and a compassionate

man, and his many interests — history, government, civilization, literature, libertarianism, and Canada — come together in this strongly argued treatise.

Before discussing the substance of the book, let me declare not a conflict but a confluence of interest. In Woodcock's scheme of things the Canada Council occupies a prominent place. Although certain aspects of the Council, particularly the jury system, are raked by his critical fire, he concludes that "the Council has on the whole performed well."

In Woodcock's view the two principal dangers to our artists, conveniently summarized on the cover of the book, are that they may increasingly become the servants of the state or the victims of the profit motive:

The [latter] threat . . . does not come merely from free enterprise. It comes even more from government departments that seek economic evidence of the benefits of government aid. These bureaucrats fail to understand that the benefits the arts confer on the community are not material and therefore cannot be assessed in this way.

In recent months the Canada Council (and the other federal cultural agencies) have been subjected to an unending series of critical appraisals by the officials of the federal department of communications, the auditor general's office, and the cabinet's Nielsen com-



mittee. It seems that none of them have read or understood that paragraph.

The first 10 chapters of the book provide a succinct and highly readable account of how we got to where we are. They include one of the most perceptive descriptions of Quebec cultural policy ever written by an English-speaking Canadian.

The last few pages of Chapter 10 deal

with the 1984 crisis over the Liberal government's Bill C-24, which would have drawn cultural agencies like the Council under closer parliamentary supervision. With the exception of one detail, I find Woodcock's description remarkably accurate. On this subject, as on others, 3,000 miles of distance and a few thousand feet of Rocky Mountains do not seem to have obscured his view.

Woodcock believes that hostile reactions to the telephone call to me by Robert Rabinowich, deputy minister for culture and communications (in which he warned that public criticism of the bill by me, my staff, or members of the Council would not be tolerated) "forced the government to beat a retreat." The call certainly had an effect on the government, but it was an indirect one.

The minor scandal provoked by the call stiffened the opposition parties' resistance to the inclusion of the cultural agencies in the bill and caused them to issue an ultimatum to the government: they would allow the bill to come out of committee and receive third reading only if the government excluded the agencies. In order to get the rest of the bill through, the government accepted this deal, but never conceded any validity to the arguments about arm's-length put forward by the Council, the National Arts Centre, and the CBC.

Perhaps the most useful chapters for a prime minister are the last three, in which Woodcock deals with present problems, notably the "dedicated penury" of most Canadian artists, and proposes some solutions. The last chapter, in particular, contains a number of ideas that could form part of an enlightened arts policy. The chapter emphasizes the primary role of individual creative artists. Policies to support individual creators should be the most important elements in an arts policy — not the least important, as seems to be the ingrained attitude at the department of communications.

The chapter also makes a strong plea for a program of federally supported payments for public use of library books. If you ask the officials at the DOC, you will find that they have in

their files a detailed proposal worked out by the Canada Council with advice from writers and librarians. I have been told that the officials are occupying themselves by reinventing this squeaky wheel in a format that would be administered (surprise!) by the department. The Council's proposal could be implemented rapidly and at a relatively modest cost. It would undoubtedly be popular with the arts community and would stand as a creditable achievement of your government.

This is only one of many productive suggestions you might derive from reading this lively, wise, and knowledgeable book. I commend it to you.

Your erstwhile confrère,
(Signed) *Tim*
Timothy Porteous
Sometime Director of the
Canada Council

P.S.: When you have finished with your copy you should pass it on to the minister of communications. It is just what the DOC should order. □

REVIEW

Bodily harm

By Douglas Glover

The Tattooed Woman, by Marian Engel, Penguin, 192 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 14 003115 1).

THERE IS A significance and a poignancy attached to an author's final book, especially if the author has died before the book is published — a significance that initially seems to outstrip that of the author's "first novel," her *success de scandale*, her prize-winners, and her "mature work." This is the author's last word, the last chance to set the record straight, the last message sealed in a bottle and set to float on the sea of public appreciation. Unfortunately, Marian Engel's posthumous story collection, *The Tattooed Woman*, is a somewhat flat close to a notable opus. By the late author's own admission, many of her stories were written "to pay the bills" in time taken from the more important work of writing novels.

In the title story a 42-year-old woman, wife of a successful pharmacist, reacts to her husband's infidelity by carving patterns on her body with a razor blade. Between carving sessions she spies on her husband and his new lover from behind potted plants and drugstore displays.

Finally packed off to see a psychiatrist, "She tried to explain to him that she was an old, wise woman, and at the same time beautiful and new."

There is a lot to complain of in this rather sketchy tale, not the least of which is imprecise diction — this woman is going to end up with *scars*, not tattoos. Worse, however, is the strangely sentimental notion the reader is asked to swallow — namely that this self-pitying self-mutilation is somehow redemptive. Rather, it is a kind of hyper-romantic shorthand, the bizarre fronting for character, which reads like a wish-fulfilling fantasy — the unbelievably oracular doctor *understands* our heroine in the end: "It [the scarred skin] will make a very striking tan."

In his introductory remarks Timothy Findley professes to be swept away by "The Tattooed Woman": "... the scars she makes are as much on you as on herself. But, when you come away from her — you have not been disfigured — but transformed." I can't really buy this. At the close of the story, the woman admits that what she wants is "first pity, then money. Do you think I'm any different from any other woman?" This doesn't sound like much of a transformation to me.

"The Life of Bernard Orge" is a story cut from the same pattern. A woman "of a certain age," this time abandoned by her children, dons a pair of Groucho Marx eyeglasses and a false nose and adopts the persona of "a frail collector of early Rumanian icons." After nearly starving and a trip to the hospital, she returns to normal. This story works better than "The Tattooed Woman" (except for its regrettable trick ending) mainly because its wry, comic tone floats the narrative out of the wallow of self-pity. This woman is redeemed in a way because she can be funny about herself.

"The Life of Bernard Orge" and "The Tattooed Woman" stand at about the midway point of these stories in terms of quality and theme. There are some real duds: "Feet," subtitled "A Christmas Story for Grown-ups" is mawkish and sentimental; "Two Rosemary Road, Toronto" (a man writes to a woman who has tried to put the make on him via a letter of condolence upon the recent death of his wife by cancer) is either slight and confused or vaguely repellent; "Banana Flies" is a brief description of an all-female dinner party in which the women are identified as "Apple," "Pear," "Almond," and "Greengage."

But there are some decent, interesting, if not top rank, stories as well. "The Smell of Sulphur" is vintage Engel, a memoir of a young girl's family summer on the Bruce Peninsula, a southwestern

Ontario idyll. "Share and Share Alike" (almost a novella in structure) chronicles the clash of wills that ensues when two divorcées move in together (a rare antidote to TV's *Kate and Allie*) — incidentally, the one story in which Engel allows her heroine a half-way warm relationship with a man. "Could I Have Found a Better Love Than You" tells of the life and times of Miss Iris Terryberry, spinster, flower breeder, and dying eccentric *extraordinaire*.

In a sense, a single, solitary heroine haunts the pages of this book. She can deliver a knock-out punch ("Anita's Dance") or she can suddenly forget herself in the middle of a crowded city street and become a three-year-old child again ("In the Sun"). But she is always alone, always "apart" as Findley puts it. Despite the humour, the flights of ebullience, the dogged triumphs, this is essentially a book about unhappiness endured. All its victories are Pyrrhic.

Not surprisingly, the best stories in *The Tattooed Woman* are also the longest ones. It seems clear that Engel needed the amplitude and accreted detail of a novel to bring her characters to life. The brevity of story-writing only served to expose a weakness for eccentricity as a stock device. In her own introduction Engel wrote, "I am not good at traditional narrative. Reality brings out the worst in me." I think this goes to show how wrong a writer can be about her own strengths. For my money the best writing in this book is the flat-out realism of "The Smell of Sulphur." □

REVIEW

The story of 'P'

By John Oughton

Masquerade: Fifteen Variations on a Theme of Sexual Fantasy, by Lisa Kroniuk, McClelland & Stewart, 132 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 4546 8).

The Imposter Phenomenon: Overcoming the Fear That Haunts Your Success, by Dr. Pauline Rose Clance, Peachtree Publishers, 210 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 931948 77 0).

PIERRE: A CASE HISTORY: Pierre is a highly successful popular historian and media personality. His books, ranging from *The Commodious Church-Bench* (titles have been changed to shield his identity) to *The Final Railway Nail-like Thing*, sell uniformly well. But Pierre wonders if he is a real writer. Does he deserve all the acclaim and royalties?

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He enjoys his public acceptance, but wonders what would happen if he changed genre and gender. Haunted by the feeling that it is his persona, rather than his prose, that makes his books best-sellers, he takes to appearing on television game shows. His bow tie begins to wilt. But one day, on a transatlantic Concorde flight, he is struck by the thought: "What if I wrote a completely different kind of book under a pseudonym, not even telling my publisher? Then I'd know whether I was a Real Writer."

Pierre is not sure that he deserves his success. That is typical of sufferers of the Imposter Phenomenon (hereafter IP). IP victims are achievers but not believers. Unconvinced that they merit their success, they are tormented by feelings of unworthiness, fear of failure, and cannot accept compliments or awards without feeling they are imposters.

Pauline Rose Clance's book analyzes this phenomenon, offers a self-test to reveal whether the reader suffers from it, and suggests ways to overcome the problem. Victims should read it. Personally, like most of the people I know, I believe that I merit the laurels that come my way. But *who* knows? Even in the brain of the most outwardly complacent Yuppie may lurk the piranhas of self-doubt.

And now back to Pierre. His idea was to invent a bordello that specialized in satisfying male fantasies, no matter how bizarre. The house, run by Momma, employs talented actor-hookers and elves that can do convincing set-dressing overnight. You want to run to ground the White Jungle Queen? Perhaps an adolescent confusion of dogma and hoo-ha makes you desire an assignation in a chapel with three nuns and a shapely deceased? Just see Momma, and bring a big cheque.

Pierre's twist on this concupiscent confection is clever. To test the reaction to his prose, not his byline, he submitted his manuscript under the name of Lisa Kroniuk, a single mother originally from Eastern Europe, and herself "part of the masquerade." Lo and behold, it was accepted, and published in a stylish paperback with art-nouveau cover and chapter titles. Review copies came complete with a rave from publisher Linda McKnight (who has since stepped out of the M&S masquerade), and the surprising (for an unknown novelist) publicity assistance of Elsa Franklin.

But Pierre's fears were hardly stilled by the mixed newspaper reviews and slow sales. So a press conference was called, at which three masked women were offered as potential Lisa Kroniuks. And then Pierre himself stood — and

fessed — up. Strangely, this perked up publicity for the book.

My original interest in reviewing the book lay in the fact that, Anais Nin and Marian Engel aside, few women have published sexual fantasy. Ninety per cent of erotic "literature" is based on male tastes. *Masquerade's* style is smooth, European-flavoured. Many of the characters have European names, and the setting could be anywhere. Some of the variations have ingenious premises: in one, a man troubled by shyness with women comes to Momma for assignations that happen anywhere and appear natural. His confidence that they will happen leads him to assert a new mastery over women, and erotic adventures (as in an expurgated *Penthouse* Forum letter) begin to happen to him. In fact, Momma did nothing but give him confidence in return for his handsome cheque.

Unfortunately, the book itself is not erotic and spends little time on women's point of view. Although the prose suggests more than a passing acquaintance with *The Story of O* and Nin's *Delta of Venus*, the sexual encounters usually happen in a sentence or two, often with such terms as "exploding" and "conquest." Pierre/Lisa is more interested in the mechanics of stage-managing fantasies than in sensuality. Perhaps those years of Canadian history *have* done something to the imagination.

Although entertaining and easy to read, the book is short on conflict and suspense. The brothel's inmates take pride in playing their roles, and customers are always satisfied. The one fly in the lubricant is the house lawyer Kressman, a kind of cheap European whine. Suspense is established only by hints of the reappearance of the Magician, who gave Momma the original idea of turning fantasy into reality.

The "imposter phenomenon" is a well-established tradition. The accomplished literary style of *The Story of O* stimulated speculation in France as to which writer "Pauline Reage" really was. André Gide? Simone de Beauvoir? John Glassco's caning classic *Harriet Marwood, Governess* appeared under several pen-names, including Miles Underwood.

More recently, the box-office success of the *Isa the She-Wolf of the SS* movie series produced the revelation that an unnamed University of Toronto professor wrote the scripts. Will posterity reveal Northrop Frye's secret life to us? Will Pierre's unbuttoning stimulate a mild flood of long-repressed erotica by Farley Mowat (*A Whale for the Kissing*) and Margaret Atwood (*The Edible Man*)? Stay tuned — but don't hold your breath. □

ScanLit

How user-friendly is a computerized literary magazine? If readers get bored, a screenful of type can be sent to oblivion with the gentle touch of a finger

By Barbara Wade Rose

WELCOME TO *Swift Current*," says the grey-and-white screen on my home computer. "Please read a letter to all *Swift Current* users from Margaret Atwood and Graeme Gibson (in the commentary section)." They and I are not pen-pals at the moment, so this invitation sounds rather exciting. The computer then asks if I am communicating from Datapac or local telephone. I type an L and press the carriage return. I answer the next few questions the computer asks me, and watch the table of contents for my electronic literary magazine shift line by line onto the screen.

FRANK DAVEY of Toronto and Fred Wah of British Columbia are the co-founders

of *Swift Current*. Davey, who teaches English at York University, has published four books of poetry and criticism. He calls *Swift Current* a literary magazine, but acknowledges that "magazine" cannot begin to describe a forum providing the luminous verbiage that can be selected by a tap of a terminal key, or the mail that flows along the electrical circuits among 60 poets and writers across Canada.

The idea grew with a steady stream of electronic interest among Davey, Wah, and their fellow poets. The two began their first literary magazine, *Tish*, at the graduate school of the University of British Columbia in 1961, using Wah's skill as a pressman to work a used offset press for some of the magazine's issues. Three years later Davey began *Open Let-*

ter in Victoria, to which Wah has always been a contributor. The two "started using computers for word processing several years ago," says Wah from interior B.C., where he is a co-ordinator with the Kootenay School of Writing. He also teaches writing at Selkirk College and has a book of prose and poems, *The Sparrow's Tale*, coming out from Turnstone Press this fall.

Davey moved to Toronto in 1970. On visits to Coach House Press, where he had a book of poems heading toward publication, he met such writers as bp Nichol, Michael Ondaatje, and Matt Cohen. A proposal to computerize Coach House led to revolt and the resignation of an editor, Victor Coleman, says Davey. He found himself one of several forward-looking writers on a new editorial board.

"We got a very primitive used business computer for an awful lot of money," Davey recalls. The writers had to learn how to read the computer code used to mark up and edit copy, and how to punch the paper tape then in use. In 1979 Davey bought an Apple II micro-computer for his home and started sending material to Coach House through a modem (short for modulator-demodulator, a device that sends electronic signals over telephone lines). Writers who visited Davey's home or Coach House Press began to want microcomputers of their own. The naturally fertile poetic mind also began to discuss ways of using them.

"We realized it was possible to read another writer's work on the screen," says Davey. "So we discussed the possibility of putting a magazine on a floppy disk and mailing it either to each other or to all Apple users: But that was its biggest drawback — it could only be read on an Apple II."

Davey and Wah applied for a Canada Council grant two years ago and established *Swift Current* last summer at York University. Using his or her own terminal, every *Swift Current* member telephones (either locally or through Datapac, a network accessible across Canada) the *Swift Current* computer called DYETTI when he wishes to read

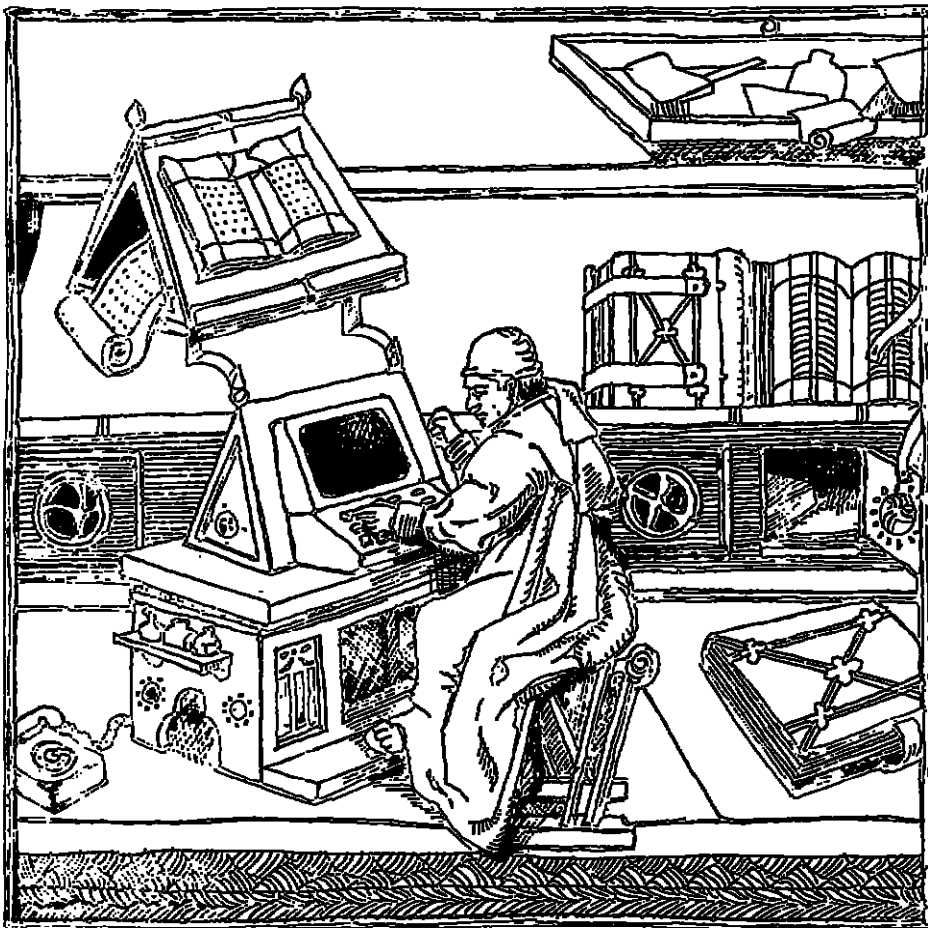


ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES PAITOC

what the magazine has to offer. For now, the grant absorbs long-distance charges.

The departments I may choose to read include Collaborations, Commentary, Drama, Fiction, Filmscripts, Mail, Poetry, Visuals, and a category dramatically entitle Help. To read Atwood's and Gibson's letter, I tell the terminal I want to read Commentary. It gives me a list of authors. Then it asks me if I want to read one of the authors' submissions. I type R for read. "Which author?" it asks. I type in Atwood's name. Her list of submissions comes up on screen — a total of one. I type in another R in answer to the request whether I wish to read. "Which submission?" asks the computer. The only one that's there, I

respond wearily. User-friendliness isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Atwood's and Gibson's missive is dated March 17, 1985, and was, the introductory information tells me, sent to Davey in the dark hours near midnight. In a wry parody of chain letters it admonishes *Swift Current* members to sign and send a letter protesting against cultural cutbacks to Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and to get four friends to follow suit "before the Spring budget." As that budget was tabled some time ago, I finish reading the letter ("terrible bad fortune will befall anyone who breaks this chain!") and return to the table of contents.

POETRY IS THE single most popular

category in *Swift Current*, says Davey. He believes it's because "there are more poets using computers than there are fiction writers — at least it seems that way. Or it means that fiction writers are more reclusive." Among the poets, Wah and David McFadden, this year's writer-in-residence at the Metro Toronto Reference Library, seem to be the most prolific.

Readers are those like myself who pay \$25 per year to dabble in the waters of *Swift Current*. One of the most frequent readers is Trevor Owen, a school board computer consultant who arranged for Riverdale and Monarch Collegiate High Schools in Ontario to sign on with *Swift Current*. "I remember some students sent a message to David McFadden

Robert Zend, 1929-1985

POET ROBERT Zend died in Toronto on June 27 this year, and on July 16 his magnum opus, *OAB*, was published by Exile Press. An astonishing and moving work, Zend's *OAB* reveals the living heart of the act of creation through the medium of poetry and visual composition. Creators are created, universes come into being and dissolve, cosmologies are imagined, play abounds in the mind's eye, and intimate details of ordinary living are evoked and transfigured. Above all, *OAB* is creative play of a high order, the manifestation of a vaulting imagination that never lost touch with our human lives and dreams.

Born in Budapest in 1929, Robert Zend had lived in Toronto since 1956. To make a living, he worked at the CBC as a shipper, film librarian, film editor, and radio producer. He researched, wrote, directed, and produced more than 100 radio programs. He liked the radio documentary as a form of composition and used it to explore ideas in science, literature, and spiritual matters. His series *The Lost Continent of Atlantis* was broadcast in Canada, the U.S., Great Britain, and Australia. He was also a prize-winning photographer.

Zend wrote poetry in Hungarian and in English. What did writing mean for him? In remembering the writer Frigyes Karinthy — in *Beyond Labels*, (Hounslow, 1982) — Zend wrote:

He was — and remains — my spiritual father, the Master who first inspired me to feel, to think, to express myself, to be considerate, to

have high ideals, to understand others as if they were me: in other words, to write. At least, that's what it means for me to be a writer. (Of course, it means many other things, too, but this is the foundation on which all those other things are built.)

His experiences as a Hungarian and as a Canadian, and the way he transcended these labels, is seen in the poem "In Transit," published in *Beyond Labels*:

*Budapest is my homeland
Toronto is my home*

Robert Zend



*In Toronto I am nostalgic for
Budapest
In Budapest I am nostalgic for
Toronto*

*Everywhere else I am nostalgic for
my nostalgia*

His poetry was published in *Tamarack Review*, *Canadian Literature*, *Performing Arts*, *Chess Canada*, *Earth and You*, *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, *Exile*, *Malahat Review*, and several anthologies. Besides *OAB* and *Beyond Labels*, his books include *From Zero to One* (Sono Nis), *Arbolmundi* (blewointment), and *My Friend Jerónimo* (Omnibooks).

They say that Robert has gone, but I know better. Where could he go? Into the universe, of course, or else into one of the universes that he himself already imagined. That isn't going anywhere. Or somewhere. There is nowhere to go. But he lost his body — his Zend body — and that appears to be going somewhere; that is now dispersing into the earth, into the cosmos, into the universe. But it originated there, so it isn't going anywhere really, either. If you ask me *where* is the he that lost his Zend body, I can't say. But I know that "where" has not that much meaning now. And since I can use "all" with some meaning for me at least it seems that Robert didn't really go any place. He is included in the all. He only seems to have shifted out of our reach in a mysterious way. Robert's wonderful writing and compositions are well within our reach.

— PAUL BUCKLEY

Rough Justice

By Paul Wright

Dark Arrows: Chronicles of Revenge, collected by Alberto Manguel, Penguin, 288 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 14 007712 X).

ALBERTO MANGUEL was born in Argentina and has lived in France, Germany, England, Italy, Spain, Tahiti, and now Toronto, where he teaches a course in fantastic literature at York University. From this cosmopolitan history he has assembled the persona of an old-fashioned man of letters and, with it, this anthology of short stories drawn from Irish, Canadian, American, British, German, Indian, Mexican, Brazilian, and Argentine writers.

The categorization that leads to themed collections of this kind can seem arbitrary when controlled by something like the idea of revenge: broader themes such as love or fear would appear at first glance to be more plausible. How was it that such a secondary human impulse came to motivate such a massive deployment of effort, learning, taste, and publishing enterprise? Is the book a manifestation of private appetite writ large, the public expression of years of personal indulgence? Or is it a late idea now arbitrarily imposed on immense reading, not so much to appeal to a specific taste as to provide a method of sampling a variety of literary experiences, a reader's grab-bag with something for everyone? Or is it merely that revenge is a way of speaking about love by its opposite?

In the event, the use of revenge as a motif produces some strange results. The mixture is odd, ranging in period from late 19th- to late 20th-century, and in style from a stiff example of Heinrich von Kleist through the southern demotic of William Faulkner to a smoothly worked story by a prominent writer of mass-market escapism, Frederick Forsyth. Further, the collection shows, perhaps inevitably, the effect produced when plots that require the action to move to a pre-ordained result combine with the short story form: the stuff of the story is sometimes too thin to veil the intentions of the author, who can be seen behind the scenes industriously preparing his effects.

"Revenge is one of the oldest themes in literature," says Manguel, citing Hamlet, the Count of Monte Cristo, and God. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay,

about one of his poems," says Davey. "They were astounded that they got a reply. That's not generally available with print publications."

I mail a letter to Fred Wah by telling the computer I want to send mail, then typing a message on my terminal as I would on a typewriter. It takes a few minutes to learn that I must press the carriage return, not a normal requirement of your garden-variety Macintosh. (One of bp Nichol's first letters to Frank Davey is such a bizarre outpouring of words that Davey put it in the poetry category for others to read.) When the letter is finished, I type in a D. In seconds the computer tells me the mail is delivered.

Wah's response is friendly and swift. "I'm on the line nearly every day for 'mail' purposes and I try to scan new files in SC every couple of days," he tells me. "It's wonderful to be able to keep track of recent writing by some of my favourite writers like bp Nichol and Dave McFadden and discover new writers like Libby Scheier. The experience in SC is more immediate, a lot closer, than reading in print."

As I scan the sentences shifting up the length of my terminal screen, I find myself wondering what Fred Wah looks like, what his mannerisms are. His computing mannerisms include a slight stutter, so "Swift" becomes "Swiftift," and Wah tells me he works at "the Kootenatenay School of Writing."

The way to know more about Wah is to traverse the electronic path to find his poetry. "Seven Haibun" was relayed Oct. 30, 1984, at 8 p.m. Wah's time. It's 149 lines long. I try to read the haibun through the frustrating relay of a 300-baud modem, which transmits copy at only 30 characters per second. Lines march too slowly for me to print out and too quickly for me to contemplate as poetry.

"We expect readers to print out the poetry they want to read," says Davey when I tell him of the problem. When I choose the "Print Stream" option on the Macintosh the printer type waves across the paper like bullrushes in water, producing line after line at the same slow, 300-baud rate.

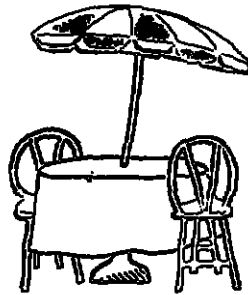
In the course of an afternoon's read, I can select other poems by other poets, or take a look at other categories such as Visuals — which is again mostly poetry, with a creative presentation that confuses my printer so that it pauses between lines. Fiction submissions entail a lot of effort for the reader if he wants to print out lengthy novelettes or the shortest of stories.

Some work in *Swift Current* is excellent, well-considered and fresh — the newest, only days old. Other work

should have "Desperately Seeking Editor" as a caption. And some is best served by the Delete option on the keyboard. A screenful of type can be sent to oblivion with the gentle touch of a finger.

Swift Current's founders don't edit its content, although Davey and Wah do screen potential contributors. "Anyone who becomes a contributor is free to put in anything he wants," Davey says. "We wanted the system to be as eclectic as possible." Wah adds that contributors may introduce a new writer to *Swift Current*. "I think SC will really become a magazine of little magazines," he muses. "Contributing editors will submit work of other writers, and that's how it will grow." Each year, the two hope, an anthology of *Swift Current* material will be published by conventional means. Printing electronic poetry in a cover-bound book seems retrogressive, but until home computers are as common as television sets, it will have to do.

THE SAME WEEK that my computer learns to produce poetry, I descend into the basement library of Massey College at the University of Toronto to use the 1870 "improved" Albion Press. Drawer after wooden drawer of type lines the printing room, filled with thousands of letters individually frozen in a lead, tin, and antimony alloy. The printer, a Ph.D. student in English, needs my help to lift the heavy drawer of Janson Italic she is to use. Setting 300 characters of 14-point type — only 11 lines, the size of a short poem — with lead slugs and the help of a bodkin takes us four and a half hours. We squeeze blue ink over a plate of clear glass, lock the type into a chase with quoins and wooden "furniture" (rectangular pieces of wood) and print for another three hours. Our labour pro-



duces 60 cleanly printed copies from a press run of 100.

In the 18th century, compositors were paid 21 shillings a week and set type at the rate — incredible to amateurs like us — of 1,000 characters an hour. Thirty characters a second to read or print Canada's electronic literary magazine attains its proper perspective. □

with the Lord.' . . . The story of revenge allows the writer to explore the human soul upon the battlefield, its skirmishes, treasons, heroics, shifting sides and alliances."

The choice produced by this rationale is impressive in range and eclecticism. Lord Dunsany, an Irish writer who died in 1957, would perhaps have been regarded at the peak of his narrow fame as, at best, a literary phenomenon whose stories of fantasy appealed to a special taste — Manguel tells us that they were an early influence on the latter-day fantasist, Ursula LeGuin. Here he is represented by a schoolboy's anecdote strongly marked by period mannerism:

. . . Bob Tipling is great the whole time. I should think he is the greatest chap in the world. Anyway he is the greatest chap in our school, by a long way. And he's not only the cleverest, but he's best at cricket and football too.

From the work of Bram Stoker, now known chiefly as the author of *Dracula*, we're given an old-fashioned account of the behaviour of an American primitive in the polished circumstances of European society. The story is called "The Squaw," and the writing provides would-be humorous examples of North American speech as it never existed: " 'Wall now!' he said, 'I du declare that that poor critter seems quite desperate.' " In contrast, William Faulkner gives a convincing demonstration of southern local colour: "But Ash never said nothing. He just went back into the kitchen. And still I never suspected nothing. How could I? I hadn't never even seen Jefferson in them days."

New to me is the name of Isidoro Blaistein, discovered by Manguel when he was working for an Argentine publishing house, and here providing an attractive example of magic realism. Edmundo Valadés represents Mexico and Rachel de Queiroz, Brazil. There are long stories by Rudyard Kipling and E.L. Doctorow and a short one from Saki (H.H. Munro). Canadian writing is represented by Ken Mitchell's "The Great Electrical Revolution," light-hearted and populist in tone, with an easy, informal, plain style that distinguishes it from the rest.

An uncalculated function of collections such as this, ranging widely through different periods, is to demonstrate the thinness that has overtaken much writing in our time. Kipling and Faulkner provides layers of meaning through connotative language, attention to material detail, careful observation of the rhythms and language of speech, with the effect of drawing a reader into the world of the story. Frederick Forsyth's smooth, accomplished prose

achieves its effects economically but with a machine-finished surface that inhibits sympathy.

At the end, as at the beginning, one is left with the question whether an assortment such as this, so various in tone and period, can effectively be unified, be given significance and singularity, under such a category as revenge. For whom is the book intended? Will the admirer of Doctorow also sit still for Saki? □

REVIEW

Advice and dissent

By Jim Lotz

Shocked and Appalled: A Century of Letters to the Globe and Mail, edited by Jack Kapica, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 297 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88619 062 2).

ONE OF MY theories is that politicians and civil servants in Ottawa start their day by reading the letters in the *Globe and Mail*. Then they change or formulate their policies and plans. After all, Canada's national newspaper offers one of the few avenues whereby ordinary Canadians can get their ideas across to those in the centres of power.

Shocked and Appalled tells a great deal about Canada and Canadians as well as about the *Globe*. It suffers badly from comparison with *The First Cuckoo*, a collection of letters to the *London Times*, on which it is presumably modelled. The letters are not in chronological order, nor has the editor provided each section with an introduction, as Kenneth Gregory did for the *Times* collection. Both books are better sipped than swallowed whole, and *Shocked and Appalled* certainly casts new light on Canadians. One hilarious section discusses the correct spelling of the plural of hippopotamus.

Most of the letters originate from writers in and around Toronto, and some narcissism mars the book, with separate chapters on the paper itself, Toronto, and beards on the city's taxi drivers.

Familiar themes sound through the years. A.C. Sawyer describes "the Canadian Commission cocktail — a little of everything well shaken" in 1935. H. O'Brien wondered in 1955 why Canada was "so desperately anxious to become cultured." Mrs. Ena Mitchell, writing in 1951, expressed concern about booklets on personal protection against atomic warfare issued by the Depart-

ment of National Health and Welfare, which suggested that people build shelters in their cellars. But what about people who don't have cellars? Mrs. Mitchell asks. And Hugh MacLennan suggested in 1965 that we need to "save ourselves from ourselves" rather than from the United States.

Other famous names appear in these pages. John Diefenbaker thunders on paper as he did in life, masking his ambition with a fine flood of rhetoric. A.Y. Jackson claims that Quebec needs "fewer agitators, less politics, and a vision of Canada . . . where the genius of the French-Canadian will not be bottled up in one province. . . ." And Irving Layton blasts "the degenerates of the FLQ and the bleeding heart liblabs" in October, 1970.

The most enjoyable letters are the short sharp ones that make their point with very few words. The first letters, long-winded and obscure, slow down the first part of the book. But a couple read like short stories. Had Freud seen the two-page letter from Lydia Leavitt, dated Jan. 6, 1894, he would have hastened to Toronto. Miss Leavitt describes an encounter with a belly-dancer in a dingy building in Port Said while on her way to Australia. She followed the woman home, and "from out of the darkened corner came gliding a huge snake." The woman fondled the reptile, and Miss Leavitt's letter ends: "How I reached the ship I cannot tell, but during the remainder of the voyage I was under the doctor's care with brain fever." This letter offers positive proof that Torontonians knew about sex before 1900, even if they had to refer to it in an oblique manner, much as they do today.

An anonymous writer, "H.C.," wrote about the origin of the word Canada in 1897. Quoting an English church newspaper, he traces the name to a Portuguese who drew a map of the places he had visited in search of wealth. Over this part of North America he wrote "*Ca nada*" — the Portuguese words for "nothing here." And the Rt. Hon. Sir Thomas White wrote to the paper in 1943 pointing out the origin of the term "unconditional surrender." While White was finance minister in 1917, the editor notes, the Canadian government introduced income tax.

A book of small pleasures, *Shocked and Appalled*, should teach potential letter-writers some of the arts of saying a great deal in very few words as well as giving them a few chuckles and some useful insights into the nature of Canada and Canadians. How many of us knew that while country cats in Canada in the 1930s wore snowshoes, those in the city were provided with miniature skates? □

Flaws in the mosaic

Written in anger and frustration, new books by expatriate writers assert with stinging finality that multiculturalism is not working

By Neil Bissoondath

When Women Rule, by Austin Clarke, McClelland & Stewart, 174 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 2129 1).

Darkness, by Bharati Mukherjee, Penguin, 199 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 14 007930 0).

A Meeting of Streams: South Asian Canadian Literature, edited by M.G. Vassanji, TSAR Publications, 145 pages, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 920561 00 9).

IN AN INTERVIEW in a recent issue of *Mogazine Littéraire*, the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo says of exiles: "There are people who remain mentally or effectively attached to their country of origin; they camp. There are others, on the other hand, who adapt, change language, become French or American. There is a third category, to which I undoubtedly belong. While growing distant from my country of origin, I never really integrate into my new, adopted society, into the society in which I am living. I am not French when I live in France, American when I go to the United States. I don't feel Moroccan when I am in Morocco."

In Austin Clarke's new short-story collection, *When Women Rule*, we meet a lot of campers who have been in the field for too long. Bharati Mukherjee's *Darkness*, on the other hand, presents encounters with more of the third kind, and she lashes out at Canada for producing a nation of campers, or expatriates, rather than of true immigrants.

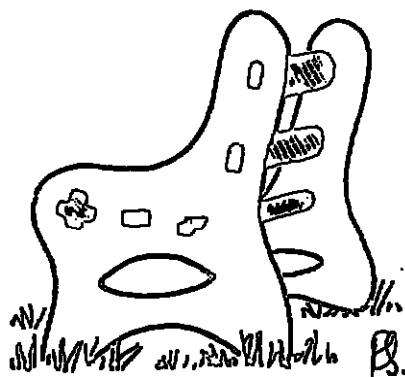
When Women Rule is a book about impotent men and victimized but strong women — women who, while remaining very much in the background, still rule the roost, all living together in the little hothouse of their ethnic camp. Here is Clarke on West Indian attitudes; it is Friday night at the Cancer Club:

They had all forgotten now, through the flavour of the calypso and the peas and rice, the fried chicken, the curry goat, that they were still living in a white man's country. Tonight none of them would tell you that they hated Canada; that they wanted to go back home; that they were going to "make a little money first"; that they were only waiting till

then, that they were going to go back before the blasted Canadian "tourisses buy up the blasted Carbean." They wouldn't tell you tonight that they all suffered some form of racial discrimination in Canada. . . . Not tonight. Tonight, Friday night, was forgetting night. West Indian night. And they were at the Cancer Club to forget and drink and get drunk. . . . Tonight they would forget and drink, forget and dance, and dance to forget.

The description is from "Griff," the most powerful story in the collection. At the end of the story, Griff, "a black man from Barbados who sometimes denied he was black," apparently strangles his wife, and it is in a way surprising that this is the only murder in the book. In many of the stories men contemplate violence against women. They are men groping at ideas of masculinity, luckless gamblers — they spend much time at the horse races or the card table or dreaming up scams — with dreams too large for their abilities, dreams that do not so much feed the ambition as haunt the imagination.

As reflected in the stories, this ethnic camp has little contact with the larger society in which it is based. The police



are always seen as a threat, social agencies as interfering busybodies. In "The Discipline" a father is arrested and jailed for assaulting his son, breaking his jaw and some ribs in the process. "I have the right," he thinks at one point, "as my grandmother had the right, to chastise a child." The charges are incomprehensible to him. "I disciplined him," he says repeatedly to his lawyer,

his mind slipping back to his island childhood and his stern but loving grandmother.

In "Doing Right," a funny story about a "green hornet" with big dreams, Clarke points out another aspect of the camp mentality:

Wessindians accustom to parking in the middle o' the road or on the wrong side back home. And nobody don't trouble them, nor touch their cars. And since they come here, many o' these Wessindians haven't change their attitude in regards to who own the public road and who own the motto-cars.

The larger society, in this case Toronto, is brashly ignored, the rules violated. Clarke's characters do not form part of the society, live in a camp within it, have no long-term stake in it; and the society, largely unknown, is seen to be alien, hostile, racist, a constant threat to the camp itself rife with tensions.

In her introduction to *Darkness*, Bharati Mukherjee writes with, in my opinion, unfortunate exaggeration:

In the years I spent in Canada — 1966 to 1980 — I discovered that the country is hostile to its citizens who had been born in hot, moist continents like Asia; that the country proudly boasts of its opposition to the whole concept of cultural assimilation. . . . [In moving from Canada to the United States] I had moved from being a "visible minority," against whom the nation had officially incited its less-visible citizens to react, to being just another immigrant. . . . For me, it is a movement away from the aloofness of expatriation, to the exuberance of immigration. . . . Instead of seeing my Indianness as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration (or worse, a "visible" disfigurement to be hidden), I see it now as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated.

With these words, Mukherjee takes dead aim at one of those almost untouchable Canadian tenets, our entire concept of multiculturalism and the cultural mosaic. Life in Canada was a trial for Bharati Mukherjee, while life in the United States, where it is unnecessary to play the ethnic, where she can simply be herself, is a kind of liberation. It has allowed her Indianness to become "a metaphor, a particular way of par-

tially comprehending the world." It is a marvellous strength.

Darkness contains 12 hard-edged, beautifully written stories that explore the states of expatriation and immigration. Neither is ever an easy world. One must constantly contend with memories of the past, uncertainties of the present, and fears of the future. They are states that come with packaged instability.

Mukherjee's acquired strength remains beyond the pale of most of her characters. They struggle toward it, often acquire much of the veneer of adaptation, but usually remain haunted by ideas and attitudes from which they have not adequately distanced themselves. In "Nostalgia" Dr. Manny Patel, a psychiatrist with an American wife and all the trappings of North American success, relishes an atypical one-night stand with a young Indian girl: "The Indian food, an Indian woman in his bed, made him nostalgic. . . . He wished he had married an Indian woman. One that his father had selected."

Mr. Bhowmick in "A Father" dresses stylishly, eats French toast, and has dreams about taking a Club Med vacation. Yet when a neighbour sneezes just as Mr. Bhowmick is about to drive off in his car, he puts off the trip and goes back into his house because "a sneeze at the start of a journey brings bad luck." Mr. Bhowmick discovers that his daughter Babli, a 26-year-old unmarried engineer still living at home, is pregnant, and he struggles manfully to be "progressive" about it. But then Babli reveals that she has been artificially impregnated with sperm from "a certified fit donor," and she gives a marvellous and unexpected twist of the cultural knife: "You should be happy — that's what marriage is all about, isn't it? Matching bloodlines, matching horoscopes, matching castes, matching, matching, matching. . . ." His Americanized daughter with her modern ideas is all too much for Mr. Bhowmick. His progressiveness, superficial, cannot stretch this far; it cracks, and he attacks her with a rolling pin.

There is some comfort in this storm of disruption. Leela, the narrator of "Hindu," while understanding that "no matter what language I speak it will come out slightly foreign," remains comfortable with herself. "The World According to Hsu," the best story in the book, a quietly modulated tale that captures with a subtle tension the paranoia possible from rootlessness, ends on a note of wistful ease. Surrounded by a "collection of Indians and Europeans babbling in English and remembered dialects," the narrator knows that "she would never feel so at home again."

Mukherjee's characters encounter

society in ways that are either marginal or confrontational. They are challenged by its norms, often fail to understand its mechanics, misinterpret its values; their vision becomes twisted. In *Darkness*, Toronto is presented as a city of horrifying racism, a city that beats and maims its "visible" minorities with impunity. From "The World According to Hsu":

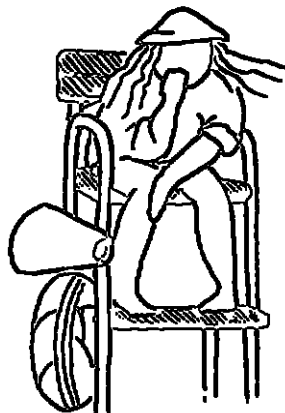
In Toronto, she was not Canadian, not even Indian. She was something called, after the imported idiom of London, a Paki. And for Pakis, Toronto was hell.

"I'm worrying about Toronto," [Ratna said]. A week before their flight, a Bengali woman was beaten and nearly blinded on the street. And the week before that an eight-year-old Punjabi boy was struck by a car announcing on its bumper: KEEP CANADA GREEN. PAINT A PAKI.

They drove behind a truckload of jeering paratroopers who pointed their rifles and fired mock salvos into their taxi . . . but Ratna felt safer than she had in the subway stations of Toronto.

Toronto? The city, for this member of a "visible" minority, for this "Paki" 12 years resident in Toronto, is unrecognizable. Not to put too fine a point on it, the last section contains heavy intimations of paranoia, Ratna lost in the welter of her festering fears. She is a woman terrified of a place she clearly knows little about. Like Austin Clarke's characters, she judges unfairly, condemns on the basis of too little contact, and retreats in the end to a comfortable stroking of self, a caressing of her uprootedness.

Darkness is a probing examination of expatriation and immigration, a book of anger and sympathy. It looks at multi-



culturalism as it is understood and encouraged in Canada and it says, with stinging finality: It is not working.

A Meeting of Streams, edited by M.G. Vassanji, is a collection of short essays that survey the literature produced in Canada by writers of South Asian origin, whether they come from the countries of South Asia, the Caribbean, or East and South Africa. On the evidence of this book, the field remains

a fairly minor one, with no work of great import having yet been produced and no writer of world status having yet emerged. The themes mentioned are familiar — uprootedness, dislocation, racism — and the book succeeds as a good general guide to the writing available.

One essay, however, stands out — not, unfortunately, for its excellence but for its unintended comedy. Brenda E.F. Beck is an anthropologist at the University of British Columbia, and a well-meaning one too. In her essay ("Indo-Canadian Popular Culture: Should Writers Take the Lead in Its Development?"), she offers possible strategies for South Asians to create room for themselves in Canadian society by pushing "previous limits and perspectives outward, helping to expand the worldviews of those currently in positions of dominance." Among her suggestions are: an Indo-Canadian version of a marathon, a "peacock stroll", a mass parade that would stress the importance of grace, beauty and mental calm"; "South Asian versions of Cinderella, or Paul Bunyan, or even of E.T. Could E.T. have been a form of Vishnu, for example? Would an Indo-Canadian have preferred E.T. to have been a vegetarian? What about a Samosa Sam? One could play with the idea that Sam loves subtle spices and Ronald McDonald prefers tomato ketchup."

These are but some of Ms. Beck's ideas. Why not, I wondered, Mickey Mantra in a dhoti? Or a Mahatma Michael moon-walking across a bed of burning coals to a Hindi version of "Beat It"? Is this, one wonders, what multiculturalism has finally come down to? Super Sikh zooming over Toronto, magic sabre in hand?

Maybe it has. One has but to look at Toronto's annual multicultural fair, "Caravan," at which various "ethnic" groups put on their "national costumes" and perform dances for other "ethnic" and not-so-ethnic groups. It is little more than a few nights of amateur theatre and overpriced food, but it is generally viewed as a great multicultural achievement and not as the simple carnival it really is.

Despite Mukherjee's exaggeration — Toronto, I am convinced, is not really as racist as she depicts it — let us take the warning offered, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, by these three books. Let us examine, without romanticism or condescension, this mosaic of ours to be sure that it is not becoming, at best, a spectacular Disney-like trivialization of culture or, at worst, an as yet benign form of culturally-based apartheid. □

CRITICAL NOTICES

BALANCE SHEETS

Plain Talk! Memoirs of an Auditor General, by Maxwell Henderson, McClelland & Stewart, 358 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 4064 4).

By Kevin Barter

IN WRITING his memoirs, Henderson sought out the help of a former editor of a chartered accountants' magazine. That may explain why *Plain Talk* is written with the bland precision of a quarterly report. His short, clipped sentences suggest he is as economical with words as he undoubtedly was with the sundry purse strings he controlled. Henderson's talents are other than authorial, and these are certainly worthy of note. "An auditor general who is popular with his government," states Hugh MacLennan in his foreword to these memoirs, "is not doing his job properly."

With that in mind, Henderson was an exemplary man indeed, having had the unhappy task between 1960 and 1973 of being financial watchdog over the spendthrift governments of Diefenbaker, Pearson, and Trudeau. Henderson was the first to apply a private-enterprise approach to the spending wasteland that existed in Ottawa. But for a bevy of cartoons from the portfolios of Yardley Jones and Duncan Macpherson, however, *Plain Talk* would be a wasteland of the literary kind. Noticeably absent is any trace of humour. Though Henderson tries his best to recreate some of John Diefenbaker's sallies, he never quite succeeds in pulling it off. That really is too bad, because there is a wealth of material there. □

BELLES LETTRES

The Beginnings of the Book Trade in Canada, by George L. Parker, University of Toronto Press, 346 pages, \$39.95 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 2547 1).

By Michele Lacombe

THE TITLE of this long-awaited study is at once accurate and potentially misleading. Pulling together all previously known and unknown facts about the book trade from 1770 to 1900, it is an exhaustive and indispensable reference tool. However, because book selling in 19th-century Canada is virtually indistinguishable from newspaper publishing Parker provides us with more

than mere statistics about bookselling; he lays the groundwork for a more general analysis of the economics of nationalism in pioneering conditions and in the urban-based but still colonial society that emerged in the 1840s.

As usual, publishers (and authors, although these tend to be forgotten) were caught in the squeeze between American unscrupulousness and imperial obliviousness, when they weren't serving as pawns in the piracy wars between these two great nations of readers. Those Canadians who remained in the business began by lobbying for sane copyright laws but eventually and of necessity became pirates too. Still, for many individuals who began as booksellers (Octave Crémazie, W.L. Mackenzie) or as printer's apprentices (Joseph Howe) membership in the unique community once known as "the stationers' guild" led to distinguished careers in the arts and in government. This book will appeal not only to traditional bookmen but to all students of 19th-century Canadian culture. □

Canadian Studies: Papers presented at a colloquium at the British Library 17-19 August 1983, edited by Patricia McLaren-Turner, British Library (Pendragon), 210 pages, \$20.00 paper (ISBN 0 7123 0039 2).

By Rupert Schleder

THESE PAPERS were presented by some high-powered names in British and Canadian cultural affairs, officials, archivists, and librarians. The geographical representation of the participants is interesting: London, Edinburgh, Leeds, Birmingham, and Liverpool — obviously the centres of Canadian Studies in Great Britain — and Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, and Quebec City, besides two outposts, Halifax and Vancouver. Six provinces are not represented.

Ian Willison, the head, English Language Branch, British Library Reference Division, began by attempting to put the colloquium and its proceedings into context:

The Colloquium is one of a series of meetings and reports that explore the consequences, for scholarship, bibliography and library administration, of Canada's cultural coming of age in the world: a process which by and large began in 1951 with the work of the Massey Royal Commission. . . .

The use of the verb "began" might

have given some in the audience pause for flashing back to periods of self-conscious cultural nationalism, particularly that of the 1920s that spawned a proliferation of literary histories, anthologies, and reprints of Canadian "classics." Perhaps, however, the claim is tempered by the phrase "in the world."

Another word might have prompted some thought, "canonization"; for Willison used it twice: first in relation to "the authors considered "worthy" of inclusion in the *Literary History of Canada* and second in relation to "the various attempts of canonizing the Canadian experience" in that work and the related bibliographies of Watters, Barbeau, Fortier and others. Any reader of Carl Klinck's introduction and Northrop Frye's conclusion to that book would have known that the aims of the editors and contributors were anything but exclusive. It is interesting that Willison chose that word, after Frye speaks of "the inductive basis" of the work and of the limitations of "evaluative criticism," which is "concerned mainly to define and canonize the genuine classics of literature."

Willison also spoke of "the authoritative editing of the texts of the country's authors," leaving John M. Robson of Toronto to elaborate on the Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts at Carleton University. Robson listed the six works being prepared for publication. It can now be added that two of them will appear soon: Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769) and Catharine Parr Traill's *Canadian Crusoes* (1852). □

FICTION LONG & SHORT

Bottled Roses, by Darlene Madott, Oberon Press, 120 pages, \$21.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 568 6) and \$11.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 569 4).

By Sherle Posesorstki

IN THE TITLE STORY of her first collection of short stories, Madott writes, "two people can fall in love without ever being able to tolerate each other's truths." For the young Italian women in Madott's stories, love is not a form of intimacy but rather an escape from taking responsibility for creating themselves. They sleepwalk toward marriage, suppressing their dissatisfactions with the constricting role allotted them, closing their ears to the loud rumblings by their grand-

mothers and mothers on the joys of loveless unions.

In "Ettled Roses," a young woman preparing for marriage is warned by her father to take a close look at her fiancé's mother for a glimpse of her future self. She barrels ahead, denying the evidence that she sees — that Paul is not weaned from his mother, and that her marriage to him will just be another set of breasts. Finally, she breaks off the engagement, acknowledging that their love for each other is based on not knowing each other. Then, unable to resist the thought of marriage, marries him, to disastrous results.

In "Instructing the Young," Julie, a third-generation Italian Canadian, is engaged to Frank, a first-generation Italian Canadian. They go to visit his aunt in the hospital after she's given birth to a fourth son. When Julie regards the aunt — worn, old beyond her years, mute with pain, surrounded by males congratulating her husband on his virility — she breaks off the engagement.

Several stories, "Family Sacraments," "Namesakes," explore family love and acceptance of relatives who can be mean-spirited, difficult. Most of the stories deal with the generational differences that bond families of women and the process in which the young women learn that they can reject the restricted matriarchal role without rejecting the matriarchs. □

Cracked Wheat and Other Stories, by Hugh Cook, Mosaic Press, 122 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88962 266 5) and \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88962 266 3).

By Gideon Forman

TWO FEATURES mark these short stories: a concern with the lives of Dutch Canadians and a lack of perseverance on the part of the author. The stories hold our interest — none is dull — but at the same time they do not sufficiently probe.

What the author seems adept in is the creation of story elements. We find evocative descriptions, carefully drawn details, and poignant moments. In particular, Cook delivers vivid scenes of the exploitation of nature. The father in "Homeliness," for example, is a taxidermist with a collection of glass eyes: "dear eyes murky brown fringed with black. . . pheasant eyes, the yellow iris speckled with darker orange; and wood duck. . . ." Two of the stories — the title piece and "Pisces" — make good use of symbolism, employed without a heavy hand. In spite of their noteworthy ingredients, though, most of the pieces prove unsatisfying. They introduce engaging predicaments but do not ade-

quately expand and explore them.

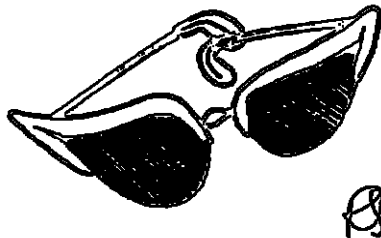
Part of the problem is dialogue. Much that is said by characters is insubstantial or unnecessary; pieces like "Exodus," "Clown," and "Easter Lily" are laden with what is essentially small-talk. And where meaty discussion is allowed to begin, it seldom lasts long. The author would do well to excise lines such as those of the fat lady in "Clown" — "Guess I'll get me a little something to eat" — and at the same time to develop the grandfather-grandson dialogue of "The White Rabbit" and the thoughtful man-vs.-nature discussion of "Pisces." The protagonist's wife in "Pisces" says to her husband at one point, "Don't you get us into an argument now!" It is that sort of thinking which, unfortunately, colours this collection. □

The Ethnic Detectives: Masterpieces of Detective Fiction, edited by Bill Pronzini and Martin H. Greenberg, Dodd, Mead (McClelland & Stewart), 360 pages, \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 396 08545 8).

By Wayne Grady

THE EDITORS' definition of an ethnic detective holds that the sleuth "be a member of a minority group within a dominant culture," and have "mannerisms, world view, and approach [that] reflect his or her ethnic origins." It is also helpful if the detective's "ethnicity helps to solve the crime." Do not look here for Japanese sleuths from Japanese writers translated from the Japanese, for example. Rather we get Hispanic or Italian Americans working in New York, or Czech or Pakistani detectives working in London or the Middle East. The language of writing is always English — with one exception: Simenon's Maigret. But what would a collection of detective stories be without the Chief?

Given their own restrictions, the editors have turned up an astonishing



array of ethnic detectives. Seventeen stories are included, but dozens more are mentioned in the brief introduction to each story. The book contains some pleasant surprises. Sieko Légru, for instance, author of the splendid "Inspec-

tor Saito's Small Satori," turns out to be Janwillem van de Wetering in disguise. Van de Wetering, who once lived in a Zen Buddhist monastery in Japan, has created a believable alternative to John P. Marquand's inscrutable Mr. Moto. The American writer Ed McBain's story, "J," is well-written and agreeable, resembling such television *policières* as *Barney Miller* and *Hill Street Blues*. Several of the stories are less than five years old, and three are published here for the first time.

There are, of course, the inevitable quibbles. The editors repeatedly refer to their genre as "criminous fiction," a phrase that incites in me a desire to inflict grievous bodily harm. Though the stories are generally well chosen, there are two or three lapses. H.R.F. Keating's dreary detective makes an unmemorable appearance in "Inspector Ghote and the Test Match," in which a simple case of mistaken identity turns out to be just that. And the worst story in the collection is by a Canadian writer, W. Ryerson Johnson, whose Métis sleuth, Poleon Baptiste, talks like a parody of W.H. Drummond and performs unnecessary feats of derring-do in a canoe. If Maigret qualifies as an ethnic, then surely a Québécois detective would have been a better choice. André Major's Inspector Therrien does not exist in a short story, but Yves Bauchemin's Bruno Brunelle does, and any story from André Carpentier's anthology, *Fuites et Poursuites*, would serve equally well. Even Jean-Maurice Laporte's private eye, Jim Longpré, whose adventures were collected in *Amour Police et Morgue*, would have been more worth the price of translation.

And surely instead of Eric Ambler's "The Case of the Emerald Sky," which features the anaemic Dr. Jan Czissar as a mysteriously exiled Czech, we ought to have been treated to one of the 12 linked stories from *The Mournful Demeanour of Lieutenant Boruvka* (1966), by the author of *The Cowards* and winner of this year's Governor General's Award for English fiction, Josef Skvorecky. □

Fatal Recurrences: New Fiction in English from Montreal, edited by Hugh Hood and Peter O'Brien, Véhicule Press, 134 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 919890 65 2).

By Theresa Moritz

THE EDITORS have gathered ample proof that contemporary Montreal is a well-stocked pool of fresh writing talent in English. *Fatal Recurrences* is a preview of coming attractions in Canadian prose, a signal to look beyond its covers

for more of value coming from the 12 authors represented in the book and from their city. As Hood's introduction suggests, he was interested both in providing solid pieces and in awakening interest in the broader accomplishments of authors selected. To this end, he includes three excerpts from novels, along with two brief sketches, rather than exclude fiction writers working outside the conventional story form.

Jerry Wexler's two prose sketches are the most satisfying selections. Although his sureness of insight is hampered sometimes by a poor choice of word or image, the picture of life he presents in "For Ann" is remarkable in its clarity and appeal. It is also the most explicit evocation of Montreal in the book. In other stories, the atmosphere of particular neighbourhoods or ethnic communities is evoked without the city being named.

Miriam Packer's "The Condition," Robyn Sarah's "Premiere Arabesque," and Renato Trujillo's "The Illusionist" display a tendency common in the collection: a movement away from plot and incident toward a revelation of mood, emotion, or character. Thoroughly modern in style, these three stories also share a refreshing defiance of the all-too-common practice of equating sexual subject matter with currency and power in writing.

One disappointment is the absence of any revelation as to the bicultural life of Montreal. Perhaps, as Hood states, "linguistic confrontation is a dead issue," but there is nothing here beyond an occasional snatch of dialogue in French to convey the living reality that has replaced confrontation. Perhaps it is because all writers feel somewhat at odds with their environment that these English speakers have little to say on the question of their participation in a city with a French majority. □

Lesbian Triptych, by Jovette Marchessault, translated by Yvonne M. Klein, The Women's Press, 110 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 2 89024 003 7).

By Marvynne Jenoff

YOU DON'T HAVE to be lesbian to appreciate a book that represents the best aspects of feminism, the mutual caring and support among women. *Lesbian Triptych* has no overt sexual content in the traditional sense. Anyone who has ever chafed at the social order can readily identify with this work by an important Quebec writer who is just now becoming known to English readers.

The first of the three fictional pieces, "A Lesbian Chronicle from Medieval Quebec," is the straightforward story of a girl growing up within and seeing

through the values of the Catholic church and a male-dominated society; after 40 pages it resolves itself as the narrator joins a society of women. The great anger in this piece comes dangerously close to diatribe, yet the reader is held fascinated by the brilliant language and images, the sane twists of logic in response to social values, and the characters: Cowboy Jesus, Cowboy John the Baptist, and Old Flame-Tongue the super gynecologist.

In the two shorter pieces Marchessault creates long-needed female-centred myths by assuming a new social order. In both pieces the main character is the mother, whom the narrator adores. "Night Cows" is a rhapsody of femaleness. The narrator and her mother, both cows, dress up in their night clothes and join the other mammalian females on their journey to the Milky Way to visit with the crows, chroniclers of the long-past female order and the atrocities that superseded it. In the gentle, lyrical, and proud piece, "The Angel Makers," the mother is an abortionist, who carries from house to house her yarn from a variety of female animals, and her knitting needles.

Klein's translation — a laudable accomplishment given Marchessault's poetic use of language — is occasionally far-fetched: the three bulls proclaimed to suppress lesbianism are called "the Bull-dog, the Bull-dozer, and the Burlisque."

The book contains a short afterword by Gloria Feman Orenstein and a bibliography, as well as a 20-page introduction by Barbara Godard that illuminates Marchessault's work and places it in the context of Quebec feminist literature. Though I would have liked more of Marchessault's fiction in this volume, the contributions of these women flanking her work, and the beautiful, full-colour cover illustration by Wendy Wortsman — three panels each representing one of the pieces in the book — lend a feeling of Marchessault's being nurtured and protected, and add further depth to the implicit message of feminist literature. □

Strappado, by Karl Jirgens, Coach House, 96 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88910 292 9).

By Lorraine Johnson

STRAPPADO: A KIND of torture mainly used during the Inquisition in which the wrists are bound, the rope attached to an instrument, and the body dropped from a height not sufficient to kill, but when repeated, sufficient to tear the arms from the shoulders. . . .

Although the sanguine may look for

literal equivalents of this experience in Jirgens's collection of short stories, the significance of the title is to be found in the post-modern playground of metaphor. It is the writer, involved in the act of production, who stretches and tugs language and experience; and in the best of these stories, it may be that the reader plunges over his shoulders. Violent, but in the realm of post-modernism, the *is* of metaphor forces alarming connections: "he secured his thoughts to the elements and hurled himself into that chaos over and over until, eyes bulging, arms threatening to rip out from shoulder sockets, his thought-line snapped, and he found final peace embracing the too-solid language of stone."

These stories never lose sight of process, the fluidity of meaning, or the need to stretch language to reveal experience. Hence, a poem can become an out-of-control character who goes to fight in El Salvador, where guns sound like Selectric typewriters doing automatic erase. It is clear that such humour is not without threat. The typewriter and blank pages, referred to continually, point to the precariousness of writing and meaning, just as the characters and situations in these stories signal the delicacy of poise in the "ordinary." The subtext of threat in the most benign activities is at once disorienting and funny, causing the reader to "turn" and rethink. And, with such a gymnastic endeavour, the reading of these stories becomes a kind of "safe" strappado in itself. □

FOOD & DRINK

Hors-d'oeuvres, by Carla Homan and Joyce Palmer, Hurtig, 112 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88830 268 1).

By Volker Strunk

"OUR FIRST venture," the authors confess, "found us on the tennis court." (Budding novelists in search of a plot, take note.) Soon after, they discover that "a dash of the entrepreneur simmered in us both," and they got into a different racket: a "travelling cooking school." Along the way Homan and Palmer appear to have become stir-crazy, deciding that if you can't stand the heat of the mobile kitchenette, get out and write — you guessed it — a cookbook. *Hors-d'oeuvres* is their first and, pray the publishing gods be just, last effort at enlightening the culinary boors. Boors? Don't blink, it's YOU they're talking to: "we are offering this book with you in mind."

By the logic of necessary plagiarism no cookbook can be totally awful, though Homan and Palmer try their

darndest as they attempt to challenge "the old definition of hors-d'oeuvres." But let's not get into the nitty-gritty of tinned mushrooms, frozen artichoke hearts, and "velveeta-type cheese." Best to heed the injunction they offer: "Hire some help if you can." By all means, by all means. □

The Strawberry Connection, by Beatrice Ross Buszek, Nimbus, 214 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 920852 31 9).

By Volker Strunk

THIS BOOK should be in all hospital gift shops. Utterly unpretentious in conception and execution (down to the author's hand-lettering of the text — yes, it's one of those books), this collection of strawberryiana makes the perfect gift for the convalescent and the feeble.

Did you know that "Not only is the strawberry a religious symbol but it dates to a relatively early origin"? Or have you ever wondered how strawberries are farmed in Oregon? "In Oregon, berries are stemmed by hand-pickers and put in molded plastic containers and flats. Pickers are paid by the flat." Good to know that. Or that "The strawberry continued to have special meaning into the 19th century"; that "In some parts of the West Coast, strawberries are available fresh every month of the year."

In case you really wondered, there are also some recipes in this book: more than 200, in fact, and surprisingly not all are bad. The filling for Bittersweet Pancakes, for instance (orange bitter marmalade combined with crushed strawberries) is promising; and so are several chilled strawberry soups. The majority of recipes, however, is perfectly beastly, calling for lots of marshmallows and store-bought guck, not to mention pectin in the strawberry jam. The author admits that the whole enterprise is "entirely out of my professional field and hardly the stuff of which cookbooks are made." Let's leave it at that. □

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

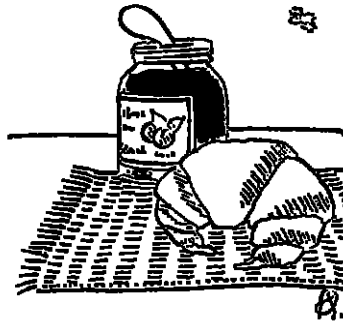
The Domestic Mosaic: Domestic Groups and Canadian Foreign Policy, by Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon, Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 120 pages, \$7.00 paper (ISBN 0 919084 47 8).

By Linda Fung

THIS BOOK, which promises to provide a "comprehensive treatment of interest groups in Canada active in foreign policy issues," ends with an appended apology that "the inclusion of full

details on tactics, government contacts, and relative influence and effectiveness of the groups is beyond the scope of this survey." Between the foreword and the appendix, one finds a basically well-organized directory that (depending on each group's affiliation, foreign policy concerns, and finances) categorizes interest groups under two main headings, "Economic" (further sub-divided into business, agriculture, labour, professions, and consumers) and "Non-Economic" (veteran/military support, women's, religious, ethnic, citizens, and special foreign policy).

Despite the energy and time required to compile the list, one can simply skip to the five-page conclusion for insight. The strongest point made about the



dynamics between the government and interest groups on foreign policies is that "most [group representatives] perceive their influence to be fairly small," and that "demands which more closely mirror the government's priorities are much more likely to succeed." Considering that the groups include those involved in such major issues as disarmament and human rights and that they are drawn from virtually all major industries, commerce associations, religious denominations, and professions, one wonders whose views government priorities mirror.

Two major groups may be discerned. There are those — such as veteran's and military interest groups — who "owe their existence to government initiatives" (including grants) and who "have had relatively little success... in influencing government policies." On the other hand, business and labour groups, supported solely by membership dues, are the most effective and influential.

One further revelation is the groups' increasing desire to educate the public not only on their goals but also on their interaction with the government. If this is the case, one hopes for in-depth studies on our domestic mosaic. □

NOTE

Particularly positive critical notices are marked at the end with a star. ☆

LEISURE & PLEASURE

Weeds and Seeds: A Gardener's Companion, by Peter Weis, Horsdal & Schubart Publishers, 135 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 920663 00 1).

By Brian Fawcett

MOST SERIOUS gardeners are a little bit loony, and Weis is a serious gardener. The book is a collection of his monthly articles from the *Gulf Islands Driftwood* out of Saltspring Island, B.C., an area that has more than its share of eccentrics. Weis's specialty is organic gardening, and generally speaking organic gardeners are the looniest of the lot, more often than not showing a greater interest in the spiritual purity of those who garden than in the crops actually produced.

Weis turns out to be the exception. He exhibits an extensive understanding of plant genetics and soil chemistry; his chapters are filled with unorthodox but often practical advice, and his knowledge of some of the more esoteric garden plants is thorough. Like most organic gardeners he has one plant that he claims can save the world, but even then he manages to be charming about it, rather in the style of M.F.K. Fisher. Consequently, the book is an extremely pleasant read for the well-versed gardener.

It isn't meant for beginners, however, and it isn't encyclopedic. Nor is it terribly well organized, and the one-page index is next to useless. Even though there are things to be learned here, urban gardeners should be cautious of both his methods and his promises. The kind of gardening he describes requires large tracts of land, a considerable amount of free time, and wide separation from the diseases and insects that inevitably infest urban soils. But don't let any of its shortcomings deter you if you're interested in gardening. □

THE PAST

Forty Nights to Freedom: The True Prisoner of War Escape Story of Wing Commander Stewart F. Cowan (Ret.), by Gladys E. Smith, Queenston House, 219 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919866 03 4) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 919866 04 2).

By Steve Lukits

SHAKESPEARE'S OTHELLO knew what it took to make an absorbing tale of adventure: "moving accidents... hair-breadth 'scapes i' the imminent deadly breach." The story of how Stewart Cowan eluded capture by the Germans

after he and a companion jumped from a prisoner train and trekked through occupied Italy back to the Allied lines does not have tragic drama, but it has its share of "moving accidents." Cowan's plane was shot down near the Isle of Capri in July, 1943. He just missed rescue by a British seaplane and was taken prisoner by the Italians. These were the last two pieces of bad luck he experienced until he reached safety.

Good fortune found him a partner in British Army Engineer George Purt, who was as determined as Cowan was to avoid relocation in a German prison camp. Italian civilians helped them on their perilous journey. And it is these chance encounters, each beginning in mutual caution and doubt, rather than the escapees' frightening skirmishes with German soldiers, that are the most memorable parts of the narrative. Generous despite their own privations, the civilians risked certain danger when they helped the ragged Canadian and his companion.

Gladys E. Smith, Cowan's sister, recounts her brother's adventures in the first person. Sometimes her writing rings a bit hollow and the text could have benefited from more careful editing. Not about a great escape, this unpretentious book tells a good and, at times, moving story. □

Vanished in Darkness: An Auschwitz Memoir, by Eva Brewster, NeWest Press, 143 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 920316 57 3).

By Sherie Pososorski

ONE OF THE NUMBERED few to survive the Nazi death camps at Auschwitz and Birkenau, Brewster was frequently politely asked to recount her experiences, but her unpolite descriptions were not the coffee-and-cake conversation desired by her listeners. Frustrated by their responses, Brewster resolved never to talk about it again — neither to friends nor family. Instead, as a form of therapy, she wrote her experiences down and then locked them in a drawer. The key to the drawer was Jim Keegstra (Brewster lives in Coutts, Alta.) and his presentation of the "Holocaust Myth" to his high-school students.

In 1943 Daniella Raphael, 20, (the name given her by the Resistance Movement) was arrested by the Berlin Gestapo for carrying documents for the Resistance. When she refused to tell the Gestapo where she had farmed out her daughter for safety, her mother was arrested and they were both transported to Auschwitz. There, they were greeted by the death-dispenser Joseph Mengele, who waved them to the left — the labour

camps. Those waved to the right were gassed.

In most literature, one wants more plot, more action. In Brewster's account of Auschwitz life, one prays for less. In her first few months, she encounters and perseveres through one tragedy after another. The daughter that she farmed out for safety is brought to Auschwitz and gassed. Her husband is gassed. She contracts typhoid. She leaps off her infirmary bed, claiming health when Mengele comes to her bed, during his rounds. (Few of the ill were given the opportunity to recover, instead they were sent to the gas chambers.) Through all her ordeals, she is tough, spirited — a survivor. Finally, she is reunited with her mother, and they are assigned to work doing laundry for the SS officers. Her memoirs are compelling, moving — and should be on the required reading list for the children of Keegstra. ☆

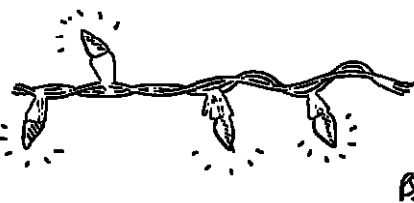
POETRY

Anyone Skating on That Middle Ground, by Robyn Sarah, Véhicule Press, 53 pages, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 919890 60 1).

By Cary Fagan

IN SARAH'S FIRST book of poetry, *The Space Between Sleeping and Waking* one poem, "Maintenance," stood out in a generally accomplished collection, and in this new book another poem, "Québécois," rises above the rest. Sarah writes in an intelligently weary but not joyless voice that can combine with precise domestic detail and a quiet narrative line into an arresting poem. She often just misses the mark. As her titles suggest, Sarah eschews the dramatics of beginnings and endings for the long haul in-between, the space that most of us inhabit most of the time. Instead of ecstasy and despair, here are the quieter moments of pleasure, confusion, and disappointment. For Sarah this is where that subtly shifting thing called truth might be found.

"Québécois" describes the kind of party where the women wear Guatemalan ponchos, the camembert has all been eaten, and "everyone you know/is engaged in conversation with someone you don't." Sarah refuses to discover the profound, insisting that the most memorable event concerns a woman's



deciding whether to go to China or get her hair cut. Although the place is left unnamed, this is Montreal, a textured world of streetlamps, crouching cats, and eternally falling snow. Sarah is interested in various kinds of spaces, such as those between two people and between a person's own desires and reality. As she writes, "It has never helped to think you knew/what you were looking for."

Knowing she's good on detail, Sarah sometimes tries to do little more than pointillist-paint, resulting in the lovely thinness of a poem like "Study in Latex Semi-Gloss." But most of the time she strives for more and reaches beyond the obsessive "I" to bring us into her personal world, often by using the pronoun "you." This can open a poem up wonderfully as in "Québécois," but it just as often creates a feeling of vagueness.

Several brief, short-lined poems don't give Sarah the room she needs to work her gentle rhythms and ironies. On the other hand, the prose pieces lack focus or play with Gertrude Stein-like repetition that does nothing for this reader. Sarah's voice comes out best in the poems in-between, such as "Sounding an Old Chord in October" and "A Mediation Between Claims" — poems that skate on that middle ground. □

A Difficult Faith, by Richard Lemm, Pottersfield Press, 63 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 919001 20 3).

By Sparling Mills

THIS SELECTION is a hymn to flower power. To read it is to relive the 1960s. Part one is sensuous almost beyond belief, and makes the reader want either to be in love also or to choke with cynicism. There can be no bored reaction — quite an accomplishment in these days of vapid sexuality.

Furthermore, do you remember believing that if we sent our armies "forth with hoes and grain," there would be no more war? And if all the business courses in colleges were emptied, there would be no greed? I did not know anyone thought that way still, but Lemm does. In part three he expands these theories about the world situation by presenting poems about victims: Acadians, the "mounds of bodies" at the "Aryan gasworks," Palestinians, Moslems, and Israelis. Lemm maintains that sharing is the answer to these problems because "everywhere is the holy land." For these poems, which he calls "Guide to the Perplexed," he won third prize in the 1983 CBC Literary Competition; however, he could be more ruthless

about cutting away extra verbiage. Tighter imagery would be welcome.

The mood of part two reminds me of Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*. Both poke around at the little happenings and feelings that caused us as children to experience shame. Children are aware of not being innocent; moreover, they take guilt in others very seriously. This idea is developed competently in "Voyeur," a seeing/watching poem. More complicated thoughts inspire better poetry. □

Fables from the Women's Quarters, by Claire Harris, Williams-Wallace, 62 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88795 031 0).

By Colline Calder

IF A TITLE is meant to pinpoint the contents of a book, then this one certainly has an ironic twist. These poems are anything but fables. Claire Harris, in this moving, docu-fiction collection of poems, has created poetry based on fact, especially a long section devoted to revolutionary activities in Guatemala. Based on the testimony of Rigoberto Manchu, translated by Patricia Goedicke, this section is a gripping account of people's suffering as they fight for freedom from an oppressive government.

The theme of the collection is that of injustice perpetrated upon citizens, whether by a policeman in Edmonton toward a 15-year-old girl he caught jaywalking ("...the girl was/ arrested, strip-searched and jailed in/ the adult detention centre") or army executions of guerrillas. With fine imagery and technical virtuosity, Harris writes as if she were relating all she has seen and heard. For a first book, the poems are refined and mature, and predict even better poems in a second collection due this year. □

Orts and Scantlings, by H.C. Dillow, Thistle-down, 85 pages, \$18.00 cloth (ISBN 0 929966 76 3) and \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 920066 73 9).

By Paul McNally

MOST ADVICE to young writers contains some injunction along the lines "Publish in haste, repent at leisure." There's no haste (or infelicity) in a first collection of poems by Dillow, for he has been honing his skills not for years, but for decades. The book covers in chronological order subject matter ranging from Dillow's childhood in the Bronx in the 1920s to the last two decades in Saskatchewan, where he still teaches English at the University of Regina.

Publishing a first book at 62 bespeaks

a deliberate hand, and the poems don't belie that. They are poems of adamant linguistic and imagistic control. The control is neither cold-blooded nor stifling. It's just his manner of speaking, one in which he knows what he's going to say. Most readers will find the first half of the collection good and interesting: incisive, wry, and vivid. The second half is all this and rather more besides. The first half consists of memories, well-written and shrewdly invoked, of a time prior to Dillow's arrival in Canada. It's focused and formal. In many of the poems in the second half a similar tone and manner wrestle with an obsession. The obsession is the northern prairie: too big to ignore once you're in it; too flat to disguise itself even for a moment; too much its own self to be treated as a domicile of convenience. Which means language has to get tough to try for a grip on the monster. Dillow tries haughtiness ("Notes for Exile in a Dry Land"): push coming to shove, he goes so far as to call Canada's breadbasket province "this anus mundi." He tries well-justified outrage ("Mid-August Frost"). He unleashes a wicked line of metaphysics ("Theory of Perspective"), but the monster has lines of its own, and implacable lies ("the land lies flat and flaccid in deceit").

Loving control as he does, Dillow joins the struggle with a will, using tools of language acquired in a lifetime's study to get the beast outside and in its place. Readers who, like Dillow, find themselves exiled in a relentless land will enjoy rooting for the underdog authorial persona. Every reader will enjoy seeing a good writer lifted to moments of greatness by the fierce cunning of his adversary. □

Out of the Storm, by Michael Thorpe, Penumbra Press, 64 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 920806 62 7).

By Laurel Boone

IN "NOVEMBER RITE," Thorpe says, "No need to describe a deer, quick or dead, / Nor men either, with death in their head," yet he has just described those very things. Explaining but cutting out the extraneous and describing the remainder works both negatively and positively in *Out of the Storm*. Thorpe tends to write about life, seldom kindling in the reader experienced insights, sensations, or emotions. At the same time, his poems are spare and carefully crafted, economical but expressive in diction and in effect.

Thorpe seems to be intrigued by the fragility of life and the compulsion to flirt with disaster. In "Merely Verbal," the speaker imagines himself crippled in

a melodramatic accident in order "To cast a charm on the risky road," and in a similar mood the people in "Unworthy Winter" feel cheated when a mild winter does them out of their yearly struggle. Young men relieving themselves downwind in "Dorchester Cape, N.B." break up a picture of austere natural grandeur with their flimsy defiance and also act out the split between humanity and nature that Thorpe describes more fully in "Gulled" and "Natural Selection." The "Six Museum Poems," seeking some connection with ordinary individuals of past societies, and the spirits lurking on the fringes of consciousness in "Out of the Storm" and "Vulpes Vulpes (Extinct)" hint at a dimension other than the literal and physical. This hint plus occasional comedy soften Thorpe's reductiveness and lighten his description. *Out of the Storm* is a low-keyed book of subtle, intelligent, and finely crafted poetry. □

Variorum: New Poems and Old, 1965-1985, by Doug Fetherling, Hounslow Press, 60 pages, \$5.95 paper (ISBN 0 88882 083 6).

By Judith Fitzgerald

FETHERLING'S SAVING grace locates itself in a remarkable ability to walk the fine line between vision and verbicidal prolixity.

In this sampling spanning 20 years, Fetherling's dominant metaphor emerges in musical terminology: most of the poems depend either implicitly or explicitly upon its lexis. One entry, "Death Bed Ramblings of Andrew Heron," is augmented by a note explaining that Jack Behrens composed the accompaniment for the poem. Seven numbered "Notations" counterpoint variations on the same major theme.

The collection opens with "Prologue," travels through a range of exceptionally strong poems and concludes with a chant, a satiric incantation, "Contributor's Note," which again puns the musical. *Variorum's* title — *L. varius; cum notis variorum* — stands one step removed in its wordplay. Come, notice *Variorum*.

Poems such as "Western Manitoba" and "Teratology" deserve notice. The former concludes with the macabre image of two skeletons examining road maps while the latter enunciates one of the volume's secondary — diminished? — motifs, the monstrous unkindness of humankind. That belief intersects despair with echoes of religious symbolism: "...he awakes/in crucifixion/ with a soreness in the throat/an ancient premonition of the gallows..." The ancillary strands combine to produce a

score for sorrow reminiscent of Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts": *About suffering they were never wrong.* . . .

Variorum achieves a striking musicality and demonstrates a finely tuned sense of resonance and control. □

POLITICS & POLITICOS

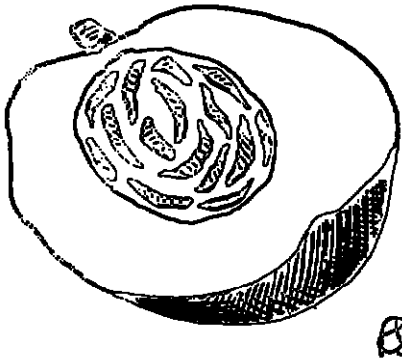
Women of Influence: Canadian Women and Politics, by Penney Kome, Doubleday, 240 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 305 23140 7).

By Barbara Gunn

AGNES MACPHAIL earned considerably more than a few casual glances in the days and months that followed the 1921 Canadian federal election. What she had done was simply too peculiar to be ignored. This woman had campaigned to become a member of Parliament — and won.

Canada's contemporary female parliamentarians have travelled a long and often bumpy road since the day when Macphail became the first woman elected to the House of Commons. Their numbers on the government and opposition benches may still be comparatively small, but gone are the days when a woman in the House was recognized for her gender alone.

Kome's strength in detailing the growth of women's political clout in Canada, both inside the country's legislatures and out, is that she puts faces to her subjects and thereby prevents her account from simply being a black-and-white history of Canadian feminism.



Elizabeth Engshaw, for instance, isn't solely described as one of the pioneers in the field of contraception, but a physician who was seen, in the early 1900s, "bicycling furiously across town to deliver babies, her obstetrics bag dangling from her handlebars."

It's the attention that's given to people like Engshaw — the lesser-known women who managed to change the *status quo* — that gives the greatest flavour to Kome's book. We're introduced to people like Emily Murphy, the

first female judge in Canada and the individual who helped all Canadian women win the right to be considered "persons" under the law; Barbara Cadbury, a British immigrant who, with her husband, founded Planned Parenthood of Canada; and Madeleine Parent, the union organizer whose tireless activities caused her to be publicly reviled as "a witch and an atheist."

Kome's account of more contemporary political involvement by women — a hefty chunk that goes over everything from the Playboy Productions pay-TV controversy to the appointment of Jeanne Sauvé as governor-general to last summer's federal leadership debate on women's issues — is thorough and readable. But because the events she probes are so recent, these sections are apt to contain little to inform or to enlighten anyone who's been paying the slightest attention to the evening news. □

SCIENCE & NATURE

A Killing Rain: The Global Threat of Acid Precipitation, by Thomas Pawlick, Douglas & McIntyre, 206 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88894 442 4).

By Claire Brownscombe

IT MAY BE impossible to prove all the devastation attributed to acid rain beyond a shadow of a doubt, but, as Pawlick makes clear, a lot of evidence points strongly in that direction.

Not only does he thoroughly document the facts, drawing examples from North America and Europe, but more important he explains the complex interaction between atmosphere, soil, and water underlying the disastrous effects.

However, acid rain is not only a scientific problem; it involves people. Quebec farmers worry about their dying maple bushes. Acid rain damages trees. Resort owners worry about losing tourist dollars because of a diminishing sports fishery. More serious, acid rain is implicated in such problems as asthma, chronic bronchitis, and some neurological disorders.

Large corporations face economic and social problems in choosing among the various methods of pollution control. Mistakes have been made and there has been much foot-dragging in an effort to save money. However, Pawlick cites Kidd Creek Mines Ltd., based in Toronto, as a company that functions economically, integrating its operations "much like the natural ecosystem, which it does not harm."

Politicians in Canada and the United States have wrestled ineffectually with the problems of pollution abatement. The probable damage continues to

mount. Ultimately, we need to develop an "ecotechnology" in which cities, industry, and the production of power are decentralized.

Acid rain is not alone in threatening the environment. However, this readable book should be of real value to those desiring a comprehensive grasp of the evidence incriminating this pollutant and the attempts to deal with it — information frequently presented in dribs and drabs by the popular press. □

SOCIETY

When Cultures Clash: Case Studies in Multiculturalism, by John W. Friesen, Detselig Enterprises, \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 920490 44 1).

By Linda Fung

FOR A NATIVE Southern Ontarian, accustomed to such ethnic groups as Chinese, Italian, Portuguese, and East Indian, this book offers another view of Canada's multiculturalism. The case studies present five minority ethnic groups in Western Canada: the French, Plains Indians, Métis, Hutterites, and Mennonites.

A common and interesting characteristic of the five groups is that they currently have "special rights" in Canada. For the French and Métis in Western Canada it is language rights; for Plains Indians it is self-government; for Hutterites it is buying land without imposed limits; and for Mennonites it is a German and religious school curriculum.

These special rights are interesting because they had been taken away and are now at least partly restored. During various periods of Western settlement, all five minority groups represented a majority, either in their own colonies or actually outnumbering White Anglo-Saxon Protestants within a community. Legislation allowed for their present rights as well as freedom to cultivate their respective cultures. Such rights, however, were increasingly denied as more Wasps moved West and legislated in their own favour. Clashes are rare in *When Cultures Clash*; it is really about what happens when cultures have been stepped upon and are then given redress by conciliatory governments.

Friesen aptly concentrates on "schooling and cultural identity." For four of the above groups (the Métis' goal now is integration), it is incorporating education curricula into their own cultural context that has allowed them to retain their culture, despite historical setbacks. For educators, multicultural education may mean dealing with various ethnic groups simultaneously, teaching just one large

group, or training individuals so that they can teach in their own ethnic communities.

Friesen spends some chapters discussing education models and principles, but as an aid for educators this book lacks depth. Discussion is basically description of theories with no substantive examples. It also tends to be repetitious, at times relying on clichés, such as "be yourself," "accept each student as an individual," "encourage children to learn about and appreciate the unique contributions of their own culture." Nevertheless, the account of the five groups' histories and their cultural survival (not all is optimistic) makes interesting reading. □

REVIEW

Endless radiance

By Fred Cogswell

Piling Blood, by Al Purdy, McClelland & Stewart, 144 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 7213 9).

The Whole Night, Coming Home, by Roo Borson, McClelland & Stewart, 120 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 1579 8).

The Art of Darkness, by David McFadden, McClelland & Stewart, 136 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 5512 9).

AL PURDY'S poetic imagination is stimulated by incidents that bob up in his memory and by thoughts of mankind's historic and prehistoric past that come to him from his reading and his travels.

The first stimulus is of least importance, resulting in poems (for example, "A Typical Day in Winnipeg," "My Cousin Don," "In Cabbage Town," "Doug Kay," and "Piling Blood") that occasionally surprise by shock or clever whimsy but are too facilely anecdotal to make a lasting impression.

When, however, Purdy stands on "a place of power" associated with something great in the past of this planet or when he encounters something in the writing of his peers that strikes a spark in him, his empathetic imagination is kindled and his technical skill finds words with which to express the almost inexpressible.

A case in point is "Menelaus and Helen". Although in this dramatic monologue, Purdy never catches the magic of his epigraph ("Was this the face that launched a thousand ships/ And burned the topless towers of

Ilium"), he does manage to bring that magic down to earth in a wiser, more convincing dramatic monologue than can be discovered anywhere in Christopher Marlowe's work. Not only is Purdy's technique superb throughout, but the last line, "and no one comes this morning with my breakfast," is, in context, the equal of Wordsworth's celebrated line in "Michael," "And never lifted up a single stone."

Other poems are eloquent tributes to the imaginative function that reading plays in Purdy's poetry. As he writes in "Voltaire":

*Their moment of delight returns
again to us in books
and the memory of very old men
who were babies long ago
the words travel like fireflies
in starlight & sunlight & moonlight
and twinkle from their graves.*

Purdy's mystical sense of the omnipresence of all times at any time is strongest whenever he finds himself where great events bearing on conscious life had once occurred. There past worlds co-exist in a world of wonder with his own, and the result is such poems as "Lost in the Badlands," "Seal People," "Iguana," and "Adam and No Eve." What that means in terms of living is perhaps best expressed in lines from "Man Without a Country":

*There is no immunity for place and
time
and something grows inside if you feel
it
and something dies if you don't
an exaltation
when I know if anyone could ever
know
what must escape telling and become
feeling alone*

and in "Time Past/Time Now":

*Coming alive at the womb's doorway
we inherited everything — sun, moon,
all: and resent knowing more than we
know,
the dictatorship of the senses enough
for now — : then the rare arrival
of something entirely beyond us,
beyond this repeated daily dying,
the singing moment —*

There are more than enough "singing moments" in *Piling Blood* to make this book a major event in the publishing history of this decade.

Roo Borson's *The Whole Night, Coming Home* is divided into two parts, "Flying Low" and "Folklore."

"Flying Low" is a series of vignettes, neat, clear, economical, splendidly balanced and sane, but not devoid of feeling and lyricism. The opening of a semi-dedicatory poem, "Lines for Kim," is typical of the 32 other poems in the first section:

*Here on the hill as the lights begin to
come on —
that sweet dampness next to the earth*

*and the haunted feeling
that it's all built on nothing,
hills gouged with the light of gas
stations and streets,
those luminous grey crosses that taper
into the distance.*

*Tonight I can't look at you
without seeing how our faces are put
together*

*of weakness. And beyond that
of rock dust, finally,
of extinct shapes no longer known in
the earth.*

Although these poems are remarkably unified in sensibility and technique, the effect is not one of monotony, thanks to Borson's subtle variation of the relationships dealt with from poem to poem.

The same cannot be said, however, with respect to the second section, "Folklore," a series of prose-poems bound together by love, by gentility, and by the beauty of associated objects and seasons. Its effect to me is blunted by greater obsessiveness, by a lack of antinomies, and, above all, by a kind of cloying overstatement in which everything becomes, after a few minutes' reading, just a bit too much. The following passage from "Summer's Day" will illustrate what I mean:

*The air would be traversed by strange
scents emanating from night-blooms,
and the passion vine broadcast for miles
around its coded message, wound along
the trellis. The first dangled, frost with
silver and fur, and inside: a smile of
translucent teeth, a mouth full of smug-
gled jewels. The honeysuckle threaded
everything with white and yellow
trumpets, evaporating in a sweet gas. So
sweet that an inhalation inflames the
nostrils and after that is no longer
detected.*

All the same, Roo Borson has splendidly fulfilled the promise I saw in her work when I published *Landfall* in 1977. *The Whole Night, Coming Home* ought to put her firmly in the front rank of younger Canadian poets.

Since, in a reckless moment, T.S. Eliot wrote that "Art should be confused to express confusion," there has been no lack of disciples to further this aspect of his creed. Some distortion of order is, of course, allowable in a world as confused and threatened as our own, and, although I am repelled by it, the use of black humour in David McFadden's "Pinochio," "Greaseball," "The Rat," and "Kitsilano Beach on a May Evening" is sustained, skilful, and warranted by circumstance. It applies the logic of an earlier, more optimistic time to our epoch ironically, and in so doing illuminates our present disorder by placing it within a logical pattern. What I do object to in McFadden's *The Art of Darkness* is the lack of progression that he deliberately creates in his most ambi-

tious poems, "Night of Endless Radiance" and "Country of the Open Heart." Here he is careful to follow the advice that in his very fine "Letter to my Father" he gives to his creative-writing students:

*The students want to know how to
become poets, how to write poems.
I tell them to think of a line, any line,
and write it down.
. . . And if
these two lines suggest a third put that
down too, and a fourth,
and a fifth, as long as you're not forcing
your mind to be
involved in what you're doing.*

McFadden not only does not force his mind to be involved in what he is doing, but he actually consults the *I-Ching* as to the length and number of sections the process should take. The result, paradoxically, makes the title of "Night of Endless Radiance" very apt indeed. There is "endless radiance" in the lines and in isolated passages, but the direction to which they tend remains as black as nowhere. Since I have devoted my own life — as have generations of writers and scholars before me — to an attempt at ordering chaos, I find McFadden's deliberate refusal to play my game exasperating.

At the same time, however, I must admit that in terms of texture, tonal effect, instinct for the right word, imaginative grasp, and humanity, McFadden is not only my superior but the superior of most of his Canadian contemporaries as well:

*And people you have never met
are living their lives in remote Tibetan
villages
waiting for you to pass through and be
transformed
by their overwhelming beauty, a
beauty
only you can see, so that your life
becomes
beat like light passing through a black
star,
a warp that will ache and ache forever
and you can watch movies every day
and scan crowd scenes in slow motion
and you will never find yourself
or anyone else you could possibly be
for you are trapped in the trap you set
for others
like someone trying to swim
Lake Ontario
with Lakes Erie and Huron strapped
to his back, poetry
a process for stabbing the heart with
heart-felt lives
of icy darkness, poetry the art of
darkness,
and tiny people swim for the furthest
shore
in the red glow of a Canadian sunset,
each frantic swimmer and entire
animal
hoping not to die and laughing
playfully
as his or her lungs fill with real blood*

*along the length of passion's peach-
strewn beach.
And in this spot three thousand years
ago stood a
beautiful naked boy, a string of fish in
each hand.*

These three volumes are as different as the backgrounds and personalities of their authors, but they are one in that they are examples of the caring concern that poets give to words. They try to express struggles with the value and mystery beyond words that give energy and purpose to every particle of consciousness. □

REVIEW

Bad habits

By Elwin Moore

Dancing Nightly in the Tavern, by Mark Anthony Jarman, Press Porcépic, 111 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88878 229 2) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88878 228 4).

A Local Hanging and Other Stories, by Kent Thompson, Goose Lane Editions, 147 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 86492 037 7).

Swim For Your Life, by Don Bailey, Oberon Press, 140 pages, \$21.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 546 5) and \$11.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 547 3).

HERE ARE the names of the heroes in Mark Jarman's strikingly good first collection of stories: Trask, Mote, Hank, Luke, Ray, Jankovitch. Their buddies are Willy, Woody, Mohawk, Ironchild. These are truckers, roughnecks, roofers, unemployed drifters, rueful sufferers — men who would rather screw than drink, rather drink than fight, rather fight than take insult, rather take insult than discuss futons. They move through alcohol as through weather: it's a constant. No consciousness-raising for these cowboys.

The nine stories here are mostly bleak-hearted, though sexual joy provides two happy endings. Jarman is a vivid describer of the physical. He has a sharp, sardonic sense of humour, a good ear for speech, and a young poet's persuasive fondness for exuberant language: "All real pleasure demands decibels: crystal meth out at Skelly's truckstop, V-8's, carnal screamers, blasting skeets into powder with an over- under, or a certain Louis Armstrong solo. . . ." His prose, like Hemingway's, aspires mightily toward toughness and knowingness. And Jarman's success

(like Hemingway's) has its costs: pleasure in cruelty, a measure of snobbery toward the weak, and the tension of upholding an impossible ideal of masculine authority.

I like Jarman's titles. In "Goose, Dog, Fish, Stars," the hero is misunderstood twice: first by a pair of homosexuals in a Port Angeles bar, soon after by police, who arrest him as a burglar. The admirably written title story, set in Alberta, turns on a soured reunion and a violent death; it's shot through with a sense of cold and diminishment. "Jesus Made Seattle Under Protest" has heedless death in it, too, and an out-of-work, out-of-money hero who concludes by saying: "There is no brotherhood. You walk the planet and hammers dance off heads and the women try to cure us at home."

The book's most remarkable story — also its most lyrical, intense, ambitious, and technically accomplished — is "Cowboys Inc.," about two men and a woman on a self-destructive drive through the U.S. West and Midwest. It's like a condensed, jangled, dark-spirited slice of *On the Road*. There's the same young-hunger for speed, the same impulse to swallow a continent whole. Here Jarman pushes beyond rueful realism toward the mythic. The language is heightened, poeticized. A narrator's voice sneaks deftly in alongside the hero's voice. "Why this worship of death and youth, of carelessness?" it asks. Jarman jimmies time off its tracks at once to give us present and recent past — no deep past, no future. The writing is showy and harsh; it jolts and pleases.

Kent Thompson's people aren't mythic at all. On the contrary, he has a special gift for drawing characters as small as life. Most of the 16 stories of *A Local Hanging* are monologues, his subjects (women as often as men) speaking to themselves and to the reader in the flat, authentic accents of ordinary longing, guardedness, and resignation. That sounds a bit dreary, but in fact Thompson is a shrewd, supple writer, and much fun to read.

Here is Harry, the overweight, soon-to-die hero of the book's first story, turning his mind to a woman he had known briefly and intimately among the sacks of a feed mill: "His heart hurt, remembering her, because he kind of liked her. She liked to loll around in lewd postures." In two quick sentences Thompson achieves an elegant deflation, captures the strength and ox-headedness of sexual ardour, and holds Harry up to blended scorn and sympathy. Another piece begins: "I and two other guys — I've known them for years, they're stupid — were in the business of robbing motels." Who could

resist a story that starts so well?

Fredericton, where Thompson teaches, is the unobtrusive setting for most of these fictions. The book's first half consists of eight linked stories involving figures — and some events, too — from Thompson's 1980 novel, *Shackling Up*. It's a spin-off series, but a good one, with only a hint here and there (in the monotone of "The Keynote," for example) of spin-off fatigue. These stories build on one another, jar against one another. Seven characters speak in turn; most are in the process, clear-eyed or self-deceiving, of settling for less.

Settling for less is a Thompson pre-occupation. He is astute on rationalizations, on the way people wallpaper over the cracks in their lives and hope to make the wallpaper last (good value) a lifetime. Thompson's own instinct (a Canadian instinct, some would say, although he was born in Waukegan, Illinois) is to cut things down to size. It shows in his titles — "A Local Hanging," "A Blunt Affair." Even armed robbery of motels can dwindle, in Thompson's world, into a sort of bad habit, a weekend duty.

Some story-tellers confess, or seem to; Kent Thompson is of the opposing school, the ventriloquists. With every appearance of ease, he creates here

believable voices for a bright teenager named Sharalee, a 62-year-old widow reluctantly acceding to a second marriage, and a 19th-century New Brunswick storekeeper.

It is the storekeeper who pronounces the wonderfully vigorous, sonorous short sentences of "A Local Hanging." The horror of its events — incest, rape, murder, lynching — gains resonance from its setting, a time when people believed (the storekeeper's measured, earnest manner makes this clear) in God, judgement, history, and themselves. An incidental reward of this story is the pleasure of chancing, in modern fiction, upon a voice that is innocent of irony yet not pitiable. It's like a tonic.

Don Bailey's *Swim For Your Life* is a book governed, and over-governed, by a therapeutic ideal. Its eight stories form a near-novel, consecutive episodes in the life of Wayne Maitland, a 42-year-old Toronto script-writer and college teacher. Eight months before the book opens, Maitland's wife has died of cancer. When we first meet Maitland, he is wearing the dead woman's housecoat — "the last thing that belonged to his wife that he has not given away or thrown out." In the book's first six-and-a-half pages — this is plot development with a vengeance — Maitland's son has a nightmare, his pregnant teenage daughter overdoses on Valium, and his terminally ill father, long estranged, signs himself out of hospital and heads for Maitland's apartment.

The stories that follow are about reconciliation, family tenderness, and growth out of mourning. This sounds laudable. But Bailey is too much in sympathy with his hurt hero, and too little concerned for his readers. The voice of the book is flat and static — not surprising, perhaps, for Maitland is withdrawn by nature ("A drinking pal once nicknamed me The Shadow"), and with good reason depressed. And in the manner of the 20th-century depressed, Maitland keeps scrutinizing his own mental state, as one might check and re-check the oil in a suspect car engine. Bailey gives bald reports:

She has seen his stiff self. He would like her to know that he's a dancer too. That, on occasion, he can leap into the air and be suspended in happiness. He would like her to know that he is like everyone else, a mixture of emotions struggling for balance. Sometimes raging and at other times overcome with unexplainable serenity.

This is Bailey's sixth book. I have read earlier work in which he was more pleasantly willing to let readers draw their own conclusions. Each story here ends patly on a note of healing. And he has welcomed into his prose the language of

the T-group, which shrinks what it touches. It is only fair to add that parts of this book are genuinely moving, especially flashback scenes between Maitland and his stricken wife. Sometimes, too, a sentence rises out of Bailey's workaday paragraphs with a force that surprises. When Maitland finds his dying father bleeding: "The brown stains on his father's pyjamas blend with the dark carpet and give the impression that the man is disappearing in stages." □

REVIEW

Pandora's shoebox

By Aritha van Herk

It's Late, and All the Girls Have Gone: An Annesley Diary, 1907-1909, by Kathleen Cowan, Childe Thursday, 380 pages, \$15.00 paper (ISBN 0 9691203 7 0).

A Fair Shake: Autobiographical Essays by McGill Women, edited by Margaret Gillett and Kay Sibbald, Eden Press, 425 pages, \$16.95 paper (ISBN 0 920792 31 6).

THESE ARE what I have come to call "shoebox books," books that come out of shoeboxes and must ultimately disappear into them again. They are of limited interest and locality, their only possible audience those people who have some inevitable connection with the detritus of a particular place and history. Their value as such is limited, and whatever real truths they contain, they are unlikely to appeal to a general audience. I find this genre of books not so much deplorable as wasteful. The ransacking of shoeboxes is nothing so evocative as Pandora's box; instead, there is a musty predictability to the quality of reminiscence contained within.

Kathleen Cowan's *Annesley Diary, It's Late, and All the Girls Have Gone*, is a three-year diary kept during the author's stay in the women's residence of Victoria College at the University of Toronto. It dates from 1907 to 1909, and although an optimistic reader might think that it could reveal what it was like to be a female student at Victoria College during Edwardian Toronto, one is quickly disillusioned. Cowan's diary reveals her to be a silly, simpering girl, whose attendance at college certainly does not appear to be an intellectual exercise, but a social gambit. The diary recounts tea and visits *ad nauseum* and the intense philosophical questions that Miss Cowan confronts have mostly to

SEAL WARS

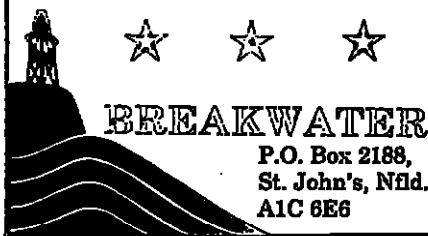
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Janice Henke

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do with getting one's handkerchiefs the right colour, with eating too much candy, and with whether or not a young woman should indulge in the double wickedness of dancing and playing cards.

It is clear from these diaries that Kathleen Cowan was a privileged young woman whose stint at Victoria College consisted of the proper social foreplay to marriage. She is always handing in her exercises late and seldom refers to anything that she might be learning. Her professors are described as a matter of personal interest rather than for their intellectual contributions or ideas. Most consuming of all is the question of *men*. "The marriage question" preoccupies these young women, and the burning issue of their intense late-night discussions is: "What would you do if someone proposed to you suddenly?" My suggestion would be to say yes, quickly. Racing paragraphs on the qualities of various young men, interspersed with recipes for Boston Date Cakes and Coffee Cream, hardly make for satisfying reading. This book should have stayed in its shoebox.

In comparison, *A Fair Shake* offers intellectual relief. It is a compilation of autobiographical essays by 32 women at one time or another associated with McGill University, including the likes of Constance Beresford-Howe, Claire Kirkland-Casgrain, Greta Hofmann Nemiroff, and Laura Sabia. Truly, the 32 lives recounted here have all the elements of intelligent women battling a social environment that is not readily willing to accept them, and the stories of their success in the face of difficulty are inspiring. Nor are they all, by any means, rabid feminists; they are simply women who have worked hard and succeeded in various fields. They represent a wide range of wealthy and poor women, of scientists and humanists, and in that respect this collection is satisfying.

Its weakness is the stylistic and structural approach that these essays take. If only the editors had encouraged a more imaginative approach than a reminiscent tour of the past. With a few exceptions, these essays maintain a tone that is careful, almost self-censoring. There is no piquancy to these lives. They are careful to acknowledge support ("my mother and father always encouraged me") and not afraid to point out the difficulties they encountered, but there is a diffident coyness to these stories that undermines their implicit strength. In their day, these women were firebrands, world shakers; that their essays give only furtive hints of their passion is disappointing. I am certain that this can be laid in the lap of the shoebox style.

Told to write an autobiographical essay recounting their lives, most people will succumb to: "I was born . . . I grew up . . . my mother and father . . . my husband . . . my children . . . and now I look back and feel satisfied with what I did." The few essays that manage to break through this congested approach are refreshing. Greta Chambers is hard-hitting, Claire Kirkland-Casgrain reveals an interesting energy, Myrna Gopnik is unusual, Victoria Lees is sensitive, and Laura Sabia downright fierce. To some extent, they redeem the book, perhaps because they are more comfortable with writing than their fellow contributors.

Ultimately, this book is a reminder that despite their success, women are undervalued, underestimated, and still struggling. The achievements of those who succeed are in spite of a discriminatory system. The real political content of this collection is excellent; it's unfortunate that the pervasive style dustballs its inherent strength.

To return to my shoebox metaphor: the habit of searching for books in our attics is one that I think needs to be controlled. Both shoebox content and shoebox style need to be relegated to the dustbin. □

REVIEW

Of dogs and men

By I.M. Owen

Journeys Through Bookland and Other Passages, by Stan Dragland, Coach House Press, 144 pages, \$7.50 paper (ISBN 0 88910 278 3).

THESE ESSAYS — most of them close to being prose poems, a few actually poetry poems — have the effect of a series of connected dreams. Like dreams, they tend to dissolve and drift away if you try to describe them. This makes for a book that's good to read and hard to review.

The title comes from one of those multi-volume sets that were designed to be sold from door to door to otherwise bookless households. This one was Dragland's entire permanent library when he was a child in the Peace River country, and the way in which its contents formed his imagination is the theme, explicit or (more often) implicit, that links the pieces that make up the book.

Two of the first three pieces derive from a poem called "Beth Gélert" by one William Robert Spencer (1769-1834). This tells the familiar story of the

man who comes home to find his baby's cradle empty and his favourite dog lying in front of it with blood on his jaws. Making a hasty deduction worthy of a Scotland Yard bungler in Conan Doyle, the man kills the dog, and then finds under the cradle his infant son, alive and well, and a dead wolf. (Dragland makes it two wolves.)

I don't know the poem, except for odd lines in books of quotations, but it seems that Dragland hasn't looked back at it. The dog was called Gélert, not as he thinks Beth Gélert, which is Spencer's spelling (why the circumflex, I wonder?) of Beddgelert, the name of a Welsh village meaning "Gélert's grave," where the dog's owner, Llewelyn the Great, is said to have remorsefully buried him. (Actually, as Dragland says, the story is found all over; it's centuries older than 1205, when this version dates it.) But for all his vagueness about detail, Dragland puts his finger unerringly on the flaw in the story: where was the baby's mother or nurse? The mother, by the way, was Joan, an illegitimate daughter of Bad King John, so maybe she was out misbehaving in some unspeakable hereditary way; but couldn't the Prince of Gwynedd at least afford to hire a babysitter?

He retells another well-known dog story in "Penelope's Dog," his version of the passage about the hound Argos in Book XVII of the *Odyssey*. This time he evidently has looked back at the original text, since he correctly says that it occupies 37 lines; but he revises it drastically. In this version, the point of which is that Argos was the special companion of Penelope and had no particular interest in Odysseus, the dog goes down to the sea and meets Odysseus just coming ashore. In Homer's version Odysseus doesn't go to his own house till the day after his arrival in Ithaca. Argos is lying on a dunghheap outside the gate, covered with fleas (or ticks, in Lattimore's translation). He isn't strong enough to move toward Odysseus — he's at least 20 years old — so he wags his tail once and dies. He couldn't possibly have made it to the seashore. And the only point in my mentioning this is to demonstrate that Dragland's pieces impel the reader to go nattering on about his subjects. Which is a good thing for a book to do.

I especially like "A Bookland Odyssey," his reminiscence of a term spent teaching at an English grammar school; and, most of all, the tales he improvises for his sons about Stan the Giant, an amiable klutz of inconvenient size. But, as I said at the beginning, it's a hard book to review. To know why I like it, you'll have to read *Journeys Through Bookland* yourself. □

The examined life

The craft of biography requires more than an interesting subject and a skilful writer. It also needs good readers

By Clara Thomas

THE CRITIC Alberto Manguel recently remarked on CBC-Radio's *Morningside* that "Life needs a good editor." He would, I believe, agree with a second statement: "Lives need good writers"; a third: "Life-writing needs good reviewer-critics"; and a fourth: "Lives deserve good readers."

Biographers have often been frustrated by the refusal of critics to examine within the genre the range of aims and techniques that individual works demonstrate. Every biographer has an idea of his subject and of his audience before he or she begins to write; we write for an academic market or a popular one, and often we hope that impeccable documentation will satisfy the academic requirements and that good prose and a good story will, at the same time, make our work popular. We may also direct our writing to special groups — youthful readers or feminists or sports enthusiasts.

Certainly, the first thing that every biographer knows is that he or she could write many different life stories of each subject. Furthermore, every biographer worth his salt knows that there is a multiplicity of choice involved in any one presentation of life; that there is no such thing as a "definitive" biography, that complacent and mistaken accolade of the academic community; that every life is worth a biography if a writer's interest is aroused in its process; and that the lives of certain men and women cry out for repeated "telling" and interpretation — there are 26 biographies of George Eliot, for instance. We also know always that the particular and consciously chosen presentation of any life is determined inescapably by the interplay between the subject's life history and the predilections, cultural milieu, and individual mind-set of the biographer.

Critic-reviewers are often far behind the actual awareness and self-consciousness of practitioners of the craft. Story summaries and a few personal judgements often pass for analytical criticism. The assembling of massive amounts of data, documented

from diaries, letters, and manuscripts (Mark Schorer's *Stclair Lewis* is a horrendous example), especially data dealing with the subject's personal and sex life, draws easy approval, even unto the tiresome "definitive." Many reviewers write of biography as if they were either back in the 19th century with Carlyle's notion of teaching history through the biographies of "great men," or advanced only as far in this century as Lytton Strachey, who is always credited with the debunking of the hagiographical biography in his *Queen Victoria* and with the instituting of the entertaining, revealing — and debunking — biographical portraits in his *Eminent Victorians*.

Just recently, throughout the literary world as a whole there have been enormous strides made in examining, analysing, evaluating, and understanding "life-writing," as the craft has come to be called. The University of Hawaii, in honour of Leon Edel's presence there, founded the journal *Biography* some seven years ago. In its issues repose a great deal of challenging commentary and analysis, providing a critical basis for the practice of life-writing and of life-reading. Scholars such as Marc Pachter in *Telling Lives* and Ira Nadel in *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form* demonstrate and analyse the concepts, theory, and techniques of biographical writing. In Canada the work of academic reviewers such as Carole Gerson (in *Canadian Literature*) and Gordon Moyles (in *Essays in Canadian Writing*) also shows that the scholarly climate of serious investigation and regard for the genre is producing some positive results.

As with all reviewing, the prime requirement for the critic is to review the book the author really wrote and not some other dream-work existing only in the critic's mind. It often helps to look closely at the title — this was not chosen

lightly. Look also at the preface if there is one, for in it the biographer often makes his perspective and intention clear. Elspeth Cameron's recently reprinted biography is called *Hugh MacLennan: A Writer's Life*. The focus on that excellent work is on MacLennan the writer, and its purpose is to document the background and growth of a man to the recognition of writing as his vocation, and then to examine the process of interaction between life and writing throughout a long and continuing career.

In my and John Lennox's *William Arthur Deacon: A Canadian Literary Life* (University of Toronto Press), the focus, as the preface makes clear, is on *Canadian* and *Literary*. Deacon was a man whose obsessive mission was to promote the growth of Canadian literature, its writers and their works. He became and remained for 40 years a focus for the literary community in this country. That was his gift and his achievement and that is what his biographers consciously chose to record.

Marian Fowler's title, *Redney: A Life of Sara Jeannette Duncan* (Penguin), points to its own highly imaginative and fictional qualities by its use of the nickname-persona "Redney" and by the subtitle "A Life," a disclaimer of the authority that "The Life" would imply. Lorraine McMullen's *An Odd Attempt in a Woman: The Life of Frances Brooke* (University of British Columbia Press), signals that book's benignly ironic charm and challenge, for McMullen gives only the facts as she has found them. When there are gaps in the factual material she does not fill them with speculative narrative — the reader may, if he or she wishes, make up the missing parts of the story. The writer refrains.

In fact, Fowler and McMullen are fascinating to read in tandem as illustrating concepts of the biographer's craft that are poles apart. Fowler's work is far closer to Heather Robertson's *Willie: A Romance* (Lorimer), the novel featuring the life of Mackenzie King, than it is to what we have traditionally thought of as biography. She has sub-



sumed her intensive documentation into a highly coloured story that might well be called *Redney: A Romance*. To contemporary scholars, engaged in breaking down the barriers between traditional ways of working at fiction and biography, such a radical piece of life-writing is especially intriguing.

Other writers, Maria Tippett in *Emily Carr* (Oxford), Michael Bliss in *Banting* (McClelland & Stewart), and David Pitt in *E.J. Pratt: The Truant Years* (University of Toronto Press), the first in a two-volume life of Pratt, move more conventionally, judiciously, exhaustively — though always, of course, selectively — within their understanding of their subjects and toward its communication. Pitt, in particular, is the most perfect match of author to subject that I can think of since Donald Creighton took on John A. Macdonald. His own Newfoundland, Methodist, outpost background, his years of immersion in Pratt's life and works that have given him total confidence, and — most of all — his rich, Newfoundland-flavoured prose, make this book an outstanding experience in reading. It is very much "Pitt's Pratt"; the author is as much a presence in the text as his subject. The genial authority of that presence sets up the community of author, subject, and

reader that all biographers devoutly wish to achieve.

Formac's Good Read Biographies, paperback reprints that began in 1983 and now include some 30 titles, demonstrate the range of experience and enjoyment to be found in the genre. The series, which also includes autobiography, diaries, memoirs, and letters, answers many moods. Are you interested in a biographical mystery story? Try Ellen Godfrey's *By Reason of Doubt*, the story of the mysterious death of Cyril Belshaw's wife and his trial for murder in Switzerland. Or in feminism? Carlotta Hacker's *The Indomitable Lady Doctors* will give you biographical portraits of pioneering Canadian women doctors; *Her Own Woman*, by Myrna Kostash and others, provides portraits of 10 contemporary women, a roll-call of feminine achievement from contemporary feminist viewpoints; and Georgina Keddell's *Ma Murray* tells the story of the feisty newspaper proprietor and journalist of British Columbia. Cameron's *MacLennan* is in the series, as are Thomas Flanagan's *Louis "David" Riel: Prophet of the New World* and Mollie Gillen's *The Wheel of Things: A Biography of L.M. Montgomery*. Charles Taylor's *Radical Tories* is an intriguing variation on the conven-

tional collection of biographical portraits, structured as it is around his own quest for understanding of the Canadian conservative tradition.

Something for everybody? Yes, and remember please that the whole enterprise is self-propelling: Lives *do* deserve good readers and critics, and good readers and critics encourage the emergence of good writers to meet their various interests and demands. □

REVIEW

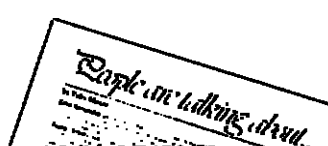
Preaching to the converted

By Marilyn Powell

Women Against Censorship, edited by Varda Burstyn, Douglas & McIntyre, 224 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88894 455 1).

THE TROUBLE WITH the issue of censorship is that it's never ultimately resolved, and the trouble with the nature of pornography is that it's never been absolutely defined. So when the two are

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brought together in a shaky context, social pandemonium is the result. Let me back up a little and sketch the world to which this new book belongs.

In the late '70s, the women's movement began to look hard at pornography, its causes and effects. In the years that followed, there were books — *Take Back the Night*, edited by Laura Lederer; *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, by Andrea Dworkin — and there were films — *Not a Love Story*, produced by Studio D of the National Film Board. Most of the leading stars of feminism — Robin Morgan, Gloria Steinem, and Susan Brownmiller — spoke out in one form or another.

Pornography (let no one mistake it for erotica) encouraged violence against women; it wilfully confused sex with exploitation, intercourse with male domination, love with pain. It was based in hatred and fear, and the only real way to fight the aggression it reflected was to ban its imagery once and for all. By law and by public outcry. There were popular forums and marches as well as attacks on pornographic book and video stores (remember the fire-bombing of Red Hot Video in B.C.?), all in the name of censorship, in the hope that the culture could be changed by expunging sleaze.

Ironically, their energetic attack seemed to generate more sleaze, more violent pornography, as if the pornographers themselves were fighting back with blatant images of torture and bondage and the introduction of snuff movies and kiddie porn. Somehow raging feminists found themselves at raging odds with each other. Somehow those who continued to advocate censorship were soon in league with traditional foes — right-wing groups, staunch con-

servatives, TV evangelists, and the Ontario censor board — while those who defected or began to have doubts or never believed in censorship in the first place were pronounced the enemy.

That is the intense background to *Women Against Censorship*, shaping it, fueling it, inspiring certain of its strengths and also what I think is its essential weakness. In her introduction, Varda Burstyn explains that the approach of all 14 writers, American and Canadian, who wrote essays is personal, partisan, reflecting the experience each of them has had with the subject. They comprise lawyers, anthropologists, sociologists, film-makers, video artists and historians; they are also embattled feminists — at their best, courageous and forceful in the stand they have taken; at their worst, the perpetrators of jargon and diatribe. That is what I mean by weakness. I have to confess that I leapt over horse-choking paragraphs of haranguing academic analysis, even though I was promised by the editor in her introduction that there would be none.

What was most impressive and convincing in the book was also simply anecdotal, demonstrating what it is like to live through a controversy emotionally as well as intellectually. For example, the journalist Myrna Kostash admits that she is one of those who relinquished her old and certain faith in censorship: "Now I cannot present anything definitive or conclusive or *correct* [her italics]; I can only offer my tentativeness, my doubts, my second thoughts so as to, I hope, encourage other women to express all the contradictoriness of our collective thinking and feeling about pornography. . . ."

June Callwood takes the extraor-

dinary step of presenting an apologia ("First, I should get some personal pain out of the way") in her essay, acknowledging that her consistency in opposing censorship has cost her colleagues and friends when it came to the question of what to do about pornography. Women who stood side by side in the early struggles for equal pay, day-care, freedom of choice, and equal rights now denounce each other from opposite sides of the room. As Callwood notes dramatically:

Unhappily, most forums where reasoned discussion of strategies and solutions might take place are soon stampeded by women, often feminists, who show films of men putting meat hooks in women's vaginas or talk about films where men put meat hooks in women's vaginas. Most of the audience erupts like a lynch mob, and those who dare to rise in the tumult to say that censorship isn't the answer are accused of insensitivity or worse.

Obviously, this is a book that exists in a highly wrought state. Clearly, it has a temperature degrees removed from that of the ordinary, unprepared reader's awareness. All the contributors have been arguing, talking, agonizing about pornography long before they took pen to paper. They use feminist terms ("gender relations," "patriarchy," "sexism," "heterosexism"), expect familiarity with feminist concepts, even anticipate shared feminist perspectives. Finally, the question must be raised: who is the book's projected audience?

Was it ever designed to win new hearts and minds, hesitating on the edge of understanding — that vast society of the uncommitted out there, without whom the war cannot be won, with basic consciousness waiting to be raised? Since it so often speaks at fever pitch, I don't

1885: METIS REBELLION OR GOVERNMENT CONSPIRACY?

Don McLean

Long meticulous research has led to new information about the causes of the 1885 resistance in the West. The material was gathered from archives across Canada and from police files by Metis researchers from the Gabriel Dumont Institute.

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believe it could have been. Instead, it reaches out to like minds, to the passionate, even to the sisters who support censorship perhaps, in an attempt to heal the breach and re-enlist the army. It is in full *medias res*. Yet without beginning at the beginning — patiently rethinking, reinterpreting, reintroducing each idea,

accepting the possibility of error — the book as persuader of many is limited to a few.

The solutions it presents are worth considering. The women suggest an exploration of female erotic imagery is in order, that access to the media by feminists is essential (they claim it is dif-

ficult), that education of adults and children is imperative. But who will buy *Women Against Censorship* by this evening, and how many perceptions of reality will be altered? Meantime the pornographers will go on producing apace, and the censors will still miss their mark. □

INTERVIEW

Peter C. Newman

'I don't think financial power was ever in the West. If you're talking about power, as opposed to just getting rich, I don't think it was ever there'

By Doug Fetherling

AT 55, PETER C. NEWMAN, author of such books as *Debrett's Illustrated Guide to the Canadian Establishment* (Methuen) and *Bronfman Dynasty* (McClelland & Stewart) and former editor of *Maclean's*, leads the Canadian equivalent of what Americans call a bi-coastal lifestyle. Six months of the year he and his wife Camilla occupy their renovated Edwardian townhouse in downtown Toronto, from which Newman works as a freelance writer and commentator on economic, commercial, and military subjects. For the other six months they make do with much less space — on a yacht moored in Victoria, where Newman worked on his history of the Hudson's Bay Company, to be published next month by Penguin. It was in his Toronto residence that he was interviewed by Doug Fetherling:

Books in Canada: Is Canada heading for political polarization like Britain's, with

Peter C. Newman



a far left and a far right and not very much in the middle?

Newman: I hope not. Being a part-time resident of B.C., I see the kind of damage that can cause. You have a right-wing and a left-wing party, and every issue gets so polarized that there is no debate. That's why I think that the survival of the Liberal Party is so important. If there were only two parties, the Conservatives would be driven much further to the right and the NDP much further to the left. Then the whole country would run like B.C., which means that it wouldn't run at all. But although I'm a little nervous about it, I don't think it will happen because there is a very strong impulse in Canadians to seek a middle ground.

BiC: What can the Liberals do on a practical level?

Newman: The great task for John Turner is to cultivate that middle ground first by having another Kingston-like conference so that they get not just a new policy but new people to revive the party. Don't forget Lester Pearson was in the same position in 1958; he had only a few more MPs. Within five years he was in power because he had people like Claude Morin, Maurice Sauvé, Bud Drury, Mitchell Sharp, and Walter Gordon, who at that time were young bucks, most of them. They came into the party and revived it.

BiC: But even in 1958 the Liberals were still a national party. Can the Liberals today keep the embers glowing nationally?

Newman: That's a tough one. I think it will be another generation before there are Liberals elected in Alberta or B.C. I think that Turner's personal victory was a fluke. Saskatchewan and Manitoba, that's something else again. But things change very quickly. Who would have guessed Quebec would elect 58 Tories? If you get a combination of factors

going together to produce a credible alternative, and disillusionment with the party in power, then anything can happen. I think that the toughest thing for Turner will be to heal the national party again. And I don't think he can do it. Remember that Brian Mulroney knows how long it takes for public disillusionment to set in, because he's already lived through the process. There's a clue to that in my book about the Diefenbaker years, *Renegade in Power*, published back in 1963. [He reaches for a copy.] I'm writing about how Diefenbaker lost Quebec because he did all the wrong things: "As a matter of fact, Diefenbaker did have one enlightened adviser in the Province of Quebec. His name was Brian Mulroney, and he spent most of the Diefenbaker years as a law student at Laval University. Though only in his early twenties, he was politically mature beyond his years and had a perfect appreciation of Quebec's political aspirations. Unlike most of the other men who had access to the Prime Minister, he was unafraid to be openly critical. It was largely because Mulroney's advice went unheeded that the Tories lost the confidence of Quebec." In the September, 1984, election Mulroney got more votes in Quebec than in Ontario. That's never happened to a Conservative in the history of Canada, including Macdonald.

BiC: As a founder of the Committee for an Independent Canada and a vocal nationalist, aren't you aghast at the call for more and more U.S. investment in Canada?

Newman: Yes and no. Yes, in that I have always maintained that what matters in the economy is who makes the decisions, and if you have ownership that's foreign, then you're going to get foreign decision-makers and decisions that are made in somebody else's national interest, not ours. On the other hand, when

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN REEVES

you have an economy that is in as serious trouble as ours, then it's time to shift your ground and to defend the sovereignty of this country not on an economic basis but on a social, cultural basis — time not to defend the Canadian economy but Canadian society. And so you bring in the money, it creates jobs, but you concentrate on publishing, on communications, on all the things that make up the Canadian identity. On a rational economic basis, there shouldn't be a Canada. Encouraging even more foreign investment is a temporary step that had to be taken. But it's very dangerous to say to Ronald Reagan that we like everything you do.

EC: *Is Canada getting its share of investment capital?*

Newman: At the moment all we're getting is real estate investment, which is not really productive. It's money that is here for security reasons; it's not entrepreneurial capital. Especially German capital. They're afraid of socialism, and they're buying up huge tracts. Texada Island off the West Coast and Niagara-on-the-Lake are just two examples. Two things I would like to see are much more entrepreneurial capital coming in and the possibility of Montreal and Vancouver becoming free ports, like Hamburg and Hong Kong. Such free ports would develop international banking centres to which our banking laws wouldn't apply. One could say, "That means they wouldn't be taxed and therefore they wouldn't give very much back," and they wouldn't. But these big head offices do give a lot of high-grade employment. Hong Kong isn't the answer any more.

EC: *After the next round of recovery is manifest, is it likely that financial power in Canada will resume a westward drift?*

Newman: I don't think financial power was ever in the West. What you had was a rise of fast money doing interesting things, but if you're talking about power, if you're talking about access to bank chairmen, the ability to move things, as opposed to just getting rich, I don't think it was ever there. I think it was just beginning. The next time there will be a chance for more regional distribution of real power, but it hasn't happened yet. When it does, I would give Halifax as big odds as Vancouver. There's a lot of hidden money in the Maritimes. Not just the Jodreys, Sobey's, Camerons, McCains, and Irvings. There are huge amounts of private capital there.

EC: *Looking back now with a year's perspective, what do you make of the reality of Brian Mulroney, as opposed to the promise he held out at the beginning?*

Newman: If you tried to design the ideal

prime minister for this country, you would probably pick a Catholic because that is still the preponderant religious strain. But you wouldn't want a particularly dogmatic Catholic. Also, you'd pick somebody with an English name who's totally at home in French, and you would pick a Mackenzie King-like conciliator whose background was in labour law, because being prime minister of this country really means presiding over special interests and being a broker among them.

You would pick somebody in his 40s who still has scope to learn on the job, which Diefenbaker and Pearson didn't. You'd pick someone with an attractive, intelligent wife because it's very lonely, and you have to have that kind of domestic support. And you would pick somebody who has a sense of humour — you need that because any decision you take makes one person happy and 20 unhappy. In other words, you would pick Mulroney, and I think we've been a terribly lucky country to have him. I'm not saying that he's not made mistakes. But when you look at the alternatives, both in his party and in the Liberal Party, there's no question that he's by far the best. I think it's a bloody good thing, and I think he's going to be there forever. I think you'll have to dynamite him out. □

something quite different from Phillips's meaning and Scanlan heard such a misuse. Phillips was himself uneasy at the possibility that it might be just the kind of missile the denaturalized Australian intellectual would delight in throwing at the Aussie mob. But this misuse, itself a variety of the Cringe, he condemned in advance. "If any of the breed use my phrase for his own contemptuous purposes, my curse be upon him. May crudely-Dinkum Aussies spit in his beer. . . ."

The essay was published some 30 years ago. When reprinted in his *The Australian Tradition* in 1966, he regarded it as dated and something that his younger readers might find quite incomprehensible. The same might be said for its Canadian version, though with Phillips's caveat: "Our satisfaction at our apparent victory over it is sobered by the reflection that there are strains of bacilli which have learned to live with penicillin."

Douglas Cole
Vancouver

GILT BY ASSOCIATION

THE DEATHS OF F.R. Scott and Marian Engel, memorialized in your April issue, are a double blow to admirers of their

LETTERS

Cultural cringe

LARRY SCANLAN'S field note (June/July) on Australian literary culture was an informative and enjoyable piece about a country that possesses a rich literature as well as many points of similarity to Canada. I did regret, however, that Scanlan missed the meaning of A.A. Phillips's unforgettable phrase "the cultural cringe." It is not the "Aussie preference for Foster's ale, barbeques, and horse-racing over any cultured pursuit," but what Canadians have less picturesquely referred to as "the colonial mentality."

The Cringe, Phillips wrote, appeared mainly as a tendency to make needless comparisons to Anglo-Saxon tradition, a trait that crippled critical judgement. A second effect was the estrangement of the cringing Australian intellectual from his environment while he sought fellowship with Bloomsbury or some such centre abroad.

It is possible that "the cultural cringe" has been twisted by some into

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work. Ralph Gustafson's essay about Scott is, however, worse than disappointing: it is a gross disservice to Scott's distinguished career and unique achievements.

Gustafson seems less interested in presenting a balanced account of Scott's diversified activities than in trying to create the impression that he was as involved with Scott as a thorn is with a rose. In the first sentence Gustafson gives us a list of "everybody [who] poured into our small apartment on 168th Street in New York City" in 1959, Scott happening to be part of the presumed congestion. Several paragraphs later we are given another list of party-attenders. One recalls Scott's mocking lines:

The cakes are sweet, but sweeter is the feeling

*That one is mixing with the literati;
It warms the old, and melts the most congealing.*

Really, it is a most delightful party.

Ten lines from Scott's poems are quoted: so are nine from Gustafson's. We learn the exact location of Gustafson's house in relation to Scott's in North Hatley. Even the photograph features Gustafson as prominently as it does Scott. The whole piece is a blatant attempt at gilt-by-association. Gustafson has succeeded in modifying the classic prescription "*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*" to mean "Say nothing about the dead unless you simultaneously puff yourself."

Christopher M. Armitage
Durham, North Carolina

HELP WANTED

WITH THE PERMISSION of Mrs. Audrey Sutherland, I am collecting for publication the letters of her late husband John Sutherland (1919-1956), the Canadian poet, critic, editor of *First Statement* and *Northern Review*, and publisher of First Statement Press books. I would be grateful if any person owning or knowing of letters and other documents would contact me.

Bruce Whiteman
142 Herkimer Street #2
Hamilton, Ontario L8P 2H1

INDECENT EXPOSURES

REGARDING ELEANOR WACHTEL'S report on writers of the West Coast (May), the article is well-written and does justice to its subjects (though certainly doesn't include all of the West Coast notable writers). However, the photographs are neither flattering nor revealing (nor appealing for that matter); Jack Hodgins and P.K. Page appear star-

struck, Jane Rule and Dorothy Livesay look as though they are merely cooperating as subjects, and Phyllis Webb seems rather bored with the photo session. I probably would not have found the photos so disappointing except that I recently viewed a remarkable exhibition of portraits of Vancouver Island writers that included these authors.

It was done by a photographer from Ladysmith, B.C., named Elaine Brière. Brière's photos are not only distinctive in their use of interesting and unusual background, they also convey some of the essence of each writer's personality — an impish grin, a sombre brow, a candid smile, and so on.

Susan Yates
Gabriola, B.C.

POETIC LICENCE

SOME OBSERVATIONS concerning Kathleen Moore's review of *Adam and Eve in Middle Age* by Rona Murray and *Sheba and Solomon* by Karen Mulhallen (March):

I found the long poem by Murray poetically sensitive and effective; in contrast with its eloquent distinction, Moore's review underscores her own inadequacy as a critic and writer. Her writing is marred by awkwardness and clichés. What kind of tree is the "Tree of Life" that "languishes untongued" followed by the tautological "post-exilic?" Can there be a more tasteless and contrived phrase than "... evoking vibration of [Moore's] uvula and soft palate — that is, a resounding snore?" How appropriate are the images of "a flat tire rolling down a gravel road" and "clubfoot iambs" in a review of poetry? Consider also the irrelevant "a wonderful gift for your favourite cabbage-patch doll." Moore is also prone to forced and self-conscious alliteration such as "debilitated didactics," "scribal seabird," and the meaningless "tyrannical trochees."

Moore complains about the "contrivedly archaic language" in Murray's poem. She is apparently unaware that Murray, a former professor of English literature, and erudite in the history of English poetry, derived her archaisms directly from passages by Marvell, Marlowe, Eliot, and Yeats.

As to the poem, *Sheba and Solomon*, Moore finds fault with Mulhallen because "she has passed up a rare chance to explore the political, sexual, and spiritual levels of the encounter." This followed by an extended exegesis of these elements in the Sheba/Solomon relationship, notwithstanding that the story does not have absolute historicity and is biblically freighted with the legen-

dary. Instead of a poem determined by the deliberate limits imposed by the poet's own sensibility, Moore would have Mulhellen fashion, in poetic guise, a scholarly tract stressing political and sexual iconography. There is a touch of arrogance in Moore's "instruction" to an artist as to how the content of her poetic imagery should be shaped.

Christopher Carney
Associate Professor of Art History
Fairleigh Dickinson University
Madison, New Jersey

RECOMMENDED

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

NON-FICTION

Stampede City: Power and Politics in the West, edited by Chuck Reasons, *Between the Lines*. For those who are baffled by the aggressive recentment of many westerners, this warty entertaining book will be a revelation, explaining everything from western separatism to Dome's collapse.

POETRY

Selected Poems 1930-1960, by Richard Outram, Exile Editions. A major poet at the height of his powers, Outram has been shamefully neglected in this country. A cursory glance at two decades of his poetry provides ample reason why he should not be overlooked in the future.

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:

Al. In Crenchoul: Revue de l'Histoire Littéraire du Québec et du Canada Français, University of Ottawa Press.
Alberta's Local Governments and Their Politics, by Jack McLean, Pica Pica Press.
L'Amérique d'Art, par Carmen Marcis, Les Éditions du Preamble.
Amish, by Betty Burkman, Kindred Press.
Apocalypse D. Joyce's The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses, by H. James Fenton, U of T.
April Politics, by Beatrice Cullison, Pennicun Publications (1974).
An Arch for the King, by Michael Hennessey, Ragweed.
Amalgamation, by Gary Harrop, Lancelot Press.
Around the Mulberry Tree, by P. Scott Lawrence, Exile Editions.
Architect: The Evolution of Contemporary Floral Design, by Hal Cook, Prentice-Hall Canada.
Architect, by Jean O'Huigin, illustrated by Barbara Di Lella, B.C. Mo's Press.
Autobiography of Oliver Goldman: A Chapter in Canada's Literary History, Lancelot Press.
Arms With Them to Eat on, by Sara Woods, Macmillan.
Early on a Biography, by Michael Bica, M & S.
Artists, by Charles Bukowski, Page Press.
Art of Western Canada, by Bob Hainstock, Bremer Books.
Arty McKinnon, by John Harris, Repository Press.
Arty McKinnon: Their Curves and Avoidance, by Stephen Hawco, Nick Lyons Books (Hurd).
Assembling Southwestern British Columbia & The Sunshine Coast, by Simon Priest, Douglas & McIntyre.
The Flame of Life, by Robert Early, Ourefours.
Elacé Tici, by David Adams Richards, M & S.
The Elacé Ontario Hemlock, by Donat Hertz, by David Donnell, Cech Hour.
East West of Toronto, ECW Press.
The Earth and the Gifted, by Fred Speed and David Appleyard, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
Canada Among Nations 1934, A Time of Transition, edited

by B.W. Tomlin and M. Molot, James Lorimer.
Canada and International Trade: Conference Papers, Volumes I and II, The Institute for Research on Public Policy.
Canada and the Reagan Challenge, by Stephen Clarkson, James Lorimer.
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Canadian Multinationals, by Jorge Niosi, translated by Robert Chodos, *Between the Lines*.
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Children of the Great Mustang, by Sean Ferris, Black Moss Press.
The Collected Writings of Lord Selkirk: 1799-1859, Volume 1, edited by J.M. Bumsted, The Manitoba Record Society.
The Completely Civil Servant, by G. Arthur Sage, illustrated by Luba Zagorak, Eden.
Contact People for Multilingual Materials in Ontario Libraries, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.
Contemporary Canadian Theatre, edited by Anton Wagner, Simon & Pierre.
Contes pour un autre eel, par Bernard Noel, Les Éditions Preamble.
A Continent Apart: The U.S. and Canada in World Politics, by William T.R. Fox, U of T Press.
Continuous Journey: Social History of South Africa in Canada, by Norman Buchignani and Doreen M. Indra, M & S.

CANWIT NO. 104

AS JOHN OUGHTON points out in his puckish review of *Masquerade: Fifteen Variations on a Theme of Sexual Fantasy*, Pierre Berton (a.k.a. Lisa Kroniuk) may not be the only well-known author who harbours secret erotic desires. Two he suggests are Farley Mowat (*A Whale for the Kissing*) and Margaret Atwood (*The Edible Man*). Contestants are invited to compose other soft-core variations on titles of books by Canadian writers. The prize is \$25. Deadline: October 1. Address: CanWit No. 104, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

Results of CanWit No. 102

IF ONLY BECAUSE we see so many *real* reviews with similar endings, judging the last sentences of reviews of the most loathsome books imaginable proved to be a tragi-comic chore. The winner is John Vardon of Waterloo, Ont., for the following critical summations:

In *A Fantasy of Scissors and Other Feminist Poems* Toni Pike has transcended the bleakness and despair of her earlier volumes, taking instead a decidedly lighthearted look at the derangement, disease, and degradation that have marked her psychological journey from "harness to harness."

Thus, in transforming the title character from a lovable, honey-eating innocent into a shrewd, chain-smoking black-maller who threatens to reveal all about Christopher Robin's homosexuality and Tigger's addiction to amphetamines, *Winnie the Turd* constitutes nothing less than a much needed antidote to the frivolous imagination and childish whimsy of the long-outdated original.

With its 385 colour photos and its wealth of biographical details about the artists, *A History of Ashtray Painting in Canada* is a worthwhile companion to Elmer Stodge's earlier works (*Lawn Jockeys: A Dying Art* and *A Collector's Guide to Nails*), for it also delves with care into a realm that has, inexplicably

enough, been sadly neglected by both scholars and laymen alike.

Honourable mentions:

A satire on coprophagists might in lesser hands not have been to all tastes, but the dark humour of the text combined with the unusual illustrations (many in colour) guarantees that *That's Diana -- I'd Know Her Faeces Anywhere* does not fall between two stools.

— Barry Baldwin, Calgary

With her lesbian mother, alcoholic father, psychic sister, drug-taking friends, house under renovation, and three-legged dog, Huntley doesn't seem to be headed for success at junior high — yet first love conquers all in *Chewing My Toenail Polish*, this fresh, realistic young adult novel.

— Natalia Mayer, Toronto

First The Waste Land, then *The Hollow Men*, now *Sacred Culture: Still Life Forms West of the Rockies*, a must for a privileged few mega-tome collectors, wherein the contemplative musings of B.C.'s cabinet ministers on "The Arts and Our Daily Rituals" are barely restrained between its covers.

— Caroline Woodword, Nelson, B.C.

The Dentist's Drill describes in chilling detail the plight of patients of arthritis victims; never boring, it cuts through the bone to the marrow of contemporary decay, and will touch a nerve in everyone.

— Mark Manson, New York, N.Y.

An exhaustively detailed and thoroughly researched social history of Stayner, Ont., Miss Priscilla Mellon's *Travels in Nottawasaga Township* is "must" reading for anyone with close relatives in the area.

— Jill Browne, Calgary

A must for the adventurous gourmet, the battery of recipes in *1,000 Ways to Cook a Bat* prove that it is in no way a fly-by-night book; on the contrary, I tested three of the recipes — "Master-son Bat" (dipped in Texas chili), "In the Bat of an Eye" (candied eyeballs in plum sauce), and "Baseball Bat" (barbecued and served in a hot dog bun) — and came away with a .667 batting average.

— W.P. Kinsella, White Rock, B.C.

Conversation with My Son, by Maria J. Ardizzi, translated by Coluccio Salustiano, Toma Publishing.
 Copyright, edited by Francoise Herbert, Canadian Library A. 65-1650.
 Celebrations: Traditions of the Canadian Navy, by Greene Arbuckle, Nimbus.
 Out There: 1969 Engagement Calendar, illustrated by Mary Cleo J. Penrice-Hall Canada.
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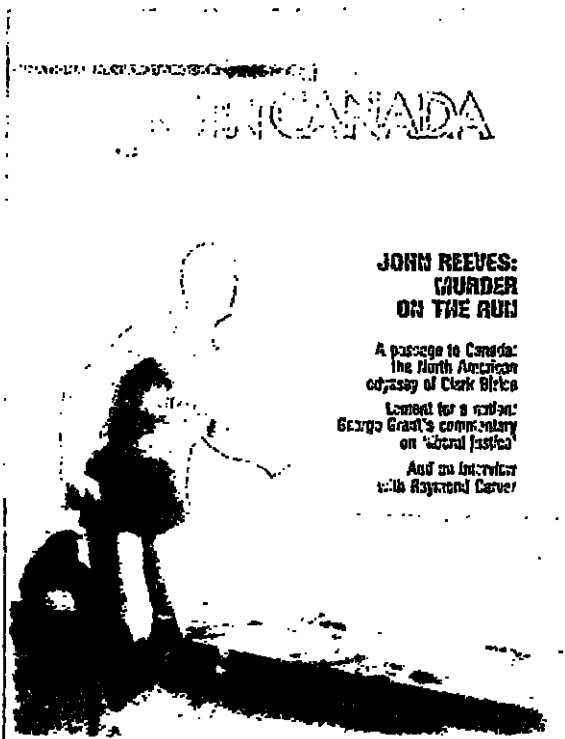
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