

A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

LOOKS IN CANADA

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WHERE THE WORDS
ARE COMING FROM



Canada's literary landmarks
Roy MacLaren on Eldorado Nuclear
And an interview with Marty Gervais

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Prize and prejudice

Beyond state oppression, Nobel laureate Jaroslav Seifert's poetry is withheld from Western readers by a lack of competent translations

THE SWEDISH ACADEMY appears to have taken just about everyone by surprise last fall when it named the 53-year-old Czech lyric poet Jaroslav Seifert winner of the 1984 Nobel Prize for Literature. It was certainly not the first time an "unknown" had been given the prize, but it was the first time in recent years that virtually nothing except a few thin volumes of the new laureate's most recent works was available — and barely available at that — in translation.

Thanks to the vagaries of history and the notorious inhospitality of some regimes to people and ideas that do not directly serve their interests, Toronto has become a good place to track down the works of renegade central and eastern European writers. The Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library has a special collection of Czech and Slovak *samizdat* literature (self-published volumes of typed and bound books circulated inside Czechoslovakia by writers whose work is banned) that includes three of the more than 30 collections of poetry Seifert has published in his lifetime: *An Umbrella from Picadilly*, *The Plague Column*, and *The Arms of Venus*. Toronto is also the home of Seifert's major Czech publisher, a printing and publishing venture called 68 Publishers, run by Zdena Salivarova, who is herself a writer and wife of novelist Josef Skvorecky.

The firm has recently moved from an old brownstone on Avenue Road to a renovated house set in a row of private galleries and expensive shops just around the corner on Davenport Road. When I called on her the day the news of Seifert's award broke, Salivarova was in her third-floor office talking to a pert young reporter from one of the TV networks who, secretarial pad in hand, was asking her who exactly Jaroslav Seifert was. Ranged behind Salivarova on a single shelf were about 150 different brightly coloured paperback volumes, representing the books Salivarova has published in Czech since she founded 68 Publishers in 1972.

Her original idea was to encourage Czech authors in exile to go on writing by publishing and distributing their

work. But as her business and reputation grew, manuscripts smuggled out of Czechoslovakia began arriving in Toronto, and she has since become the regular publisher of at least a dozen Czech writers who are banned at home but still remain there. Salivarova now operates one of the busiest Czech publishing houses in the world; its list — including such authors as playwright Vaclav Havel, novelists Milan Kundera, Pavel Kohout, Ludvik Vaculik, and of course Josef Skvorecky — reads like a *Who's Who* of contemporary Czech literature.

Jaroslav Seifert is one of Salivarova's "domestic" authors. An anthology of Seifert's poetry published this year has proved immensely popular with her customers, who are mostly Czechs living in exile in the West. But her books find their way back to Czechoslovakia too: in 1981, she published Seifert's memoirs, *All the Beauties of the World*, and a year later, a bowdlerized edition of the book — minus nine chapters and several dozen names — appeared officially in Prague to mark the occasion of Seifert's 80th birthday. There is solid internal evidence to suggest that the 68 Publishers' edition was the basis of the Prague edition. Thus Seifert's memoirs have the odd distinction of being one of the few books ever to appear in Czech on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Seifert has had an uneasy and often stormy relationship with the Czechoslovak Communist Party, which has held absolute power in the country since 1948. As a radical working-class youth, he joined the party in the early 1920s but was expelled in 1929 because of a disagreement over its policy toward the arts. By the 1930s he had turned his back on conventional politics altogether to concentrate on his first love — poetry. Ever since then, at key moments in his country's history, Seifert has spoken out loudly and unequivocally in favour of freedom of expression. As the last freely elected chairman of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, he condemned the Soviet invasion of his country, and he was among the first to sign Charter 77, the Czechoslovak human rights manifesto demanding respect for constitutionally guaranteed freedoms.

Seifert's enormous popularity with a wide reading public at home and the fact that his verse is largely apolitical have made it difficult for the regime to deal with him as roughly as it has with so many other non-conformist writers, many of whom, particularly since 1977, have been systematically harassed, jailed, or driven into exile. Until recently, Seifert has generally been treated with a gingerly circumspection. His attitudes have been condemned, but his work has seldom been banned outright.

This attitude has carried over into the regime's embarrassed reactions to the Nobel Prize. Brief notices on the back pages of the daily newspapers were followed a few days later with attacks in the official party newspaper *Rudé Právo*, not on Seifert but on "the attempts by Western journalists to misuse the name of our poet in slanderous attacks on his homeland as part of a psychological war against the countries of socialism." To allay rumours, the Czechoslovak ambassador in Paris denied in *Rudé Právo* that Seifert had ever been harassed in his native land, pointing out that his memoirs had been published, and that in 1981 President Husak had personally congratulated Seifert on his 80th birthday — a gesture that implies something like official blessing.

What the paper did not mention was that several weeks after this gesture — according to Czech underground journalist Jiri Otava — Seifert was visited by two policemen who tried to persuade him to thank Husak publicly and, at the same time, withdraw his signature from an open letter that had been sent abroad. Seifert refused, but shortly afterwards suffered his first heart attack. For the past few years the police also have been routinely confiscating unofficial editions of his books that have turned up during house searches. (The most recent instance of this took place only last August.) And after the Nobel Prize was officially announced, Otava says, two police guards dressed in orderly's smocks were posted outside Seifert's door in the Prague hospital where he was being treated for a heart ailment. They took down the names of all those who wanted to see him and turned away

everyone but his immediate family.

In the end, Seifert's ill health eliminated speculation over whether or not he would be allowed to go to Sweden to receive the prize: it was quite simply out of the question, and his daughter went to Stockholm in his place.

Now that the event of the prize and the prize-giving is over, those who wish to read Seifert's work (and can't read Czech) are thrown back on those few thin volumes of translated verse, at least until translators and publishers manage to come up with more substantial offerings. Meanwhile, there is Ewald Oser's rendition of *The Plague Column*, published in 1979 by Terra Nova Editions, 25 Upper Montague Street, London W. 1, England. The Czechoslovak Arts and Science Society published a bilingual edition of the same book in 1980, translated by Lyn Coffin. It is available from 63 Publishers, 164 Davenport Road, Toronto M5R 1J2.

The most available work by Seifert at the moment — for better or for worse — is a translation of *The Casting of Bells* by Paul Jagasich and Tom O'Grady, published in a second edition of 3,000 copies especially for the post-prize market by The Spirit That Moves Us Press in Iowa City, Iowa. I first read about the volume in *The New Yorker*, which in its finest Talk of the Town style told an intriguing tale of the serendipitous events leading from the "discovery" of Seifert by an American man of letters in the 1960s to the final publication of the translation — which, it is claimed, helped tilt the Swedish Academy in Seifert's favour.

When I recently came across this edition of *The Casting of Bells* in a Toronto

book store, I discovered a set of astonishingly inaccurate translations, some of them so bad they had come unstuck from the original entirely and gone blithely off in their own direction. One example will be enough. The second poem in the book ends with the quatrain:

*She who had so often
Danced on Labut Lake
Has gotten frozen toes
And suffers.*

The giveaway here is "Labut," which in Czech means "swan." The image, then, is not of someone running about in winter improperly shod but of an aging ballerina, and the verse should read something like this:

*And even she, who often danced
on the tips of her toes in Swan Lake
has crippled toes
and is growing old.*

Would that the spirit had moved the publisher to check the translations thoroughly before he put them out. Still, in an oblique way, it is a tribute to the power of Seifert's poetry that something essential can survive even an incompetent translation. The Nobel committee, in a generous appraisal of Seifert's work, concluded: "He conjures up for us another world than that of tyranny and desolation — a world that exists both here and now, although it may be hidden from our view and bound in chains, and one that exists in our dreams and our will and our indomitable spirit." Powerful words, but they help to explain, I think, why Jaroslav Seifert's poems are so important to the people who live in Czechoslovakia.

— PAUL WILSON

Letter from Ballarat

AS I WRITE this in Brisbane, I am suffering through a Queensland winter in which the temperature seldom gets above 26° — Celsius. But I recently came much closer to true suffering in a place called Ballarat, some 80 kilometres from Melbourne. It even snowed while I was there, which can be a bit of a fright when the central heating isn't as refined as an average Canadian might wish.

Ballarat, once best known as a gold-mining town, now makes its way as an agricultural centre and a tourist attraction, complete with a pioneer village. I was braving the cold to attend a conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, a feisty group devoted to maintaining the culture in face of Pommies, Yanks, and anyone else who fails to see the value of the national literature — in other words, not unlike the Association for Canadian and Quebec Literatures. But, of course, there are peculiarly Australian ways of doing things.

Ballarat is not a major city, and there is no university there. The conference was held at a college of advanced education, somewhat like a community college. The reason for this is the old Australian democratic impulse. ASAL (that's "ay-zel," presumably to prevent unfortunate phonetic associations) doesn't want to be a university club but rather to include anyone interested in the subject. Thus, as well as university teachers and students, there were college teachers of various sorts, some high-school teachers, a number of journalists, and even a few just plain folks.

Which certainly suits the anti-academic traditions of Australian literature. There is no Australian equivalent to the Canadian mind-mass known as the Learned Societies — that annual floating dialectic of litcrit, philosophy, history, and the like — and the ASAL group stays resolutely away from the nearest thing, the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association, which holds a sort of mini-MLA. One or two ASALites might give a paper there, but no more.

Of course, it's all right to be anti-academic, but what if you *are* an academic? The answer is a few moments of confusion. As in English-speaking Canada, contemporary critical theory — structuralist, post-structuralist, or whatever — has been somewhat slow to take hold in Australia. But for the last few years ASAL has been consciously attempting to program more papers with a theoretical thrust. A number of the

TO OUR READERS

OUR READERS will notice a number of changes in this month's *Books in Canada*. For one thing, it combines January and February into a single issue. We have decided to reduce the number of issues in a year from 10 to nine so that we will be able to publish more reviews and related features during the remaining months.

Although this change means fewer issues per year, its main advantage is that we now can afford to publish a greater number of pages in each issue of the magazine. This will allow us not only to increase the number of reviews each month but also to comment on more books while they are still current, rather than spreading relatively fewer reviews throughout

the year. In addition to columns, departments, feature articles, and interviews, future issues will include an expanded mid-section, with brief critical notices of many more books than we previously had been able to review.

These additions to the content have been accompanied by some changes in format and typography that, we hope, will reflect the improving prospects both of the magazine and the readers it serves. Together they combine to ensure that we may continue to provide everything you have come to expect from *Books in Canada*. We think you will agree, however, that now we are able to bring you even more. □

presentations in Ballarat had at least a few moments of this, and although some made complaints about "abstruse baffle-gab," they were well-received.

There were three papers that emphasized post-structural theory; interestingly, they included the two foreigners giving papers, one American and one Canadian. But the Australian was probably the most important. Andrew Taylor teaches at Adelaide University, but he is best known as a poet and at one time a member of the Australian Literature Board (in some ways like the writing section of the Canada Council). His work with deconstructive readings of prominent Australian poets such as Judith Wright and A.D. Hope could do much to make such theories acceptable in the Australian context.

The American, Brenda Lyons, who gave a complex and fascinating analysis of Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip*, provides another side to the picture. In her examination of writing by Australian women her emphasis is *women* rather than Australian, and she would probably admit to knowing more about Adrienne Rich than Patrick White. But she is not just one more American imperialist, such as those who turn our Margaret Atwood into another Yankee feminist. For one thing, she is studying Australian in Australia, with a keen awareness of what that means, and yet she admits that she knew almost nothing about Australian literature when she arrived. She is like a number of other graduate students from around the world that I met at the conference — students of English in Belgium, Germany, Yugoslavia, Italy — or even China — who decided to combine further study with the Australian experience.

One other difference I noticed is that the traditions of Australian literature are much closer to literary journalism than to academic journals. The editors of the Oz equivalent of *Books in Canada*, the *Australian Book Review*, were prominent at ASAL, and one of them, John Hanrahan, who holds no academic position, gave a paper. (I wonder if similar Canadian rituals would make room for the academically unanointed.)

Among ASAL people I usually find at least a minimal knowledge of Canadian literature, often much more. One of the prime organizers of ASAL, Alan Lawson, just returned from Canada and intends to take an extended study leave there in the near future. Two of the greatest boosters of things Canadian, both prominent at Ballarat, are the poets Tom Shapcott and Judith Rodriguez. They first went to Canada when Shapcott won the Canada-Australia prize, and have since made more excursions. It

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is interesting how valuable has been simply sending a Canadian writer to Australia one year and vice versa the next. These individual writers have established impressive connections, both with other writers and with academics. Now that Shapcott is director of the Australian Literature Board, the Oz side of the administration of the award, it will no doubt become still more important.

Probably the best parts of an ASAL

gathering are the least serious. For example, the parody night, in which tremendous efforts and skill go into making monkeys of famous Australian writers. Or, this year, the melodrama. *The Lost Child*, which incorporated all the great Australian clichés, from dingos and bushrangers to D.H. Lawrence and Frieda. And then, at the conference banquet, the Frank Moorhouse Perpetual Ballroom Dancing Competition.

In many ways, the atmosphere of the

conference was established at the beginning, when the Australian Literature Society gold medal was awarded to the poet Les Murray. A very large man, he seemed to remember the recent Olympics in Los Angeles, where the Australian super-heavyweight lifter, Dean Lukin, won the gold medal. Like Lukin, Murray said few words, just held the medal above his head. How unliterary. How Australian. How appropriate. —TERRY GOLDIE

ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Begging the answer

If the prime minister addresses the problem of unemployment, to what destination should he address it?

By Bob Blackburn

WHEN I WAS in high school, I had a teacher who was given to shouting at students who were exchanging whispers, "Shut up, or either that, get out." There was another who always put an extra *n* in *dictionary*.

Both of them taught English, among other subjects, and they weren't all that bad. That was more than 40 years ago, in a suburb of Ottawa. There was another English teacher, an elderly (it seemed to me then) spinster who, according to school gossip, had had a tragic love affair with Rupert Brooke. I was never able to substantiate that, but it might have accounted for the fact that she had a passion for the English language that probably should have been x-rated. She was wonderful, and more than made up for the other two. And there was a fourth who made Latin *fun*, at least for one term.

I think of the four of them frequently when I am writing these columns and bemoaning the quality of the teaching of English today. I imagine the first two would be considered very good now. I doubt that there are many like the third left. As for the fourth, well, do the high schools even teach Latin any more?

I wish there had been a fifth: one who could have made Greek enjoyable for a year. The tiny glimmering of Latin I absorbed in those months has been a constant help; a bit of Greek would have made life even better. Best of all, though, would have been a year of *language*.

That is a serious suggestion. Comparing languages can fascinate a student who might shy away from the prospect of a course in Latin or from dry

references to etymology in English classes. And the traveller who knows the Latin *coquina*, for instance, might feel equally at home in a Vancouver kitchen, a Montreal *cuisine*, an Acapulco *cocina*, or a Naples *cucina*. (*Kitchen* underwent the most changes, having come by way of the Anglo-Saxon *cycene*.) There's something very satisfying about looking into these relationships, and I think such a course, well taught, would be invaluable in stirring the interest of high-school students in their own language.

The question of who would devise such a course and who would teach it is another matter. Since even English courses are now being taught by teachers who themselves have not been adequately taught, perhaps my suggestion is impractical.

DONALD J.C. PHILLIPSON of Carlsbad Springs, Ont., tells me I was wasting space in my October column when I fretted over *compared with* and *compared to*. "A simple syntactic rule suffices," he writes. "There are exact synonyms for the two most common synonyms of *compare*, viz. *contrast* and *liken*. Substitution of either suggests the correct proposition [sic], as in *contrasted with* and *likened to*."

I do not propose to waste much more space on the matter, and I think that this is more a question of diction than of syntax, but I appreciate the facility of his suggestion and pass it along for your consideration. *Likened to* I like, but I suspect that as many people would choose the wrong preposition with *contrasted* as do with *compared*.

JUST BECAUSE it grates on my nerves, I am going to complain once more about

journalists who do not understand what *begging the question* means but go on using it anyway. It is English for *petitio principii*, and it refers to the fallacy of basing a conclusion on an unproved premise. It is constantly misused by people who think it means *raising the question* and who fail to realize that they are displaying ignorance, not erudition.

I would also like to plead with our new crop of MPs to stop addressing problems, and remind them that to address something is to direct it. I don't understand the member who will say, correctly, that he would like to address a question to the prime minister, and in the next breath ask the prime minister to address the problem of unemployment. This, of course, raises (not begs) the question: to what destination should he address it?

I would like to address myself to the relatively recent epidemic of abuse of *plus*, but what use is there in pointing out that it does not mean *and*, and that it may be a preposition, an adjective, an adverb, or even a noun, but that it is *not* a conjunction.

A scant couple of years ago, I thought that the trend toward its misuse might still be young enough to be reversible. It isn't, because some of the shoddier advertising copy writers have fallen in love with the word: "Plus, you get this bonus set of 48 lifetime-sharp pickle forks . . ." And when those yahoos set their sights on a word, you can consider it permanently debased.

At the rate this is happening, I expect it to be a matter of months before *plus* replaces *and* altogether, and a new generation starts to grow up believing *and* is short for *anode*. (You may want to think about that one for a minute.) □

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As for me and my house

From the Bay of Fundy to the Gulf Islands, a survey of Canadian writers offers some home thoughts from home

BEVERYONE HAS TO live somewhere. But writers — being writers — aren't content to leave it at that. Recently, *Books in Canada* presumptuously sent around a blank piece of paper with the heading, "Why I Live Where I Live," and invited some well-known Canadian writers to inhabit the white space beneath. Most gladly did so, and we found that there is an organic connection between work-place and work.

Of course, some writers can't live anywhere without dreaming of faraway places with strange — or at least different — sounding names. When she lived in Liverpool, N.S., fiction-writer Veronica Ross (*Fisherman*, Pottersfield Press) felt "a sense of alienation, a

feeling of being perhaps in exile. But from where? My family came to Canada when I was a young child. We moved around a lot." She "used to draw the drapes and pretend I was in Montreal or Toronto." Now living in Kitchener, Ont., she has "fond and deep feelings about Nova Scotia. Feeling a bit disoriented in a place which was once so familiar. Maybe I need to feel 'the stranger' in order to write? We'll see."

Out on Vancouver Island, the poet Joe Rosenblatt (*Omni-bus*, Black Moss) sometimes gets "rushes of Toronto but this only happens when I'm asleep. And it usually takes the form of a hot smoked meat sandwich . . . on real rye bread . . . sweet or hot mustard . . . and a genuine dill pickle is usually asleep in the background." In Rosenblatt's view, the village of Qualicum Beach "needs a deli like Switzers. . . ." Still, the place has its compensations: "The fishing is fantastic and nobody gives a damn who the hell you are, and furthermore there's no bloody distractions so that the only thing you can do is write, contemplate the 'fearful symmetry' of trees, and at times think of fresh ling cod."

Kay Hill, the children's writer (*Glooscap and His Magic*, McClelland & Stewart) thought that she was going "to escape the distractions of city life and have more time for writing" when she moved to Ketch Harbour, N.S.

As it turned out, I grew so fond of village life, so caught up with house and garden care, so interested in dogs and cats and flowers and woods, not to mention an active social life, work somehow got overlooked. In 15 years, I only managed to write and publish one young people's biography, a few radio plays, a few articles and stories for magazines. I begin to think I ought now to escape to the city, to avoid the distractions of country life.

The comic novelist Donald Jack (*The Bandy Papers*, Doubleday) likes to get to know a place — but not too well, at least not so well that he is content to stay there all his days:

I always research the volumes of *The Bandy Papers* quite deeply; looking around Russia, for instance, for the three or four chapters located in that country. Similarly, I came to Lindsay eight years ago to get the feel of a small town in preparation for the fifth book in the series, *Me Too*, which is mainly set in the fictitious town of Gallop, Ont. But this is the only example of an organic connection between work and where I live, except for the obvious one of residing where the work is, like the many years I lived in Toronto where my publisher was and where the radio and TV centres were — I had 39 TV and 18 radio plays produced over the years.

I feel it is now time to move on, as I have lived in Lindsay now for eight years, and my house is presently up for sale. . . . mostly because I feel I am getting, in the words of W.S., "Stale, flat, and unprofitable." I have never felt the need to put down deep roots in a community, but quite often the need to shake myself up with a dramatic, sometimes quite stressful change of scene, as this seems to revive a certain drive and enthusiasm.

By contrast, Don Domanski writes his poetry (*The Cape Breton Book of the Dead*, House of Anansi) in Wolfville, N.S., "because it's home. This is where my family has lived for about 200 years, where I was born and raised. Also because



DRAWING BY JACOBSON FERNANDEZ

of the rich history of the place, the land, and the people. The Atlantic too plays a major role. I always feel a bit uneasy being away from the ocean for any length of time."

Strategically based in Sackville, N.B., near the Nova Scotian border, Douglas Lochhead (*The Panic Field*, Fiddlehead) also has historical motives for staying put:

New Brunswick and the Maritimes have been part of me for more than 50 years, from the time I was christened in Fredericton at the age of two months to every boyhood summer on the Bay of Fundy until I arrived in Sackville to live permanently in 1975. I say the Maritimes almost in the same breath because there were seven years in Halifax with my Cape Breton wife and my Halifax daughters. The Maritimes are Canada's real East, and in their own dignified way they are now in the midst of a renaissance. Watch for it.

Arriving in Sackville after 15 years in Toronto was easy. I stepped into a very different life without shock, without tremor. I like Toronto but I love this place. Ten minutes to the Fundy, 15 to the Northumberland Strait, and five minutes to the subtle, looming presence of the Tantramar Marshes. I began writing poetry and prose about the Tantramar before I left Toronto and have felt secure here about life and writing ever since. Yes, as I feel it, there is an organic relationship between the place and me that began with 18th-century ancestors . . . to run and fall face down in the Tantramar Marshes making reverse angles. . . .

Further inland, the writer and publisher Nancy Bauer (*Flora, Write This Down*, Goose Lane Editions) and her husband William arrived in Fredericton like latter-day United Empire Loyalists:

My husband and I came to New Brunswick because we were intrigued by it, by the strangeness of having an alien world, remote and unknown, only a few hundred miles from our home in New England. When we crossed the border for the first time in December of 1964, I felt that I had entered an amazing anti-world, as if I had stepped into my closet and found another house on the other side of the clothes. That sense of the unfamiliar, of the strange — essential to a writer — has never left me. Whenever I go to a new town here, I have the same prickle, as if I had travelled to Yangi-Hissar. Lately, the feeling has extended to the whole of the Maritimes, to finding, for instance, Pointe d'Eglise, an Edenic village with the most astounding church. I cannot think that I could exhaust the places to be discovered.

I stay here for reasons other than the twilight-zone atmosphere — for the serene beauty, for the isolation, and for the writing community, always generous-spirited and encouraging. At "Tuesday Night," an informal writers' group formed in 1967, I found receptive listeners to my fiction, and I found a part of my subject — people telling each other stories. I have often tried to imagine what my life would have been like if we'd not come here. Would I have written? I don't think so. New Brunswick has proved to be an endlessly fertile kingdom for my imagination and its inhabitants an inspiring audience.

The Atlantic provinces seem to produce not only homebodies but enthusiastic newcomers. (Anyone who hasn't lived there all his life is a newcomer.) Réshard Gool, (*The Nemesis Casket*, Square Deal) finds that Prince Edward Island

is the best of known worlds. . . . In Charlottetown the slightest glance, the slightest nuance of speech, or indeed silence, is decipherable, and directly reassuring. But I prefer rural P.E.I. The uneventful quiet stimulates reading and memory, and enables one to write for long stretches, without anxiety or intrusion.

As for the people,

If I've left money or cheque-book at home, Ivan Kennedy, the genial storekeeper in the nearby village of Breadalbane, is unperturbed. "Pay me when you come by next time," he says. If there's a "white-out" and one is trapped on an impassable stretch of winter road, one simply has to reach on foot the nearest farm house to receive overnight lodging or, as we put it, to be "storm-stayed." In this terrifying century that has killed by war more human beings than any other, I feel infinitely grateful

to live in one of the loveliest, most decent, gracious, and civilized parts of Canada, perhaps the world.

The poet Wayne Wright, (*The Girl in the Brook*, Breakwater), is also devoted to Prince Edward Island — and to islands.

Since 1975 I have lived on a half dozen islands ringing the continent of the sea: Mull, Skye, Valentia, the Arans, Cape Clear, and a few others most likely unlisted, the kind that cormorants favour or the monkish scribes who kept their vigils for the stone that fell from heaven . . . just about any island will do.

Wright is occupied creating the "International Fox Hall of Fame, because for me the fox is as vital a bardic symbol as the Celtic salmon of wisdom." Then it will be back to

The smelts rising in the brook every Easter, the lupines cutting loose in June, the ritual of strapping on my goalie pads in October . . . the instruments of a poet's earthbound kit. So what if I haven't found my druid of the heart yet, or pulled off the literary TKO of my generation, there seems to be time for all of this on my island. . . . A letter from anywhere addressed simply "Wayne Wright, Poet, Prince Edward Island" will usually get to me. This must be my home. Somewhere in its red topsoil is buried that '50s homemade house trailer where my father read Dick Tracy, my mother the Bible, and me the Phantom. Downed saucer of my days. I suppose that I left a skin there, one of mine. And every "rowing about" to strange islands is my attempt to behold that skin, the face I had before I was born.

Claire Mowat (*The Outport People*, McClelland & Stewart) has done some rowing about in her time, too. Since she and Farley "got together" in the 1960s, they have lived in Newfoundland, Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia: "In all the houses and communities I have inhabited part of me is still there, hovering like a ghost." Now they divide their year between Port Hope, Ont., and Richmond County, N.S., "where we are drawn by our fascination for the sea and all the creatures who live in it and near it, and by our longing to be among people who suffer less from the malaise that afflicts so many of us in the post-industrial world."

Port Hope . . . is a pleasant town, which, by a combination of luck and lobbying, hasn't succumbed totally to acres of asphalt and Bauhaus roofs. Parts of it look like it belongs to a gentler century. There are 10,000 people here — about the same size as an ancient Greek city state; enough people to provide a variety of human connections and a few civilized pursuits, yet not so many people that you live among strangers. We came here for the simple reason that my husband's parents lived here. We didn't intend to stay. It was supposed to be an interlude for us after the Newfoundland years, while we pondered which new direction we would take. But we are still here after 17 years. It changed and we changed and our relationship with this town is harmonious.

Richmond County . . . has about the same number of people in it as does Port Hope but it is a scattered, rural population. There are no cities and only a few small towns. The people are mainly Acadians who have lived there, off and on, for about three centuries. I envy them. They have a certainty about their position in the scheme of things which city dwellers rarely feel. I cannot change the fact that I was born in a large city, in Toronto, but I would not like to live in such a populous place again. Whatever I have to say to the world through writing, it will be written in rural places like these, communities where my fantasies let me think I belong, even though I don't.

Kevin Major (*Thirty-six Exposures*, Doubleday) has no doubt where he belongs:

I came to the Eastport Peninsula on Newfoundland's Bonavista Bay 10 years ago to teach high school. I no longer teach full-time, but have remained here. I'm still struck by the beauty and serenity of the area whenever I return from my frequent trips outside the province. The area offers me many things — a friendly and interesting people, the opportunity to feel part of a community, easy access to uninhabited country, isolation from other writers. I have never written in any other place, and I'm doubtful if I could find one better.

One city — Winnipeg — seems to be the great good place to

novelists Carol Shields (*A Fairly Conventional Woman*, Macmillan) and David Williams (*The Burning Wood*, House of Anansi).

"Happenstance" (also the title of one of her novels) brought Shields to Winnipeg; her husband Donald took a teaching job at the University of Manitoba, as she also later did. One problem she faced

was finding myself surrounded by writers who were drawing their energy from their so-called sense of place. Having lived in Chicago, Toronto, Ottawa, Manchester, and Vancouver, I began to perceive myself as a placeless person, and naturally I wondered if this would affect my impulse to write. It didn't. I soon realized that writers, even in Manitoba, spend most of their time sitting in little rooms with the doors closed, and that it mattered very little where they were as long as there was a place in their heads that could be tagged as legitimate territory.

It is a fact that I felt immediately at home in Winnipeg, and I can only wonder what perversity has given me an affection for a city that is flat and land-locked and which suffers extremes of temperature. (By the way, I think it's better to admit to a difficult climate rather than mutter on and on about the poetry of snow crunching underfoot.)

There are a number of myths about the city, and some of them are true. This is an open and energetic society; a fortunate ethnic mix *does* enliven and support the arts; eccentricity *does* flourish and can be found even in Fort Garry and Charleswood; there *does* exist a wide-awake cosmopolitan sense that eschews cheap boosterism and the wearing of cowboy hats.

I've begun lately to write stories that are freer, looser, though I think this is a function of age rather than location. I've also begun to use Manitoba as the setting for some of the stories. What this means I don't know — perhaps that I've settled in temporarily or perhaps that I've found the geographical equivalent of the "place" in my head.

The University of Manitoba also landed David Williams, a Saskatchewan boy from a hamlet called Lac Vert who had graduated from the University of Massachusetts. In his view, place is inseparable from ethnic background:

Welsh and Cree, Mennonite, Ukrainian, and Norwegian, these are my peculiar mix through three novels to date. Evidently they were authorized by the first David Williams in Bruce County who married an Irish girl and begat little David in turn who moved to Saskatchewan and married a German-French emigrée from Nebraska, begetting my father who married a Norwegian. And I found a lovely Ukrainian girl who promised to help me shed my British heritage. So I am culturally chagrined to find us still tied to a trite monarchal fiction, our head of state not even being a real citizen. The only way home, it still seems to me, is through our homegrown fictions, signposts to our lost Anglo souls.

Winnipeg, which in most respects is a harbinger of this imagined country, is in another sense a majority culture. Time and again I find myself choosing to live in St. Vital, the home of Louis Riel, that wistful outsider to Winnipeg. Of course, when I was growing up an hour or so from Batoche, Louis was just another neighbour. But Winnipeggers tend, for generations, to be from Winnipeg. Back in Saskatchewan we were all from someplace else, all minorities except for the 1,200 Norwegians around Naicam who didn't know the hybrid name had a hidden meaning in Cree: one who thinks too highly of himself.

To Williams, artists are "in the business of making private versions to compel belief and so to create our own communities. I find myself ready in a fourth novel to send a St. Boniface francophone in search of his English father in Lacjardin, Sask., sure sign to me that home must be changing. For all these reasons, I doubt that I could have done better than to live and teach and write in this old, insular city of minorities."

Patricia Joudry (*The Selenia Tree*, McClelland & Stewart) prefers Saskatchewan solitude.

I choose isolation (though always near enough to civilization to make contact when I choose) and dead quiet. If there are sounds, they are nature's sounds. At present I live in a tiny old farmhouse on the open prairie, amid the constant wind. Winters I

spend in the Bahamas, on a lone (seemingly) Atlantic shore, with sounds of surf, screeching night birds, the cricket chorus, and often at night the tropical rain. In both settings I can see the far distance: prairie or ocean reaching unbrokenly to the horizon. This long vision is important to me. Perhaps most important is to be able to walk alone and unobstructedly, doing my thinking and scribbling as I go. It is necessary for me to have this direct contact with Nature, and the outdoors, for my work. This is the reason I go south and avoid the Canadian winter. It is not to lie and laze on a beach, as everyone thinks!

The poet Jim Green (*Beyond Here, Thistledown*) doesn't escape winter; he gives it a bear-hug. In the small town of Fort Smith, N.W.T., wild-life abounds outside Green's log cabin set in a spruce clearing. "Squirrels harvest the trees in the yard. The berry bushes feed us, grosbeaks, whisky-jacks, and blackbirds. Ravens try to steal bones from dogs. A moose walked into town last winter and a crippled old wolf was picking off fat pet dogs for a couple of weeks."

Green asks:

Where else could our family paddle across the river and cook supper on the glacial sculptured granite to the roar of the rapids that haven't changed since Pond and Mackenzie had supper there — or where our son and daughter could re-enact a free mud-splattered scene from "Quest For Fire" under hot blue skies with white pelicans riding the thermals? Or my son and I could paddle a Precambrian river for a week in the company of eagles and falcons and hook a fish every time we tossed out a Len Thompson?

With his family, Green is a neo-colonial "carving out a place for ourselves in the confederation of Canada." He sits "writing at the table I built looking out the new nine-foot window I cut out of the wall. I can be inside and outside at the same time — or the other way around. It's my place/space in the world to listen, learn, and grow; as a person and as a writer."

Unlike Green, thriller-writer William Deverell (*The Dance of Shiva*, McClelland & Stewart) is "not sure" why he lives where he lives. He's joking, of course.

First, *where do I live?* I live in an eight-sided, peak-roofed cedar mandala that the locals refer to with a snide fondness as the white man's tepee and which is surrounded by (a) Douglas fir, red cedar, and arbutus trees, (b) an organic garlic garden, (c) mountain bluffs with views of Vancouver 15 miles to the north and the Olympic peninsula to the south, and (d) the ocean, which is everywhere because where I live is on an island, population 1,000, climate mild in winter, hot in summer (cactus grows here), rainfall one-half that of Vancouver, which is a two-hour ferry ride away or 15 minutes by float plane, my nearest neighbour being a half a mile away, the friendly local neighbourhood bar another half mile away, by the government dock where my little day-sailer is berthed, and let's see, there are freshwater lakes for swimming, sheep on the roads, seals in the bays, wrens in the eaves, deer in the backyard, but lacking are mosquitoes, black flies, marauding wolves, and door-to-door encyclopedia salespersons.

It's hard to avoid the truism that British Columbia is Shangri-La. Take Lyn Hancock. She'd returned home to B.C. after a three-year trip around the world, and became engaged to a biologist on their first date — aboard "a float plane above an eagle's nest on a forested island in the wilderness of the west coast. . . ." Hancock nested at Mill Bay on Vancouver Island, where she spends her winters writing books like *Love Affair with a Cougar* (Doubleday).

I am still on the sea with a view of ice-capped Mt. Baker and the Gulf Islands as I was for the years of *Seal* and *Raccoon* and *Cougar* and *Ape*. I am distanced in time and space from those days at Island View Beach, but I still enjoy the same view, both physically and spiritually.

Beyond Hancock's window sea lions and harbour seals are a common sight; a resident great blue heron feeds nearby. The bay is "ribboned with birds." But lest we strive to buy out this

nature writer, she admits to having the occasional problem with her property.

One Friday the 13th the house toppled from a height of 20 feet with me in it. Uninsured in such a construction accident, it went in splinters to the dump. Another house rose in its place but that had problems too. But each day brings grist to the writing mill and thanks to a strong sense of humour and a feeling of destiny or predestination, I remain here on the water in Mill Bay with my mountains, my islands, my seals and eagles and otters. Was it Somerset Maugham who covered his distractions by walling in his windows? I don't have the discipline for that. I live where I live because it is my life.

Hancock lives among animals; the playwright David Freeman (*Creeps*, University of Toronto Press) confesses to *being* one. He lives in Montreal because

I am a North American human. Victim of four seasons, I must dwell in an enclosed area. It serves to keep me warm fall, winter, and spring. In summer, it is my refuge from the hot rays of the sun.

Some may think that I equate myself to an animal. Some may say that I do not look farther than my nose. Others may even find these views too simple. But if I am asked why I live where I live, I cannot lie. I may be only an animal in nature.

Ian McLachlan (*Helen in Exile*, McClelland & Stewart), lives in Ennismark, Ont. If Freeman is philosophical, McLachlan is positively metaphysical. He contributes a poem called "Meditation on the Canadian Void — Chemong Lake, 1984":

*For the mathematician the core
of experience is zero think of them those poor
old romans with no
nothing just a dull
finitude of alphabetical instants
counting on fingers one after one after one
around and around in the rut forever with no
concept of forever no
nothing no infinity*

*if, say, it was the arab
zero the cipher that made the whole and the void
simultaneously present that freed
science from the treadmill of
repetition induction*

*then for us perhaps in our own
momentary sequences of cause and effect and
accident this continent becomes the way
to look beyond that mere that roman
repetition of repeated fragments*

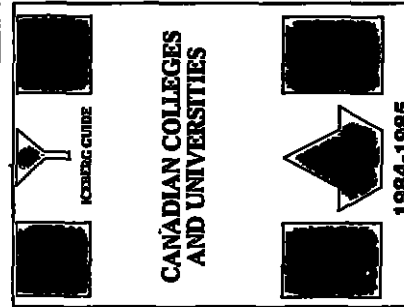
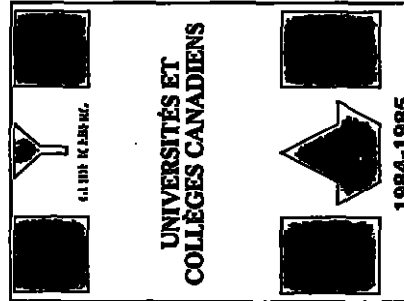
*from an old world full of ruins
of his and pieces waiting and wheezing
for some foundation to give them
shape from that impossible past I let*

*this land this lake oh
canada be my zero.*

R.A.D. Ford (*Needle in the Eye*, Mosaic) a poet, translator, and former ambassador to the Soviet Union, has lived almost everywhere, but now makes his home in Southern France "because I have a form of muscular atrophy that makes coping with the Canadian winter almost impossible. Florida did not attract. France did, partly because I am bilingual, partly because of the artistic and intellectual stimulation of living and working here. The choice of the Bourbonnais was pure chance. We [Ford and his wife Thereza] happened to find the place we wanted at an affordable price."

Fair enough. Perhaps the last word should be left to fiction-writer Leo Simpson (*Kowalski's Last Chance*, Irwin): "I live in Madoc, Ont., because nobody knows how to get here." □

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A sense of place

Like the early explorers' maps, John Robert Colombo's view of Canada's literary geography perfectly delineates some places but strangely distorts others

By George Galt

Canadian Literary Landmarks, by John Robert Colombo, Hounslow Press, illustrated, 318 pages, \$35.00 cloth (ISBN 0 88882 0739).

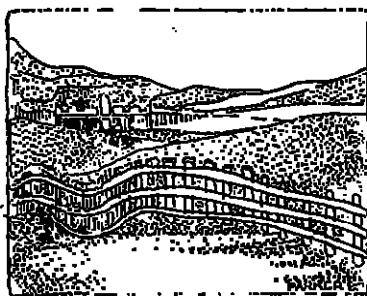
LIKE AN EVENING of Trivial Pursuit, reading Colombo's quirky new reference book begins as good entertainment. Colombo has sorted an awesome quantity of material into these pages, and there are tidbits that will probably surprise even quite knowledgeable followers of CanLit. I learned that the American poet Elizabeth Bishop spent her childhood in Great Village, N.S., and that John Malcolm Brinnin (who wrote *Dylan Thomas in America*) was born in Halifax. Brian Mulroney's birthplace, Baie Comeau, was named after Napoléon-Alexandre Comeau, a physician and naturalist who wrote *Life and Sport on the North Shore* in 1909. Comeau is one of several French-Canadian writers who have been immortalized in place-names. English-speaking Canada, as one would guess, thinks less of its own writers and more of the mother country's. We have a Shelley Lake, a Trollope Lake, a Carlyle Lake, but no Earle Birney Boulevard. Perhaps they have to be dead. Or American — Saul Bellow, Canadian-born and alive in Chicago, has a library named after him in Montreal's partly anglophone suburb, Lachine.

Colombo's reach is staggering, and sometimes he does stumble. This kind of reference book is almost too much for one mind to prepare. It arrives unfunded by any arts council and unsubsidized by a major publisher. So it is very much one man's view of Canada's literary geography, like the early explorers' maps that perfectly delineated some places but strangely distorted others.

The criteria for entry in this book are loose and ultimately frustrating for any reader who expects a definitive cartography. In his introduction Colombo describes the work as "an illustrated guide to places in the country with literary associations. . . . The sites embrace places of birth, principal resi-

dences, points of inspiration, locales transformed by imaginative acts, and final resting places." For the author to include a piece of information "it had to be either important or interesting." I discovered that what is interesting to the author is not always so for me. Fair enough. Colombo's fascination with spiritualists and science-fiction writers places them on his map. There are also many obscure 19th-century poetasters and pot-boiler writers who appear. Though these figures are on the margins of literature, they do belong in a broad and complete encyclopedia of literary places. But too many important landmarks have been omitted from Colombo's book for me to agree with his generosity of squatters' rights for all these minor wordsmiths.

All major cities, as well as many towns and localities, are included. The text is arranged alphabetically in 12 sections, covering the provinces and territories from east to northwest. Of the larger centres, Toronto receives the most satisfactory treatment, though even there



some landmarks are arbitrarily ignored. Theatres are given short shrift. Toronto Workshop Productions gets its own listing complete with address. Tacked onto this entry is a brief nod to Theatre Passe Muraille and Tarragon Theatre, without any mention of their buildings, both of which are surely more important than, say, Lac Zola in Quebec. No listing is given the Toronto Free Theatre or Adelaide Court. Both operate out of recycled structures — originally a gas-works and a court house — that are in

themselves landmarks. Colombo gives Toronto's Annex neighbourhood a separate mention, but does not say one of the city's most famous writers, Jane Jacobs, lives there. I find it odd that *Maclean's* magazine is covered, but not the more literary *Saturday Night*. And don't write Larry Zolf at 42 Balsam Avenue. He lives 20 digits up. But these are minor flaws in an otherwise erudite and energetic literary survey of the city.

Slightly less satisfying are the entries on Montreal. Shouldn't the boyhood home of Canada's best-known writer be in this book? Colombo includes the Maison Cormier, Pierre Trudeau's recently acquired Art Deco townhouse on Pine Avenue, but not the family house in Outremont with which he was associated until a few years ago. Gérard Pelletier, prominent journalist, memoirist, and Liberal politician is nowhere mentioned, nor is René Lévesque, another writer who went into politics. Leonard Cohen's graffiti-like poems "Marita/Please Find Me/I Am Almost Thirty," which remained scratched on a wall outside The Bistro café on Mountain Street through the 1960s (by Cohen's own hand, according to local legend), is worth noting. So is Sir Hugh Allan's house, Ravenscrag, which now houses the Neurological Institute of the Royal Victoria Hospital. Curiously, Colombo mentions the institute and its most famous doctor, Wilder Penfield, but not the building. There is not in the Montreal section the intimate sense of place that the author achieves for Toronto.

I found most irritating Colombo's treatment of Ottawa. Politicians who have their speeches printed are not necessarily writers, but many of them before or after their political careers write influential, if not always aesthetically pleasing, books. The same is true of civil servants. Lester Pearson, for example, a competent and sometimes elegant autobiographer, is ignored in the Ottawa section, as is the brilliant memoirist Charles Ritchie. Colombo misses one of the great literary land-

marks of Canada when he shuns Laurier House, where Mackenzie King wrote his later diaries. One can still see the cramped study at the top of the house with the desk where King worked, supervised by a portrait of his mother. (Colombo's interest in the occult, if not in politics, ought to have won this room mention.) O.D. Skelton, who appears under his birthplace, Orangeville, Ont., as "an Ottawa mandarin in the 1920s and 1930s" would more appropriately be listed under Ottawa with an acknowledgement of the two political biographies he wrote, much admired at the time. In general Colombo shows not much interest in political writers, a gap that hurts the Ottawa section much more than the rest of the book.

Again in Ottawa, several theatres go unrecognized. The Great Canadian Theatre Company, the Ottawa Little Theatre, and the National Arts Centre, all of which have premiered original Canadian drama and operate from their own buildings, are unlisted.

An odd blind spot of this book is its failure to credit the architects of many of the landmarks listed, and indeed its failure to include architectural criticism as literature. Jean Claude Marsan, who has written one of the finest works of local architectural history in North America (translated as *Montreal in Evolution*) belongs in these pages. So do the architectural historians Anthony Adamson and Marion MacRae, who won a 1975 Governor General's Award for their book: *Hallowed Walls*. The Montreal architect Percy Nobbs, who left his stamp on the McGill campus, is an obvious contender too. These are only a few examples. My point is that in a volume ostensibly devoted to literary landmarks, a knowledge of architectural history should play some part.

On the other hand, perhaps the author has misnamed this book. Its eccentricities of inclusion and omission suggest to me that he should have retained the style of his earlier reference books and titled this one *Colombo's*. And the text is not so much about landmarks as about places, often places considerably larger than a single building — towns, cities, regions. The title is a little misleading.

There are personal touches in some entries that make this both more and less than an objective reference book. My favourite example is "Timmins . . . what the town brings to mind is the story 'A Little Dinner at Timmins's' (1848), by William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863), in which an easy-going barrister, Fitzroy Timmins, is induced by his wife, Rosa, to give a dinner-party beyond their means." That is not what comes to my mind, dear reader, and probably not

to yours, when we think of Timmins, the mining capital of northern Ontario, but that's what came to Colombo. It says more about the author than about the city, and he might retort: why not? Approached with the caveat that many of the entries are similarly arbitrary, Colombo's new book can make pleasant browsing. □

REVIEW

Vile buddies

By Douglas Glover

Tourists, by Richard B. Wright, Macmillan, 180 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9825 4).

THE IMPLICIT theme or subtext of Richard B. Wright's latest novel is nothing less than the decline of the West (epitomized by Anglo-Canadian good taste), corrupt within and beset by Americans from without. Like Evelyn Waugh, Wright is essentially a conservative humourist whose characters stand benumbed, driven to eccentricity or madness by the contemporary decay of values — the world of plaster lawn ornaments, baton twirlers, and shoddy Broadway musicals.

The protagonist-narrator of *Tourists* is Philip Bannister, a private-school teacher who belongs to that snotty, anglophile, mid-Atlantic-accented class of Canadian which aspires to drape itself in Britannia's cast-off cloak of gentility. For spring break, he and his inveterately unfaithful, Australian-born wife, Joan, journey to Cozumel off the Yucatan coast, where they are befriended by the Hackers, a couple from Lincoln, Nebraska, who happen to be staying in the same resort hotel.

Ted Hacker is everything that Philip Bannister hates, a brash, abrasive, American pill salesman who wears his poverty of spirit on his sleeve, lies, bullies, cheats at board games, and hints maddeningly at *outré* erotic shenanigans. Driven berserk by the combination of Midwest bonhomie, jocular violence, and sexual intrigue, Bannister slaughters the Hackers along with his wife, immuring them in an underground storage room from which their dying screams rise like "the shrieks of the damned." The novel closes with Bannister sentenced to 99 years in a Mexican prison, which seems to suit him just fine insofar as its order and tranquillity come close to replicating the institutional cocoon of the boys' school he left behind.

Tourists is a cleverly constructed

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novel with a form that is satisfyingly circular. The internal structure — the story line — begins and ends with Bannister happily confined and teaching within an institution (school-prison). The external structure — the narration — begins and ends with the murder. Wright does this by splitting the story line into two parts: the story of the five days of vacation in Cozumel leading up to the murder and the story of the aftermath, Bannister's arrest, trial, and imprisonment. Then he uses the aftermath as a frame for the story of the murder.

By opening with Bannister's arrest and confession, Wright sacrifices the element of surprise, but what he loses in suspense he gains in dramatic irony. The main action unfolds in a series of reminiscences that, on their own, might seem thin and repetitive. Yet since we know these characters are about to die, we observe each speech and nuance all the more keenly. The reader is driven on not so much by the desire to know what happens next as by the questions: Why did he kill them? How did he get into this mess?

Flashes of the humane wit that made Wright's earlier book *The Weekend Man* so justly famous occur in *Tourists*, but perhaps not with the frequency one might have hoped for. There is a pair of delightful maiden aunts who abandon the Bohemian life of New York to bring up the motherless Bannister. There is a moving meditation on the evanescence of love and sexual triumph as Bannister watches a young hockey player who has just cuckolded him click his heels in the snow outside his apartment. And there is a line of inspired dottiness when, during the orgy scene, Bannister becomes suddenly worried over the fate of his polka-dot boxer shorts.

Then, like a man awakening to finger bandages, I placed my hand above my right ear and realized that I was indeed wearing them on my head. I lack the gifts to express the happiness afforded me by this discovery.

Best of all is a wonderfully premonitory passage in which Bannister's mad father is discovered naked in front of the house impersonating a plaster lawn ornament in what his aunts describe as "a witty and pointed statement about bad taste." This "statement" (incidentally, a set-piece expressing the implicit theme) along with the old man's incarceration in a mental institution resonates throughout *Tourists* and prepares the reader for Bannister's own fate.

They [the aunts] also assured me that he [the father] would be far happier in an institution. As Aunt Fay said, "The mad, my dear Philip, often understand these things better than the rest of us."

Tourists is more farcical and less

realistic than *The Weekend Man*, and some readers may count that a weakness. Private-school instructors are stock figures of fun; so are dumb blondes, sexually hyperactive Australian women with horse teeth, and pill salesmen from Lincoln — they appeal to the lowest common denominator of yuks. I also found myself wincing at the overabundance of out-of-date slang ("old bean," "good gravy," "piffle," "party poop"), which, I suppose, is meant to be funny. But dead language is still dead on the page even when used ironically. *Tourists* is a prolonged and genteel howl of rage — the narrator expressing his Waugh-like horror of the bourgeoisie — that often turns into a guffaw or a giggle. But it sometimes comes uncomfortably close to resembling that which it attempts to pillory. □

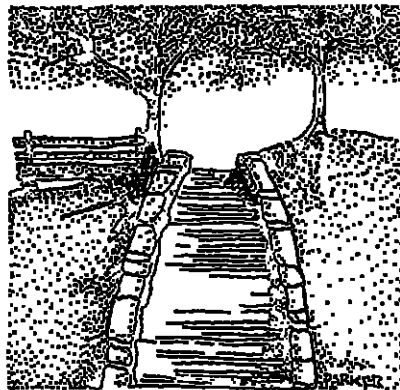
REVIEW

Everything under the sun

By Alberto Manguel

Ladies of the House, by Sandra Birdsell, Turnstone Press, 170 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88801 092 3).

ABOVE THE "shoebox of a town" that Sandra Birdsell sets out to map in "Moonlight Sonata" (the fourth of 10 stories that make up this book) is the sky, a blanketing Manitoba sky with its ends tucked in below the horizon. This sky not only covers: it imprisons, sets limits, makes rules, becomes the glass cage under which Birdsell's human specimens burrow. Digging themselves



deeper and deeper into the soil, these characters create their own reality: a reality furrowed by customs, delusions, hopes. All seem to be waiting for something to happen — a change, a sudden movement that will prove to them that they are alive.

As they watch (from the distance of memory, from childhood or middle-age — the old are probably past caring) they describe what they see. The pathos is born from the fact that they are unable to recognize this description as the world they themselves have created. Birdsell has placed these unconscious architects of reality between two mirrors — the past and the future — and they cast reflections of themselves *ad infinitum*, always unaware that it is their own image they are seeing. "Why are you here?" hisses a woman observed by the narrator of "Toronto Street." "What has this got to do with you?"

Not only do these characters not want to recognize themselves, they do not want to be recognized by others. And yet their disguises are flimsy: even children see through them. In the opening story, "The Bride Doll," two girls play a wedding game in which they do not believe. "We collected toadstools and laid them out on wild rhubarb leaves for the wedding feast. Do you take this man as your lawful wedded husband? I asked. Do you take this woman to be your awful wife? Virginia would say, laughing, spoiling the ceremony." The ceremony is always spoilt in Birdsell country.

The real wedding that follows in the same story is also a masquerade, this time even more poorly disguised than the children's game. "On Lena's blue-black head, attached with many pins, was an ivory lace curtain. Her dress appeared to be a bedsheet gathered at the waist with a man's necktie. The flowers were plastic and coated with dust." And then: "'Pity the poor thing.' I thought I heard my mother's voice."

The children's game is framed by this wedding, and both are framed by the relationship of the narrator's parents, whose masks are wearing thin. After the father has tried to level the floors of their house (to make it "look" right, to "keep up appearances") by jacking up the whole structure, the china cupboard collapses, breaking the mother's last dishes. "But it was all I had," she says. "It was all I had left."

Even the language assumes disguises: arguments become soliloquies, dialogues become letters. "The Bird Dance" — a family portrait done entirely in letters — underlines the incapacity to say things face-to-face. Confession must be achieved through a sheet of paper, as if through the lace-like grating of the confessional. This lattice, this veil, is also see-through, necessary to preserve the intention of good manners, of civilized behaviour. But even after the veil is pierced there is still no recognition. In Birdsell's world, disguises are moving

because they are ineffective.

Deluded, trapped beneath the enormous sky, the characters can still breed love: out of surprise (as in "Dreaming of Jeannie") or memory ("Ladies of the House") or even desertion. In "Falling in Love" the narrator has been abandoned by her restless lover Larry. Now she stands on a highway after taking the wrong bus, thinking of Larry's mother and of Satan, the rabbit Larry bequeathed her (a rabbit: the classical symbol of sexual love and passive fear). From her emptiness rises her need, and from her need the ghost of Larry (or is he real?) who in the end comes tapping at her window (as in the country song) and elopes with her. In "Dreaming of Jeannie" disguise (the young wife tries on a new make-up she hopes will make her look like Barbara Eden) and deception (the young husband cheats at his exams) lead not to despair but to joy. A few of the stories have happy endings.

The endings (happy or otherwise) are not really important. For that reason the 10 stories seem like sections of a larger, ongoing canvas. What counts is that there is no outcome: time here is circular, like the Manitoba horizon. This characteristic is not limited by the borders of the province. In "Niagara Falls" the wife, having witnessed the death of her husband — a farmer intent

on preserving his land — fails, as he did, to overpower nature. Faced with the falls themselves (Nature as its own symbol) all the reader knows is that she will choose her own end, not what that end will be. The last lines read: "She would go to see the falls. She would hold onto the railing or she would let herself go. Whatever she did, she would do willingly."

It is memory that becomes the source of truth in these stories — memory, because it determines reality by creating the past on which the real world stands. "It's strange," says the narrator-witness in the title story, "what happens to time when you can do that, look at old photographs like that and remember dates and events and people's names and the nice things but forget about mosquitoes and can't remember what the present month is or where you went yesterday." Memory allows for as many realities as there are characters: in "Ladies of the House" neither the grown-up narrator, nor herself as a child, nor her boyfriend as he was then and as he is now — none see the boy's father's illicit relationship as the reader sees it through their memory. It is in these kaleidoscope images that Birdsell excels.

Rolling the kaleidoscope is always a witness governed by the laws of conse-

quence. "Play with matches, get burned. Jump off a roof, suffer gravity." The typical Birdsell witness is Truda (in "Toronto Street"), who after leaving her husband watches the world opposite her veranda: the Chinese student in the apartment block across the street; a man and a woman "bathed in a slice of light as they stepped out from the house next door"; the coffin of a child — a reminder that Truda will not have children, that she will be the passive recipient of the world's road show.

Truda had nothing; Lureen (in "Spring Cleaning") had everything. Both see only through the mirroring glass placed in front of them. Lureen, failing to grasp the destruction of her own world, is nevertheless fascinated (and then disappointed) by Velikovsky's theory of "worlds in collision." Lureen can see the universe, but not her own small world. She misses her childhood ceremonies, the Easter eggs, the Paska bread. "Customs give your kids something to be depressed about when they grow up," decrees her friend, but Lureen is not convinced. There is something she misses, and she feels she may be cheating her children out of memories. Customs: an established history, nothing like the step-by-step reality that she (like all Birdsell people) has had to build.

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Birdsell's anthropological eye serves well the study of mankind she has set out to write. There are no judgements in these chronicles, no author's morals. The writing is smooth, paved with down-to-earth images that make use of her characters' own voices instead of the voice of a superior Author. The author remains aloof, but moved, concerned,

and nevertheless silent. There is gentle patience in her descriptions, the methodical thoroughness of a good-natured god who loves her children. A few of her characters appeared in her previous collection, but that is irrelevant. Each story addresses a new issue, as wide as the story itself. These pieces cannot be labelled according to themes

— "greed," "dissatisfaction," "revenge," "despair," "contentment." They are all there, but interwoven, coloured by the grey of that enormous sky, ever-present. This richness alone makes *Ladies of the House* a remarkable achievement, and confirms Birdsell's position as one of the best short-story writers in the language. □

FEATURE REVIEW

Coming of age

In yoking Images of Innocence with a grown-up frankness, some young adult novels can satisfy readers of any generation

By Mary Ainslie Smith

LITERATURE FOR adolescents, like the state of adolescence itself, is hard to place in simple categories for classification and discussion. Stuck somewhere between adult fiction and stories written for people who are clearly still children, these books, labelled "juvenile" or "young adult," present contradictions even on the surface. They are packaged to appeal to youngsters. Their jacket covers are eye-catching in obvious ways, colourful and representational. The illustration usually shows an attractive teenage couple, looking either blissfully happy or broodingly romantic. Often the text is presented in a large-print, short-chapter format. They are rarely more than 200 pages long.

This simplicity of visual presentation seems at odds with the frankness of much of the language and the complexity of many of the episodes described. Of course, adolescence is a complex period of life, and the best and most sensitive of these stories make good use of a straightforward, economical approach to deal directly with all the highly charged emotions and critical decisions associated with these years of maturing.

Kevin Major's *Thirty-six Exposures* (Doubleday, 156 pages, \$14.95 cloth) enhances the reputation earned by his previous books for honesty and perception in writing about young people. With Lorne, his central character, Major presents a convincing portrait of a boy in transition — almost free from the ties of childhood, almost an adult and on his own. Lorne is in his last few weeks of high school and much of him has already grown beyond the small Newfoundland outpost where he has lived all his life. At the beginning of the

book, he climbs to the lookout above Marten, his town, so that he can look down on all of it, getting a total view, putting it in context for himself and for the reader and at the same time, actually and symbolically, distancing himself from it.

Lorne is a photographer, and his camera provides the framework for the book — 36 exposures, 36 episodes in Lorne's story. Mostly they focus on his relationships with friends, teachers, and family, but they also include glimpses deep inside Lorne through the intensely personal poetry he secretly writes.

These last weeks of school should be easy ones for Lorne. He is bright, virtually assured of graduating with high marks, and his family is in a position to send him to university if he decides to go. His future is open, promising, filled with many possibilities, unlike that of Trevor, his brash and seemingly carefree classmate who expects to remain in Marten, fishing like his father, hoping for enough weeks' work to draw unemployment insurance.

But Lorne seems to seek complications. With mixed motivation, he leads a class revolt against an old-fashioned and rigid history teacher, who is only weeks away from retirement. This gains Lorne considerable status among his peers, but puts his academic record in jeopardy, much to his parents' concern. However, what his parents feel no longer has any positive effect on Lorne. He has become an uneasy boarder in his home, is irritated by his family, and sees their well-meaning advice as interference. He spends more and more time with Trevor, whose social life involves cars, girls, drinking, and smoking up. At the same time, Lorne develops a relationship with a new girl-friend who is both sym-

pathetic and intelligent, but his deepening feelings for her complicate, rather than ease, his life.

Still, things seem to move smoothly forward for Lorne; he will graduate and leave Marten easily behind. But then, on the night of his graduation party, a violent accident throws his life into a different focus and he begins to realize how events can have consequences reaching far into his future.

Another story about trying to leave home is *Snow Apples*, an impressive first novel by Mary Razzell (Groundwood, 160 pages, \$7.95 paper). Sheila Brary is also in her last year of high school. But in this story, set on Vancouver Island in the period immediately following the Second World War, Sheila has to fight to continue her education and to fulfil her ambition to become a nurse. She is the only girl in a family of five children and very much at odds with her mother, a woman totally dissatisfied with her own life. Mrs. Brary, battling poverty and attempting to raise her family with little help from her philandering husband, bitterly asks Sheila at one point, "Why should it be any different for you?" She sees no reason for Sheila to finish high school and no reason for her to expect anything other than early marriage and a lifetime of demeaning work.

But Sheila has more than her mother and this restricted view of women to overcome. She is attractive and admittedly boy-crazy. Almost inevitably she becomes pregnant, and must decide on her own what to do. At this point the story becomes less credible. Sheila has been presented as a sensitive and perceptive person. She is only 16 years old and has had a Roman Catholic upbringing. However, she apparently has no doubts about what to do, and her decision

seems to be neither difficult nor painful to make. She will — and does — get rid of the baby, and the description of her self-induced abortion is graphic and disturbing. Then, after a brief period of mourning, Sheila's life continues in the direction she wants, leaving the reader with the uncomfortable feeling that such a harrowing event should have had greater physical and emotional after-effects.

Winners is another good first novel, by Mary-Ellen Lang Collura (Western Producer Prairie Books, 130 pages, \$7.95 paper). The 15-year-old hero, Jordy Threebears, has a different problem; he isn't leaving home but trying to return. Until he was seven, Jordy lived on Ash Creek Blackfoot Reserve in Alberta. But after his mother was murdered by a drunken white man and his grandfather sent to prison for an act of vengeance, Jordy lives in a succession of foster homes. After his grandfather's release they are reunited, but both man and boy have years of bitterness and loneliness to overcome.

Their mutual love of horses draws them together and also forces them into contact with others who are willing to be their friends. Jordy's grandfather gives him a wild mare for a Christmas present and he gentles her and learns to ride. At the climax of the story, Jordy and his mare enter an exciting and exhausting 100-mile endurance race, trying to prove against all odds that they can be winners.

Rachel, in *Nobody Asked Me*, by Elizabeth Brochmann (Lorimer, 182 pages, \$12.95 cloth, \$5.95 paper), also struggles to belong. She has been raised on an isolated forestry station in the interior of Vancouver Island with only her parents and imaginary friends for company. Then suddenly, when she is 13, her parents go on a trip, leaving her on a mainland coastal village with strangers — independent and brusque Aunt Ev, her mother's best friend, and living nearby in a marvellous floating house, Uncle Sharky: shabby, eccentric, a bouncer at the local dance hall, and the family black sheep. Feeling lonely and insecure, Rachel tries to match up Aunt Ev and Uncle Sharky, but he is much more interested in the buxom, red-headed ticket-taker at the dance hall — a woman, Rachel feels sure, with a "soiled reputation." Rachel is disturbed and jealous until she is diverted by a new interest, her growing friendship with the ticket-taker's nephew, a 15-year-old boy who is also lonely and in need of friends.

Nobody Asked Me does not make as hard an impact as Brochmann's first novel, *What's the Matter, Girl?* Still, it is very pleasing, a whimsical and sensitive investigation of a young girl's feel-

ings as she starts to be independent and to see herself and her family in a new perspective.

Kevin Major has objected to being labelled "a young adult novelist," contending that any good novel, regardless of the age of its main characters, should be able to stand on its own. These four books support that contention. They look like — and are — books intended for the adolescent market. But they needn't be restricted to that category. They are worth looking for in the "young adult" sections of book stores and libraries, because they all have something to offer any mature reader. □

REVIEW

Jewel in the crown

By Roy MacLaren

Eldorado: Canada's National Uranium Company, by Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 470 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 3414 4).

THIS BOOK is an excellent example of what a corporate history should be. But it is also much else. It is a perceptive and lively account of how public policy is made. As Bothwell rightly notes, "The history of Canadian uranium mining is the story of a highly political, if not politicized, industry." More precisely, *Eldorado* offers not only a first-rate account of the origins and growth of the Canadian uranium industry but also insights into the role and management of crown corporations — state enterprises that have gradually developed a peculiarly Canadian character. And such insights are not simply historical; Bothwell's observations should be in the minds of all those in Ottawa now contemplating the role and management of crown corporations in our economic and social future.

Bothwell, one of Canada's leading political historians and the co-author of C.D. Howe's biography (admirable preparation for the writing of *Eldorado*), has surmounted a difficult challenge: in plain English he makes the technical side of uranium mining and refining and marketing intelligible to the layman. As a result, the general reader gains a major insight into the constant interplay of the technical difficulties and limitations of uranium production, the military alliance interests of Canada, and the methods by which Ottawa sought to give expression to those interests in the creation and the daily

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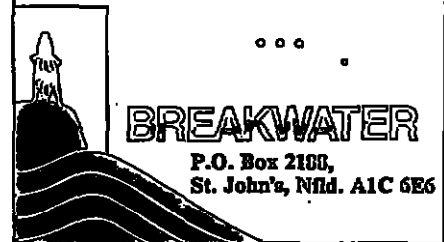
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management of a crown corporation.

The heroes of the story are, in a sense, the two pioneers of radium and hence uranium production in Canada, the brothers Charlie and Gilbert LaBine. Farm boys from Renfrew, Ont., with limited formal education, they sought — and found — on the shores of Great Bear Lake the pitchblende from which the precious radium could be refined. They were not searching for uranium (it was only an unwanted by-product) but rather for radium, prized for its ability to treat certain inoperable cancers. Europe and the Belgian Congo had hitherto been suppliers, but Great Bear Lake, despite its inaccessibility, had a radium concentration that would, in time, make millions for the brothers and Canada a prime source for both peaceful and military uses of uranium.

Through the 1920s and 1930s the story of the LaBines' Eldorado Mining Co. is fascinating enough, as the brothers worked to mine, refine, and transport their precious radium from the North-west Territories to their distant markets. The story, however, becomes yet more dramatic with the advent of the Second World War. In mid-1942, the British informed MacKenzie King of the Anglo-American development of a "weapon of immense destructive force." Uranium was the essential element in the production of the atomic bomb and Eldorado was the principal source at hand for uranium. Given the importance and magnitude of the atomic bomb project, it is not surprising that Ottawa moved to secure that source — and did so by soon nationalizing the LaBines' company.

The U.S. and Britain were in the market for all the uranium that Eldorado could produce: to mine it, scarce resources both in material and men had to be diverted from other pressing wartime needs; and ultimately the security of the Allies was seen as resting on its sure supply. In these circumstances, Ottawa reached the not surprising conclusion that the company could not be left in private hands. Eldorado would have to join the growing ranks of crown corporations which C.D. Howe was fostering to meet the military requirements of both Canada and its allies. Eldorado became a crown corporation in 1942 (although Howe made the fact public only two years later).

When the war ended, Eldorado was a flourishing crown corporation, well-managed and full of promise for a post-war world where nuclear energy might play an increasingly important — and peaceful — role. The Cold War, however, created even greater demand for Canadian uranium as the U.S. embarked upon a major weapons expansion race with the Soviet Union.

Uranium was readily available only from the Congo and Canada, and during the 1950s the U.S. would buy just about every pound Canada could produce. This meant, in turn, increased exploration and expansion of Eldorado's facilities, including a new mine at Beaverlodge in northern Saskatchewan.

"While the going was good, it was very good indeed," writes Bothwell. "In that whole period, 1946 to 1957, Howe did not stick his hand into the company to change any particular aspect of the company's business. It was up to the board of directors. . . ." But with the achievement by the Americans of their weapons expansion and the development of uranium sources elsewhere, demand from Eldorado dropped off sharply. Once a principal Canadian export, uranium disappeared from among the leading minerals, and the prospects were for a sharp decline in the crown corporation's production, profits, and employment levels.

Bill Bennett, C.D. Howe's first executive assistant who had become Eldorado's president, recommended privatization and diversification. Howe was enthusiastic, but the 1957 election brought the Conservatives to office with more immediate priorities. Howe was out, the Conservatives in and, as 1960 brings Bothwell's account to a close, the future of Eldorado is at best problematical as the few remaining contracts are stretched, pending some anticipated relief from the demands of a growing nuclear electricity generating industry.

One wants more, but Bothwell's mandate extends only to 1960. It is gratifying his talent will now be applied to the yet



more daunting task of writing the history of Atomic Energy of Canada. If AECL's history is as perceptive, good humoured, and well-written as *Eldorado*, Bothwell will have set new standards for Canadian corporate histories. □

REVIEW

Taking sides

By Desmond Morton

Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion, by Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, Hurtig, 384 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88830 262 2).

Regardless of how they started, prairie fires were terrifying in their intensity and very difficult to stop once they had taken hold. After a brief but destructive rampage, they would stop as quickly as they had arisen.

THUS IT WAS, claim Beal and Macleod, in 1885. Some carelessness and incompetence, some bad luck and a few acts on both sides as deliberate as setting a match to dry grass, and the prairie fire of rebellion roared across the Canadian Northwest. Then, only seven weeks later at Batoche, the flames were out. Like other prairie fires, few lasting traces marked the path of the flames; the permanent scars were hidden in the psyches of the vanquished and the victors.

In a year in which authors, publishers, and booksellers will all be straining to exploit the centenary of Louis Riel and his last, tragic exploit, readers should be grateful that the first major book to appear will probably be the best. Beal is an accomplished Edmonton journalist; Macleod is the author of the best book on the North West Mounted Police. Their collaboration ensures smooth if undramatic prose, and a grasp of sources that have grown exponentially in the past decade or more.

Having made my own contribution to the Riel industry some 15 years ago, I certainly welcome a successor. Thanks largely to accursed federal dollars, the study of native and Métis history has become a massive and remunerative activity. If Sir John A. Macdonald had lavished only a small fraction of the money made available in the Trudeau era on Riel and his followers, there might well have been little to study.

Instead, the greatest achievement of Confederation — a Canadian dominion from sea to sea — was fated to have its ugly underside. The great railway was completed and Canada's destiny was made manifest, but the effort overstrained the Dominion's finances and her talent and humanity too. For the native people and their Métis cousins, there were only mean agreements and cold-hearted or inept officials to enforce them.

In outline, the story has been told

before. Indeed, half a century ago, in *The Birth of Western Canada*, George Stanley established the conventional view that the Rebellion of 1885 was largely Ottawa's fault. What Beal and Macleod have done is to present the most detailed and careful account of the grievances of native people, Métis, half-breeds, and whites so far offered to a non-specialist readership.

It is a story made more fascinating by an incredible cast of characters, from the noble Poundmaker to Tom Quinn, the half-breed Indian agent who preferred death to the indignity of surrendering government bacon. Among bizarre figures in the drama is Riel's Ontario Protestant admirer, William Jackson, content to sacrifice his religion to please the Métis leader but not his convictions as a Single Taxer. Riel, himself, has been moved from centre stage in an obvious effort by the authors to depict the rebellion as a collective effort. The astonishing and ultimately fatal Métis inaction after Duck Lake, claim Beal and Macleod, was not so much the result of Riel's leadership as of the traditional defensive tactics with which the Métis had worsted their Indian enemies in earlier prairie battles.

Such an interpretation does some damage to Gabriel Dumont's reputation as a guerrilla fighter. While the old buffalo hunter persuaded his biographer — and most historians — that he had pleaded for the right to attack the advancing Canadians, Beal and Macleod find no evidence amidst the endless minutes of the Exovedate, Riel's council. Like other old soldiers, perhaps Dumont was being wise after the event.

There were, of course, many old soldiers after 1885, some of them even more imaginative than Gabriel Dumont. Perhaps because Macleod has edited several such reminiscences, he seems to accept the views of some Canadian participants as more than colour commentary. Now and then Canadians have had difficulty being fair to the elderly red-faced commander who saw the North-West campaign to an unexpectedly early conclusion. General Middleton — "Old Fred" to his men — was the spitting image of David Low's creation, Colonel Blimp. Real people are more complex than cartoons. Middleton was pompous but he was also shrewd, enterprising, and more concerned for the lives of his citizen soldiers than the Canadian politicians who acted as militia colonels.

Like the troops and most historians, Beal and Macleod also ignore the incredible logistical difficulties of the campaign. Much of the solution was provided, at a price, by the Hudson's Bay Company. Unlike the Canadian Pacific Railway — which, the authors

agree, was superfluous — the enormous supply and transport organization of "The Bay" was probably the single most decisive factor in the campaign.

In these conservative times, historians some day may balance the prairie perspective of Beal and Macleod with a more sympathetic view of Sir John A. Macdonald and his aging colleagues, beset with conflicting advice from officials, missionaries, and interested politicians — to say nothing of the more immediate problems of a nationwide recession, a stalled and bankrupt transcontinental railway, and menacing bankers. A century later, governments are not above slashing the welfare budget in the name of fiscal restraint.

Meanwhile, readers of *Prairie Fire* can take pleasure in a book that reflects the best of current scholarship. Old myths and errors — including some I have unwittingly repeated — have been firmly but tactfully suppressed. A great deal of nonsense about Riel's trial and execution is not even given the credence of a refutation. The truly shocking miscarriages of justice in the trials of the native people are belatedly exposed. This is an excellent book. It will be superseded — but not soon. □

REVIEW

Honour among thieves

By H.C. Campbell

Pirates and Outlaws of Canada 1610-1932, by Harold Horwood and Ed Butts, Doubleday, 260 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 385 18373 9).

NOT KNOWN for adventures outside the law, Canadians can now turn to a new collection of bad men and bad acts that should add spice to the blandness of their history. In *Pirates and Outlaws of Canada*, Horwood and Butts have stayed away from the true nasties — the FLQ bombers, the killers of the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland, Clifford Olson — and instead concentrated on the quaint ruffian, the strong, in some cases heroic, man who for one reason or another chose to live beyond the law.

Despite their desperate deeds, most of these men seem to have at least one quality that you could enter into the credit column. Here are some of them.

John Phillips, during eight months in 1724, ran down and captured 33 fishing ships on the Grand Banks. Yet he with four other pirates signed a pact that pro-

vided for compensation to those crew members who lost limbs in battle and the death penalty for any man found raping or molesting women.

Bartholomew Roberts, "The Puritan Pirate," sailed and looted in the seas off Newfoundland, Africa, and the Caribbean. In addition to keeping an entire orchestra on board, Roberts showed the outward signs of a religious man. He would call the crew together for nightly prayers and strictly observed the sabbath as a day of rest.

Simon Girty, an Irish immigrant brought up by Indians, shifted from one side to another in the American War of Independence, working as an interpreter and guide. He finally defected to the British in Canada, but is best remembered as a sadistic participant at the torture of the American hero, Col. William Crawford. The authors cast suspicion on the extent of Girty's involvement with the torture, preferring to emphasize his kindness to American prisoners, especially children.

The man who personifies best the hero/outlaw is Bill Miner, an American who spent most of his life in prison and gained notoriety and sympathy by robbing CPR trains. He was a bandit with manners; he dealt with his victims politely and often let them keep personal property.

These are all men of courage and daring. Their deeds took them outside the law, but there is something that compels us to forgive their criminality. They lived in harsh times or perhaps came from deprived backgrounds. They are portrayed as men you might like to have over for dinner.

It takes time to age a criminal into a folk hero and sometimes the less you know the better the story.

The Mad Trapper of Rat River was a man surrounded by conjecture. Better yet, he was an expert woodsman, a crack shot, and a man with stamina to rival an entire Everest expedition. It is 1932 and the Mounties have a man they believe is Albert Johnson trapped in a fortified log cabin on the Rat River, 100 or so miles from the Beaufort Sea. It is an Arctic January. They keep him under a hail of rifle fire, throw a few sticks of dynamite and finally lob a four-pound bundle of the stuff at the cabin. It blows the roof off the cabin and caves in three walls. Sure that Johnson is at least wounded, the Mounties approach the ruin, only to retreat under a barrage of gunfire.

By now the Mounties have to regroup and Johnson begins a month-long trek through the frozen Arctic. Unable to make fires or shoot game, Johnson eludes his trackers, dogs, and aircraft surveillance with amazing guile. Finally, he slips up and instead of outmaneuver-

ing his pursuers by backtracking he ends up facing them, outflanked and out-gunned. The body is searched but all that is found is \$2,000 and five pieces of gold dental work. No papers, nothing to indicate his identity.

One of the more flamboyant characters in this collection of rogues is a man who broadcast his identity and deeds with pride — Bill Johnston. The best-known of the pirates of the Thousand Islands, Johnston used the excuse of trying to bring Canada into the U.S. republican fold after the war of 1812 to make his forays legitimate. In the end, he was pursued by both the American and Canadian authorities. His preferred vessel of attack was a 28-foot boat powered by 12 oars and cheerfully painted black with a yellow stripe on the outside and a brilliant red on the inside. "He swaggered about with six pistols and a Bowie knife tucked in his belt, ready, as he boasted, to take on all comers." Johnston spent six months in jail for his exploits, then retired to live in Clayton, New York, until the age of 88.

Horwood and Butts have at times stretched the definition of Canada to include in this readable collection some rogues of indefinite nationality. It is natural in a book covering 300 years of history to find informational gaps, but to the credit of the authors uncertainty is portrayed as such. They have not resorted to devices to fill in the holes for the sake of the narrative.

But why did the writers stop their investigations with 1932? If perhaps they are planning a sequel of modern pirates, I might suggest they start on the night of Jan. 18, 1917, when Parliament debated and finally passed a bill to introduce personal income tax as a "temporary war-time measure." □

REVIEW

Out of touch

By Lynn King

Robinette: The Dean of Canadian Lawyers, by Jack Batten, Macmillan, illustrated, 256 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9302 5).

IT'S A SHAME that the epilogue is not the first chapter of this book. Since it's not, I would suggest that anyone reading the book look there first, because it and the ninth chapter, "The Robinette Touch," are the only ones that give some feeling and depth to the man. Until then, J.J.

Robinette, without doubt the best Canadian lawyer alive (and maybe even deceased), comes across as rather wooden and even unfeeling. You know it can't be true. No one could handle as many files as he has, from the lowliest of criminal cases to the loftiest of Charter challenges without having developed considerable personal, philosophical, and political views and insights. But until the end of the book we have a hard time finding these.

Robinette the lawyer, *as lawyer*, takes up most of the book through an exploration of his major trials. At times, the book resembles a case book on noteworthy criminal and civil trials — good reading, but not exactly about Robinette. A full 47 pages is taken up with the Evelyn Dick murder case — Evelyn's life and loves, her parents' lives, her lovers' lives. Another 22 pages is taken up with the Stephen Suchan case: Suchan was the first of Robinette's clients to be hanged for murder. Again, in the context of Robinette's courageous battles we get little sense of Robinette himself. Arthur Maloney, another famous defence lawyer, worked with Robinette on the case, defending Suchan's co-accused. In one paragraph alone we get a fuller picture of the complexity of Maloney than we have for the first 115 pages of Robinette:

[Maloney was] a Conservative member of parliament representing Toronto-Parkdale for five years; a bencher of the Law Society of Upper Canada during five four-year terms . . . Two strokes slowed him down in the early 1980s, and in recent years he spent less time in court and more time attending to his 350-acre farm, his collection of Canadian books and his fascination in the *Miracle of Fatima*.

When the death sentence was pronounced, Maloney says to Robinette "Y'know John, you never had a man hanged before. Well, you will be a better person for it." Robinette pauses to think about Maloney's line. "Arthur's a sentimental Irish philosopher, but I think he was right about what he said. You lose a case like that, lose the man, and you probably learn to have more sympathy for people. Maybe it all makes you a little more human." It's almost as if he hadn't been "human" until then; of course he had, but Batten had hidden it well.

In another matter, where Robinette had successfully acted for the federal government in having the Jehovah's Witnesses denied status as a religion for purposes of exemption from military services, Glen How, the indefatigable lawyer for the Jehovah's Witnesses bitterly says: "Robinette took advantage of the prejudices against us . . . He's a

fine counsel; but in this case, there was only one thing he was doing as far as I was concerned, and that was the Liberal government's dirty work." Batten reports that Robinette's reaction to this accusation was simple: "He was acting for a client which happened to be a department of the federal government and he based his points in court on the law as he found it." It's hard to believe that Robinette had no stronger feelings about the historical conflicts and problems of the Jehovah's Witnesses; a bit more prodding on the part of Batten might have uncovered those. Robinette's *true* feelings might have nothing to do with his job as a lawyer (the accepted law school doctrine is that true feelings are even counter-productive in fighting for a client), but a biography should go beyond technical virtuosity and deal with the philosophy, feelings, and internal conflicts of the subject.

We find this apparent distance again in the case of *Noble v. Wolf*. This was a matter where a restrictive covenant required that certain cottage property "shall never be sold . . . and shall never be occupied or used in any manner whatsoever by any person of the Jewish, Hebrew, Semitic, Negro or coloured race of blood . . ." Robinette was successful in having this prejudicial clause declared unenforceable as being contrary to public policy. Batten says "the case represented a significant breakthrough, but Robinette looks back on it as a straightforward piece of litigation." Wasn't Robinette a little pleased to be part of this civil rights breakthrough? Does he see any historical trend in this or other cases he handled in advancing civil rights? Is he proud of that record, or are they just another bunch of technical victories?

Sometimes the book reads like an account of a surgeon's operations, with no greater ethical connotations than that he did the work and did it well. Throughout the book we get the sense that Robinette is a humble and a decent man, but not until the last few chapters do we get more: wonderful stories of Robinette graciously helping other lawyers, asking in return only that they too help younger lawyers, and long and detailed recollections of his humour and sensitivity. Finally we see the real Robinette, delivering a speech at Upper Canada College: he "said he had two pieces of advice for the boys of the school. The first was to learn to love the English language, to speak it, read it and write it. His second piece of advice was more simple and direct. 'Be happy' he told the boys." I would like more of this, Robinette the wise and wonderful man and not just the Dean of Canadian Lawyers. □

BELLES LETTRES

Each Moment as It Flies, by Harry Bruce, Methuen, 256 pages, \$18.95 cloth (ISBN 0 458 981170 2).

By *Sherie Posesorski*

HARRY BRUCE is a player piano of memory. Each moment of his life has scored a note on his scroll, and when he floors the pedals in his essays and columns, he replays his past with physical and emotional fidelity. Bruce began his career as an Ottawa *Journal* reporter, and this collection spans 15 years of writing for national and regional magazines. The pieces range from personal reminiscences to profiles of Flora Macdonald and Alex Colville, to travelogues on Crete and Barbados. Melancholy pervades his writing, both in nostalgia for lost worlds of his past, and in acknowledging that were he to begin his career in the 1980s, he would face a meagre freelance market. Digging deep, Bruce has chronologically arranged the essays to flow from childhood memories to his own children's experiences, skilfully recreating his youth while evoking in his readers analogous memories. With his cataloguing of precise details, Bruce makes us participate in dreary November, Christmas blues, summer vacations, and family cars. He is a visual pack-rat, having forgotten nothing he has seen, holding on to his hoard until he finds a use for it. Pointillist details make his descriptions of Toronto, the Maritimes, Barbados, Edinburgh go beyond scene settings: they become anatomies of the character of place. In his profiles of Peter Gzowski, Mary Pratt, Macdonald, and Colville he establishes three-dimensional personalities that spark with unresolved tensions and drives, people who are actively involved in shaping themselves. A self-confessed failed television interviewer, Bruce in his writing is the perfect host. ☆

CRIME & PUNISHMENT

Erin & the Boys: The Story of a Gang Rape, by Maggie Siggins, James Lorimer & Company, 204 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88862 659 4).

By *Sherie Posesorski*

IT WOULD HAVE been easy enough, given the sensational nature of the crime, for Siggins to dwell solely on its lurid tabloid aspects; it is to her credit that she takes

the case beyond that level to place the Canadian legal system itself on trial. The book has the features of a Roger Corman biker-B-movie, scored by a heavy-metal rock group — first-run drive-in material. Brian Dempster and his five boys — the Lauder gang — existed in a state of stereophonic hangover and on a diet of beer, gin, tokes, and chemicals. Their financial support came from a combination of welfare, stolen credit cards, and the salaries of two women who lived with them. As Siggins relates in her preface, she decided to examine the misogynist pathology of gang rape, using the gang as an example. Once plunged into her investigation and interviews with the gang, their women, friends, and family, she soon realized that the story had a reality independent of her preconceptions. The book is an insightful, incisive examination of the two alleged rapes, the trial, and the character of the participants. She presents evidence that the gang was unfairly tried, and that the women may have been willing participants in group sex. In Siggins's view, the men were denied justice by the decision to have a single trial rather than two separate ones. That decision, coupled by poor representation by a team of squabbling lawyers, aided by the fact that the men were frequently stoned in court, led the judge to hand down a combined 87-year sentence. As readers, we make our own judgements and then, placed within the context of each character's perspective, experience the consequences. The whole sordid, sorry story is, to borrow a phrase from Joan Didion, a form of "social hemorrhage." ☆

Victims: The Orphans of Justice, by Jerry Amernic, Seal Books, 270 pages, \$4.50 paper (ISBN 0 7704 1862 7).

By *Paul Truster*

THE MAIN QUESTION this book asks is: why does the justice system seem designed to protect the rights and needs of criminals more than the welfare of innocent citizens? In doing so, it tells of Don Sullivan, a murder victim's father, and of his role in founding Victims of Violence, a group that provides therapy to victims and their families while lobbying for government action to protect society against crime. The author pays tribute to the courage of Sullivan, a man who "wouldn't go away like a normal father and grieve," but persisted against official stonewalling and indifference. Sullivan was ignored by all the best peo-

ple: crown attorneys, judges, parole boards, then-Solicitor General Robert Kaplan, the Correctional Service of Canada. Meanwhile, his clergyman was calling to say how badly the killer must feel, and the Human Rights Commission, when asked for help, inquired, "What colour was your daughter?" Amernic clearly shares Sullivan's rage against the criminal justice system and its sympathizers: the real culprit, he says, is liberalism gone mad, summed up in former Solicitor-General Jean-Pierre Goyer's 1971 dictum: "We have decided from now on to stress the rehabilitation of individuals rather than the protection of society." As an example, he specifies the mandatory supervision system — the one under which Pamela Sullivan's murderer was released. According to him, this release is now handed out to nearly all offenders once two-thirds of their sentences are up. The book's final section articulates the Victims of Violence platform, which includes the return of capital punishment and greater input by victims and their families into the sentencing and parole process. Amernic occasionally descends to the sentimentalism he decries in his presumed opponents, and it would be pleasant if he could occasionally use the word "lawyer" without the prefix "high-priced." Still, he has given us an informed and complex portrait of a very brave man, and powerfully indicted a system. □

FICTION: LONG & SHORT

Dry Water, by Robert Stead, edited by Prem Varna, Tecumseh Press, 247 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919662 94 5) and \$11.95 paper (ISBN 0 919662 94 3).

By *John Parr*

DISINTERRED FROM the papers of Robert Stead (1880-1959) in the Public Archives, *Dry Water* is set in Alder Creek, Man., and covers 40 years in the life of Donald Strand. At age 10 Strand comes to live with his aunt and uncle on their farm. Soon he becomes attracted to their daughter Ellen. When Donald turns 21 he inherits \$5,000 and buys his own farm; he would like to marry Ellen but she refuses. He marries instead a school-teacher, Clara. By 1929, Donald is the wealthiest farmer in the district, but is unhappy. Despite their family of three, Clara has become emotionally cold toward him, and their older son would rather bank than farm. Then a letter arrives from Ellen, who is married to

Donald's boyhood friend Jim, now a prominent Winnipeg lawyer. Ellen wants Donald and Clara to visit; once there Donald is tempted by the possibility of winning not only Ellen but a seat in Parliament. When the stock market collapses, Jim is financially devastated and commits suicide. Ellen then returns to Alder Creek to live with her mother. Donald too has lost heavily but manages to hang onto his farm and Clara — who had been planning to carry on discreetly in Winnipeg with Jim. The book's main theme is expressed in its title: mirages. Donald should not be allured by fame and fortune; rather he should be content with his responsibilities as farmer and family head. This obliges him to forgo warm Ellen for cold Clara. Like Stead's better-known novel *Grain*, this book embeds informative social history in a story that is enjoyable, despite the fact that the principal characters are more spokesmen for certain attitudes and behavioural traits than distinctive in themselves. □

Maryse, by Francine Noël, VLB Editeur, 426 pages, \$16.95 paper (ISBN 2 89005 181 1).

By David Homel

LIKE YVES BEAUCHEMIN'S *Le Matou*, this novel has had commercial success, and is humorous, rich in human anecdote and social portraiture, sentimental, and long. The heroine is Maryse O'Sullivan, French on her mother's side, Irish on her father's, and the novel explores the life and times of 1960s poets, muses, and armchair revolutionaries in checked shirts and Kodiak boots. The friendship and competition among the women are particularly well drawn, as is the love life of the '60s crowd that revolves around contradictions: the desire to be free of jealousy and possessiveness, and the impossibility of being totally cool and open about a hot subject like sex. The parts in which Noël talks about Maryse's family background, her fanciful father who disappeared one day into the Nowhere Tavern, never to emerge, are the most moving and effective of the book. Many other relationships, however, evolve in an overly predictable manner. But through it all, the author shows that most 1960s protesters from the comfortable class were basically not committed to change, since they benefited from the system in one way or another. A feminist grill has also been laid over the late '60s and early '70s, and Noël has her women possessing feminist consciousness more articulately than existed at the time. An anachronism, perhaps, but one that is worthwhile in helping her uncover traditional roles behind the seeming shake-up. Men are

stick figures, however, seated in front of the TV hockey game when they're not in cafés theorizing about the politics of the orgasm. At least it's all funny. Maryse often adopts a humorous attitude toward her own adventures, necessary to the survivor that she is. The book's verbal indiscipline and length is testimony that the job of editor still does not exist in Quebec publishing houses. But the great let-down that Maryse and her gang feel, and the subsequent refuge taken in the self, refer to a sadness not foreign to anglophones. □

Paradise Siding, by Allan Donaldson, Goose Lane Editions, 124 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 86492 027 X).

By Debra Martens

ALTHOUGH ALLAN DONALDSON is fascinated by insanity and the unknown, the stories in this collection lack power, their directness weakened by phrases like "probably," "I don't know," and "I think." In "Moose" the narrator remarks on the invisible line that separates sane from insane, but this does not bring him any closer to the Jewish schoolboy whose reaction to teasing is described only in terms like "wild," "crazy," and "frantic." The narrator is intrigued but does not come to terms with the event, leaving the reader unmoved. As interesting as they are, all seven tales are marred by the author's inability to go beyond the feelings of the people he tells us about. In "God Bless Us Every One" he skilfully contrasts this Christmas to that of ordinary ones by showing boys eagerly waking up early, and then creating a nasty tension in the house with a grandmother who spitefully taunts her daughter and is insulting about her gifts. The grandmother is so miserly that she ruins Christmas day for the children with her complaints about the cost of their pocket knives. But Donaldson never questions her cruelty, or suggests why the grandmother behaves as she does. "Rub" opens well, but this story about a minor being taken away from her bootlegging prostitute mother degenerates into a recitation of what the narrator did and did not observe. He calls Ruby's departure a "calamity," but we have no sense of it. In all, Donaldson's work is mildly frustrating; meaningful situations and characters are presented, but the author holds something back — himself. □

NOTE

For the guidance of our readers, books that receive a particularly positive critical notice are marked at the end with a star.

Pork College, by Crad Kilodney, Coach House Press, 78 pages, \$6.50 paper (ISBN 0 88910 296 4).

By Charles Mandel

THIS FORMER vanity press editor's ninth book is a pratfall of loonyness. Readers caught unaware will open it and receive a custard pie in the face, a kick in the pants, and a seltzer bottle squirt on their clothes. The suite of stories opens with protagonist Garth Farb begging his parents for permission to attend Pork College, Garth having much to gain from a school that offers courses in cheese, chairs, pictures, squash, and perhaps most importantly, porkology. As Garth travels to the school we are informed: "The train is rounding the bend by the seashore among the sheer cliffs by the tar sands adjoining the bayou at the foot of the glacier." In successive stories, Garth learns of the college's heroes, solves a mystery, and experiences first love — when his application to a computer dating service is answered, he finds that his ideal mate is a cabbage. Kilodney is a literary anarchist. Like a slapstick Bakunin, he subverts language. It is difficult to imitate badly written prose; Kilodney excels at writing poorly, counting among his methods long-winded, nonsensical rhetoric, redundancy, and defective syntax. The result is prose that trips, bumbles, stumbles, and slides with the hyperactive enthusiasm and zaniness of the Marx Brothers. ☆

INTERNATIONAL

AFFAIRS

Israel After Begin, by Daniel Gavron, Houghton Mifflin, 199 pages, \$13.95 cloth (ISBN 0 395 35320 3).

By Arnold Ages

THIS ESSAY ON Israel after Begin is a series of interviews with Israeli soldiers (many conducted during the 1982 fighting), politicians, and common folk that highlight the anxieties felt by many people who, for the first time in their lives, were faced with an Israel that had gone to war not to save the country but to advance geo-political interests. They exhibit grave apprehensions over the way the war was run. Although PLO versions of Israeli military activities in Lebanon are suspect, the quotations from high-ranking Israeli participants cannot be discounted so readily. One person interviewed was a 69-year-old career officer who dismisses arguments about the superiority of Israeli morality

over Syrian and Palestinian military ethics: "It is not by the standards of the Syrians that we must judge ourselves." Gavron is careful not to make blanket criticisms of Israel. As a former soldier, he justifies his country's assault in June, 1982, by pointing out that the PLO had by then amassed enough weaponry to give it a veto on movement within Israel's northern regions, and hence the initial incursion into Lebanon was legitimate. But Gavron and most others in this volume distinguish between what they perceive as a justifiable attack within the 45-kilometre perimeter and the illegitimate advance to Beirut and the subsequent bombing of the city. The interviewees point out often that much of Israel's moral reserves was exhausted when Israeli troops attacked a city that, for all its PLO positions, contained innocent civilians who were dragged into the conflict. Gavron himself does not believe that the moral reserves are finished, but that redemption is still available providing that Israel explores new ways of coexisting with the Arabs, specifically Palestinians. □

Israel in the Mind of America, by Peter Grose, Knopf, 261 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 3944 51658 3).

By Arnold Ages

GROSE, A FORMER *New York Times* correspondent, has written a painstakingly complex history of American-Zionist relations from the 19th century to 1948. Although Israel-American relations loom greatly today, this was not the case early in the development of the Zionist enterprise. According to Grose, U.S. Zionism even under the leadership of Justice Brandeis and Stephen Wise was of only peripheral interest to the U.S. government, which tended to leave Middle East matters to British imperial interests. It was not until the late 1930s that U.S. politicians began to interest themselves in the idea of a reconstituted Jewish homeland. That nascent interest, exhibited by Roosevelt initially in 1937, quickly abated during the Second World War, but reached its fruition in the post-1945 period when revelations about the Holocaust became public. Sympathy for Zionism also gained ground when the anti-Jewish immigration policies of Breckenbridge Long became documented: his exertions had almost single-handedly blocked the rescue of numerous Jews who perished under Hitler. Grose's account of later struggles among U.S. Zionists to obtain government support contains much information about frictions that existed among Jewish groups, which were split by diverse political and religious instincts —

besides deep personality conflicts among many Zionist spokesmen. The other great merit of this book is a detailed analysis of the opposition to Zionism in many echelons of the U.S. government. In the end the opponents lost, undone by factors like the skilful ministrations of Chaim Weizmann, the personal intervention of Harry Truman, and the general support of the American people. Although the U.S. government was the first to recognize Israel in 1948, it took almost 20 years before political support was transformed into an entente that has caused some critics to refer to Israel as the 51st state. □

The Zionist Dream Revisited, by Amnon Rubinstein, Schocken Books, 204 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 8052 3886 7).

By Arnold Ages

RUBINSTEIN, FORMER dean at the Tel Aviv Law School, believes that more flexibility needs to be introduced into public discourse in Israel. His memoir, which is an amalgam of Zionist history, social criticism, and prophetic speculation, is a powerful polemic against what he identifies as the single most dangerous trend in Israel today: religious militancy. He suggests that the increasing presence of right-wing religious militancy, such as that exemplified in the Gush Emunin (the group that has pioneered settlements in Judea and Samaria) is harmful to Israel's long-term goals. In their fervour, argues Rubinstein, such groups are reversing the progress modern Zionist pioneers made in accommodating Jewish aspirations to modernity. Invoking biblical passages to justify claims to all of Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel) is only part of the problem. The most egregious error being committed by religious extremists, he says, is the *shtetlelization* of the country



— transforming a modern political state into a backward Jewish village like those of Russia-Poland circa 1880. The author has nothing against Judaism *per se*; he is opposed to those aspects of Jewish teaching that emphasize polarities between Jews and gentiles and reinforce the idea that there will always be strife

between the two. It is the apocalyptic appeal of such teachings, according to him, that has invaded the minds of too many Israelis. Although not all readers will accept Rubinstein's thesis, he has opened the debate on Israel's ultimate configuration on a very high level. ☆

THE PAST

The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier 1880-1930, by Eliane Leslau Silverman, Eden Press, illustrated, 183 pages, \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 920792 29 4).

By Maria Horvath

THERE IS PLENTY of material here for an interesting book: interviews with women who lived through the settlement of the Alberta frontier between 1890 and 1930. They recall their arduous move to the West, their girlhoods, relationships with menfolk, the joys and sorrows of bringing up large families, the endless work, their feelings of loneliness, and contacts with the far-flung community. However, the author doesn't seem to know how to winnow the banal from the significant memories. As oral history, the book also has its problems: dates are unclear or even omitted, details are muddled, speakers are often not identified, and the selection of women interviewed could have been wider. For example, there are few Indians and Métis, apparently only one black, and few political women. But there is beauty in the simple and direct language. A teacher recalls her first job: "One day I was walking along the road from the school where I was teaching. There was a bit of newspaper on the ground and I picked it up to read it. As I turned it over I saw on it a scientific diagram of the interior of a cell. It was something familiar, from another world than the one I was in, and I just stood on that road and blubbered." Regrettably, much too often the author's commentary is jarring and pretentious. Too often she tries to force the words of yesteryear to yield a contemporary feminist outlook that they just do not contain. Silverman should let the past tell its own story. □

The Promised Land: Settling the West 1896-1914, by Pierre Berton, McClelland & Stewart, illustrated, 388 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 1243 8).

By Maria Horvath

THIS HISTORY is Berton's 30th book and the final volume in his tetralogy about the opening of the Canadian West in the

half century after Confederation. As in *The National Dream*, *The Last Spike*, and *Klondike*, he has dusted off archives and newspaper files and worked through memoirs and papers to produce an engaging, lively, and engrossing book. He tells the story of how a nation was transformed. From 1896 to 1914, more than one million new immigrants settled on the prairies. The Pied Piper who led this multitude was Clifford Sifton, Wilfrid Laurier's minister of the interior from 1896-1905. Sifton's plan was simple: bring over productive settlers to make the West the country's grain basket. But not just anyone would do: the minister welcomed only those "agricultural laborers and farmers or people who are coming for the purpose of engaging in agriculture, whether as farmers or farm laborers." They had to be "Northerners," Slavs, British, Scandinavians, Germans, and Scots, or resettled white Americans. "Southerners" like Italians and Jews or U.S. blacks were not acceptable. Should the prospective newcomer have doubts, Sifton's propaganda was brazen in its lies. "The kindest thing to say about it is that the literature was a little on the optimistic side," one British immigrant recalled. "Canada was said to have a healthy climate guaranteed to be free of malaria. One has to admit that was true." The book is full of revealing anecdotes, lively images, and vivid language — so vivid that Berton needn't have resorted to "you are there" interludes, contrivedly written in the present tense. There's enough action already. ☆

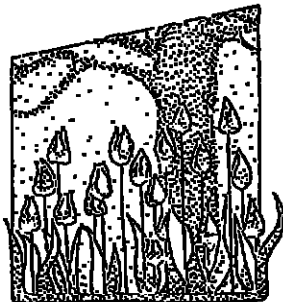
POETRY

Doctrine of Signatures, by Anne Szumigalski, Fifth House, 102 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920079 00 8) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 920079 01 6).

By Douglas Smith

IN HER EARLIER work, Szumigalski tended toward inflexible forms, but left them behind for a more colloquial yet often elliptical style. Now she has directed her colloquialism into understatement, so that when read aloud the poems pass directly to her audience like profound conversation. The style is discursive and anecdotal, and appears as effortless as if the poet had spoken the poems first and written them later. "The Doctrine of Signatures," an afterward tells us, in an "ancient herbal doctrine [that] is based on the resemblance of certain plants or plant parts to specific human organs." Szumigalski creates a world of visionary coherence devoid of entrance and exit, where everything

relates physically or psychically to everything else. Most of the poems here are compact, thick blocks of paragraphs separated by thin, horizontal blocks of white page; these paragraphs lack indentation, conventional punctuation, and capital letters; they appear deceptively simple yet intractable, and the tension



this produces is powerful. Lacking an apparent framework and metre of any kind, the poems organize themselves from within. In "The Disc" one has the feeling that words are shifting and re-shaping themselves — the formalistic extension of the woman-protagonist's confusion of appearance and reality. The woman refuses to name what she is — for that is impossible — but instead what she corresponds to: "sand, twigs, stones, and waves of disturbed air." The primary aspect of the poet's work is auditory, and in "Jazzing at the Vatican" the repetition of liturgical phrasing and nonsensical neologisms produces a comically incantatory effect. Szumigalski's transformative power, her "surreality" is the book's strength — and weakness, in that it is never developed enough to do justice to the central metaphor. Still, this remarkable book's experiments with voice and form embody both an elemental, elegiac music that yearns to give back to the plant its dignity and healing powers and a comic, lyrical music that counterpoints such seriousness with anti-selfconscious warblings. ☆

Gearing of Love, by John Oughton, Mosaic Press, 64 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88962 248 5).

By Robert Billings

WHILE TRAVELLING in Japan, John Oughton seems to have spent much of his time in cities. As a result, his poetic record is one of relationships and anecdotes about particular events. The poems range from sparse love lyrics to extended meditations on music. Throughout, we see a man struggling for identity, communication, and love. The book also satirically handles such subjects as love and Irving Layton (one of the poet's teachers at York). The satirical attracts me, permitting an

acceptance of overly sentimental poems as necessary parts of the book and of Oughton's outlook. Satire is a genre that, to be effective, must contain elements that make us both laugh and think seriously, and Oughton succeeds — his treatment of Florida, for example, turns on a tension between the landscape's beauty and the idiocy of the humans who visit or inhabit it. The sentimental poems are ones that consist of anecdotes of lost love and childhood (it is part of the satirist's nature that he can be easily hurt) in which Oughton has not succeeded in turning feelings into poems. There are some exceptions, notably "For My Dead Sister" and "January 20, 1977," that rise to the status of elegy. □

A Heart of Names, by Robert Billings, Mosaic Press, 48 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88962 208 6).

By Ken Stange

ROBERT BILLINGS is a very competent poet with an established reputation, and this book contains many competent, sensitive poems. But it does not hold many surprises. The book is divided into three sections. The first, "Cayuga," and the last, "Fruit Cellar Poems," are both longish, bland poems; the middle section consists of 16 short lyrics, like the filling in a sandwich. Billings sometimes takes the reader by surprise in these middle poems with lines like "We half-believe sunfish among rocks/are brilliant as the eyes of people in love." And in "The Paul Kane House: Wellesley Street E." he succeeds in weaving an intricate fugue of past and present. However, only too often the poems in this selection are prosaic and predictable. □

Imagining Horses, by John Bemrose, Black Moss Press, 64 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88753 113 X).

By Ken Stange

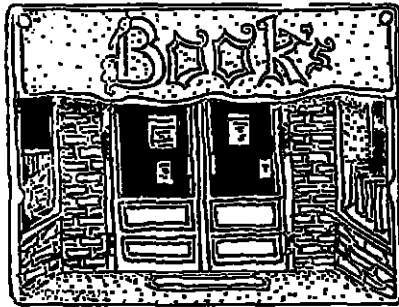
JOHN BEMROSE'S *Imagining Horses* is divided into three sections of relatively short, lyric poems. Although Bemrose sometimes comes dangerously close to the sentimental, occasionally becoming prosaic, his poems are engaging, and his persona is a complicated and likeable one: sometimes nostalgic, hard-nosed, or melancholic, but almost always emphatic. Reading the book makes you want to know the poet and fools you into thinking you do know him. In mid-book a poem, "Down the Broke Hole," meditates on the death of a man who falls into the place in a paper mill where "damaged paper goes to be pulverized and recycled." This poem has a strange

and sinister power that makes me suspect that it is destined for anthology status; it ends "and some beautiful woman bent to lay him/under her dog's bowl." Unfortunately, Bemrose's prosody tends to be a bit monotonous and conversational, but his book is an accessible, readable collection of good poems and can only be faulted for a certain structural conservatism. □

Red Shoes in the Rain, by Jan Conn, Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 62 pages, \$6.00 paper (ISBN 0 86492 025 3).

By Robert Billings

JAN CONN was raised in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, spent some years in Vancouver, and travelled to Japan. She gives "special thanks" to two former Vancouver residents, Roo Borson and Kim Maltman, and one current one, Jane Munro. Conn's work displays the sensitivity to both the natural world and the heart's ruminations that we have come to associate with these poets. But although her approach may be similar, Conn's method is her own: it involves accumulating details and images, a meticulous gathering of Nature's aspects that have been observed carefully and with imagination. Conn's training as an entomologist may be the reason for this: whatever the cause, she is able to show us a Nature that is brightly coloured, vibrant, overwhelmingly beautiful. Against many short, declarative statements according this view of Nature, she often places images or statements that



are at once questioning and elegiac. This is particularly true of the book's second and fourth sections, "Japanese Journal" and "A Matter of Time." Travel means being apart not only from what is familiar, but also from what and whom you love. Without this in mind, one may wish for more insight into Japan; but on her travels by bicycle Conn has been perhaps more honest (and more self-conscious) than many other writers. In the fourth section she asks, regarding Montreal, "how far away can you get/from your own past?" and laments "people cornered in their own skins." Although at times it seems

that she could exercise more technical control over her poems, Conn has written a first book that is a vibrant, sensitive, and sometimes moving achievement. ☆

Visible Visions: The Selected Poems of Douglas Barbour, edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Robert Kroetsch, NeWest Press, 160 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920316 49 2) and \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 920316 47 6).

By L.R. Early

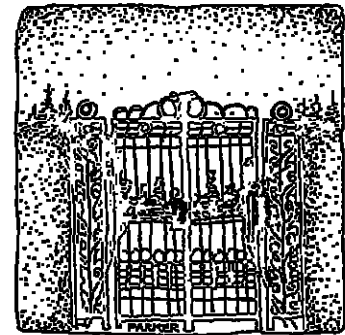
DOUGLAS BARBOUR may be less familiar as a poet than as an editor and anthologist, a critical essayist, and a reviewer of science fiction. He has, however, published eight books of poems; this latest draws from all of them, adding new poems, and shows that Barbour has had less than his due from critics and anthologists. His work is diverse, engaging, and in some ways an index to the course of recent Canadian poetry. He has been concerned with rediscovering landscape, ancestors, and the past, with articulating contemporary sexual tensions, and with exploring the dynamics of language. He has kept abreast of technical innovations, from breathline lyrics through serial, minimal, and sound poems to ghazals and the conceptual reworking or adaptation of poems already written. But this selection is more than an inventory of the merely fashionable; it is endowed with Barbour's particular sensibility. This poet's predominant sense is the visual; hence his emphasis on an often silent landscape. His most noticeable motif is the suggestive and extremely ambiguous colour white, and his characteristic lyrical gesture the movement toward a tenuous affirmation. His poetry is impelled by an interplay of resolution and irresolution: the image registered, the vision qualified, the sense of things unsaid. Because he prefers not to flourish a persona, he meditates on the limitations of his authority. His wordplay, an effective feature, is not so much the exercise of wit as a way of releasing the potential of language through uncovering its hidden connections. The hazards of Barbour's kind of poetry are flatness and obscurity; its virtues are delicacy, understatement, and precision. His editors have done a good job of highlighting the latter. The weakest are those that refer to urban blight, commercial vulgarity, and so on; some of his best poems are those that deal with personal relationships. In more recent works Barbour has concentrated on formal and technical experiments, and these indicate a restless, questing talent. □

SACRED & SECULAR

The Real Jewish World: A Rabbi's Second Thoughts, by Stuart E. Rosenberg, Irwin, 420 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7720 1442 6).

By Henry Makow

IS ROSENBERG, for 16 years the senior rabbi of Toronto's Beth Tzedec, the largest synagogue in Canada, offering us an exposé? Not very likely. Yet while recounting his memoirs, his feelings about Jewish ritual, leadership, and institutions, Soviet Jewry, and Israel, Rosenberg is often quite candid, and biting, about many important aspects of Jewish life today. He is a man of strong likes and dislikes. He likes Jewish tradition as it has come down through the centuries. He doesn't like people who change this tradition to suit themselves, and is angry about what has happened to rituals like the Bar Mitzvah and the wedding. He speaks of "culturally deprived" Jews who, with the help of "impresario" caterers, put on a gaudy display, distorting ceremony and missing its significance. "As early as 1935, Bar Mitzvah in middle class America, as some wags had put it, had already more 'Bar' than 'Mitzvah.' The social pressures that operate in this arena are a useful index



of almost every other aspect of Jewish community life in America. The need to 'appear' — successful, rich, responsible, dutiful, charitable, religious, or what have you — drives most middle class Jews." He blames, partly, the flight to the suburbs, saying that Jewish history is most distinguished in culture-generating, urban centres. Suburban communities are "primarily child and property centred" and built on mutual self-interest. Saying that "The Bible is not a book for kids," he believes that synagogues should be "academies of higher learning" and complains that the rabbi is a "university professor consigned to teach kindergarten." Although the rabbi shows little compassion or understanding of the unruly congregation he headed until 1972, he addresses in

scholarly fashion the situation of North American Jewry today and the unending conflict in the Middle East. Rosenberg emerges as a vigorous, thoughtful, and balanced voice. □

SOCIETY

Perspectives on Women in the 1980s, edited by Joan Turner and Lois Emery, University of Manitoba Press, 187 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88755 608 6).

By Cathy Matyas

SEVEN WOMEN have contributed to the compilation of proceedings held at the University of Manitoba in 1982. The guest speaker was Gloria Steinem, whose historical overview of feminism and her description of the trials that lie ahead are eloquent and relevant. "Feminism is, of course, simply the belief in the full social-political equality of human beings, which means that men can be feminists, too," she told the conference, adding that "Some of us here are probably in our fifth stage of burn-out, [and] have begun to realize that this is not something we are going to do for just two or three years, but for the rest of our lives, and have begun to pace ourselves." As one contributor noted, "the greatest crime of today is that all of the cultural messages are now negating the risk we took in the 1970s." Steinem's address prepares for much else in the book. Helen Levine develops her thesis on the power politics of motherhood and the romanticization of family life by reminding us that politics is a question of who has power over whom, and in an essay on feminist counselling focuses on the need to get at "the commonalities in every woman's life, to link personal and political in the service of change." Dorothy O'Connell describes women's economic plight, and Marlene Pierre-Agganaway the status of Canadian native women. The issue that most contributors acknowledge is that of reproductive freedom, most clearly articulated in Deirdre English's "Romantic Love and Reproductive Right," which suggests that organizations like the Right-to-Life movement are attracting many women because "They are beginning to get the message that neither feminism, nor the federal government has the clout to help them out, and they should attach themselves to men, and quickly." Perhaps because it was coordinated by the university's School of Social Work, the conference didn't cover all areas of feminist activity — women in the arts, for example. Nevertheless, this book should be required reading for anyone interested in the issue of equality. ☆

REVIEW

Failing grades

By Michiel Horn

The Great Brain Robbery: Canada's Universities on the Road to Ruin, by David J. Bercuson, Robert Bothwell, and J.L. Granatstein, McClelland & Stewart, 160 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 3514 4).

A GREAT DEAL is amiss with Canadian universities, the authors of this book assert. Many faculty members are mediocre, many students weak. Governing boards, administrations, and students have too much power, senior faculty too little. Curricula are a mess. Faculty unionization has been a mistake. Governments spend too little money per student and try to interfere too much. Directed research grants and a current emphasis on Canadian studies are regrettable. Scholarly publishing is in trouble: there is not enough money for it, people don't publish as much as they ought to, and what does get published is too often

trash. Reform is overdue. "Let something be done, quickly!" is the authors' concluding cry.

Bercuson, Bothwell and Granatstein (hereafter called BBG) are three highly respected historians who have earned enviable reputations for the quality of their scholarly work. *The Great Brain Robbery* is no work of scholarship, however, but a polemic, apparently written in a hurry and with scant regard for evidence. It is long on opinion but short on fact. Even where I shared their views I found myself wishing for solid substantiation of them.

BBG's main message is: "Canadian universities no longer take only the best students and no longer give their students the best education." Over the last decades "undergraduate education has been seriously undermined" and "the value, if not the very meaning, of a university degree has been steadily eroded."

This misrepresents the past. There is no "golden age" to be reclaimed. On the assumption that by "the best students" BBG mean "the brightest" by some test or other, we can safely state that Canadian universities have never come close to taking only the best. Bright youngsters from poor families, particularly girls, were always much less likely to enter university than the intellectually undistinguished sons of the comfortable

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middle and upper classes. Moreover, educational systems typically enhance and flatter the performance of the children of the well-to-do while often diminishing that of the offspring of the poor. As for past admission standards, they were not as high as nostalgia may suggest. Western provincial universities, for example, long admitted all those who had junior matriculation in some kind of "university program." This standard was by no means exalted.

The charge that universities no longer give students "the best education" is harder to address. What form does such an education take? BBG think of it as a "high-quality liberal arts education" with a "core curriculum" that gives students some general knowledge before they specialize. But this has never been what all undergraduates got, nor is it everybody's definition of "the best education." As well, insofar as this education required professors whom BBG approve of, active in research and publication, Canadian universities in the past provided but little of it. The pressure of high teaching loads in small institutions, the relative lack of support for scholarly work, the low salaries that encouraged moonlighting, and an ethos that rewarded teaching and service rather than original scholarship for many decades kept most professors from publishing. For part of their history, McGill and Toronto were fairly high-powered by international standards. Most Canadian institutions were not.

Occasionally, BBG let on that they know this, but their references to the past seem of a ritual kind. They may think it easier to interest the public in recapturing the supposed high standards of a golden past than in paying for the enhanced standards of BBG's New Jerusalem. Their norms owe less to the past

than to their hopes for the future: universities in which first-rate students, of the kind we may assume they themselves once were, will be taught by first-rate professors of the kind they are today. They are unabashed intellectual elitists who deplore what they see as the results of trying to provide "mass education" on the more-or-less cheap. They seem to want the taxpayer to spend more per student within a system in which only the meritorious like themselves would educate or be educated. Students would also pay more, but enhanced scholarships would be available so that no bright youngster would be excluded.

This sort of fantasy is common in faculty clubs, and I have a lot of sympathy for it. Like it or not, however, mass education is probably here to stay. And we should be aware that its enemies often dislike its purported intellectual drawbacks less than its social consequences. An expanding body of university graduates has increased competition for high-status jobs. That a growing number of graduates are young women or people with names that are hard to pronounce has not pleased everybody. The desire to exclude other people's children from university (always on academic grounds, of course) reflects an attempt to limit social mobility.

It is not clear whether BBG occupy this camp. Their insistence on merit seems genuine, even if their emphasis on standardized exams and uninflated grading seems a mite naïve. Certainly the evidence they introduce for the claim that student skills have declined in the past two decades is unconvincing. If the students of the 1950s were so good, what explains the whining about low quality reported by authors like Hilda Neatby (*So Little for the Mind*, 1953) or Robert Maynard Hutchins (*The Higher Learn-*

ing in America, 1962)? The truth is that academics have for decades, perhaps centuries, found the linguistic and numerical skills of students to be inadequate and in decline.

Of all the matters discussed in this book, perhaps none has hit a more responsive chord in some circles than the attack on tenure. BBG oppose it because they say it protects the lazy and incompetent, those who won't publish, who don't stay up to date, who skimp their duties. Of these, they aver, there are "many," "too many." How many? How large a proportion of all faculty members? BBG don't say, nor do they name names. Thus they leave the entire professoriate under a cloud.

This is unfair and, insofar as it feeds popular prejudice, injudicious. That there are *some* lazy or incompetent professors no one doubts, but until I get hard contrary evidence I shall believe that the proportion is low. And it is misleading to blame tenure for an institutional failure to discipline or dismiss those who abuse their positions. Only since the early 1960s has tenure come to mean "an appointment without term" that can only be ended "for cause, such as gross misconduct, incompetence or persistent neglect." Before that time Canadian academics held their appointments only as long as it pleased their employers, governing boards, and presidents. Dismissals were rare, however, and those that we know about were generally not for neglect of duty but for such matters as disloyalty to the employing institution or its head, or criticism of the economic, political, or social order.

Does this mean that before tenure gained its current status there were no lazy or incompetent professors, or that they mended their ways or resigned quietly when asked? BBG do not address

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such questions. They admit tenure has had value in protecting the academic freedom of professors, including the freedom to disagree publicly with their colleagues, president, or government. But they nevertheless urge an end to it.

How is this to take place? BBG oppose government intervention or administrative prerogative. Instead each institution's "senior scholars, respected by all" are to take over. In a radio interview on CBC's *Stereo Morning*, one of the authors mentioned the number "12 to 15." These would review the five-year contracts that professors would henceforth hold, and recommend renewal or termination.

BBG do not indicate who would identify these senior scholars, whether they would likely want to devote much of their time to a constant assessment of their colleagues, and who would assess

the assessors. They ignore one justification for tenure: that it frees scholars from having to do work with a fast pay-off and allows them to start longer-term and perhaps more important work. And they fail to consider the opportunities for abuse in a scheme that would give enormous power to a small academic oligarchy. Can we be sure that these senior scholars would not try to impose methodological or ideological conformity?

BBG, for example, are senior and respected, and thus obvious candidates to judge their colleagues. But they evidently think little of specialized languages in the social sciences ("gobbledegook"), "cliometrics," and Canadian Studies. Given the chance, would they not be tempted to downgrade work that they dislike? Even if not, other scholars might not be so saintly.

The existing tenure-granting process is

time-consuming and usually thorough. But abuses are possible. We may be tempted to exclude some even though they are accomplished to accept those who are not. The machinery of due process often prevents such abuses, but it is not perfect. To keep repeating the granting of tenure at five-year intervals, with only senior scholars acting as judges, would consume vastly more time while adding to the likelihood of abuse.

There are better ways of ensuring that tenured faculty continue to perform satisfactorily. One means close to us is the collective agreement at the University of Ottawa, particularly the section dealing with "progress-through-the-ranks" increments. The system signals to offenders that they are not performing adequately and allows them time to improve.

BBG want something more drastic and punitive. High quality universities must have fewer students and fewer faculty. Raised admission standards will weed out many of the former; senior scholarly action will weed out many of the latter, particularly those who don't publish. "We believe in 'publish or perish,'" BBG proudly say. Still, they reserve a place for some of those who don't publish, but only if their teaching abilities are "clearly high." These will be "directed to teach more than those who do publish." This is wise. *Somebody* had better be around to teach while those who publish are off on their sabbaticals and special research leaves.

It would be wrong to dismiss BBG's book simply because their language is intemperate or their analysis and judgement sometimes faulty. Their book has the makings of a serious critique of Canadian higher education. Our universities are far from perfect. Had BBG looked long and hard for evidence that might have substantiated — or modified — their views, had they laid the basis for workable reform, they would have written a better book. It would have taken longer to produce, however, and would hardly have been a volume from which *Toronto Life* would have wanted to publish an excerpt. It would have been noticed, but it would have prompted neither the minor sensation nor the healthy sales they seem to have desired.

BBG may have written a best-seller. But they have done so in defiance of the high standards of their serious work. They have done an injustice to many of their colleagues and many students, and have given far more comfort to the enemies of the academy than to its friends. Their scholarly reputations should easily survive the publication of this book. It is to be hoped that the universities will survive with as little damage.

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I have not discussed the full catalogue of this book's complaints: to do so would take another book. My own interest in the history of academic freedom has shaped this review and prompts my final observation. The very appearance of this ill-tempered little volume shows academic freedom to be safer than it was in the not too distant past. BBG should be glad they enjoy the current form of tenure. As recently as 25 years ago, a book denouncing the evident mediocrity of the Canadian universities of that time would have got the authors into hot water with their presidents. Fifty years ago it might have got them sacked. Fortunately, there is no danger of that today. □

REVIEW

Bed and boardwalk

By H.R. Percy

The Golden Age Hotel, by David Lewis Stein, Macmillan, 352 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9801 7).

Summer Island, by Phil Murphy, Oberon Press, 147 pages, \$21.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 538 4) and \$11.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 539 2).

THERE SEEMS no reason, beyond editorial whim, why two such apparently disparate books should have to suffer comparison; yet this chance juxtaposition is not without interest and profit. *The Golden Age Hotel* is a novel, and boldly proclaims itself as such. *Summer Island* is coy about its genre, its cover (and, indeed, its content) avowing neither fact nor fiction. Clearly, the reader soon decides, the seven sections of the book are fragments (or rather homologous strata) of autobiography. Equally clearly, however, they have been wrought upon by a ready imagination and a fine narrative sense until each section is a short story by anyone's definition, and the whole book has the unity if not the continuity of a novel.

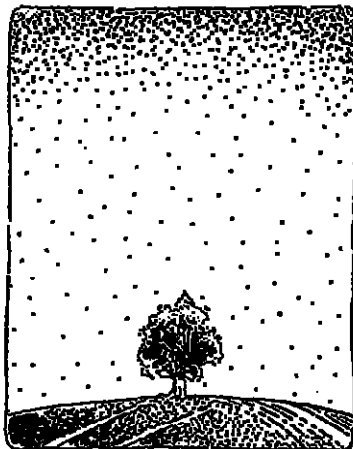
The Golden Age Hotel, on the other hand, has a tendency to unravel in the reader's mind into a series of short stories linked, like the parts of *Summer Island*, by correspondence of setting and characters. The hotel of the title is established and operated by Stan and Lilly Monteith, who dream of getting rich (again) by providing bed and board for elderly people without the dismal trammels and trappings of an institution. It is the efforts of the Monteiths to realize this dream against enormous odds, in-

cluding their own incompatibility in matters practical, that provide the skein on which the episodes are strung.

The rambunctious behaviour of the featured few among the hotel's guests powers the narrative. The guests are drawn with a lusty mix of compassionate insight and no-nonsense realism, and at times with considerable dramatic effect. One by one they are brought to centre stage in chapters bearing their names. With the undimmed passion and slightly desperate exuberance of their years they demonstrate their worth, their individuality and their undiminished zest for life, usually in face of inevitable conflict with the offspring who maintain them there.

They make a memorable tableau. The Duchess is a former psychologist of regal mien who adamantly refuses to go out and say a symbolic farewell to her longestranged husband, even though her daughters stage a macabre sit-in with the hearse at the hotel entrance. (She succumbs, when terminally ill, to the blandishments of a scruffy, disillusioned Marxian activist, and they set off on a honeymoon in Spain, the poignant bliss of which is left, mercifully, to the reader's imagination.) Then there is Faygie, ex-proprietress of an establishment she calls a bar, but which her daughter describes as a brothel. She has a disconcerting habit, when well-plied with booze by her *shvartzer*, the black busboy Lewis, of grabbing the genitals of those around her. Yet even she, who looks "like a big baking potato swathed in layers of musty wool," has her endearing side. Not all the author's similes, I might add, are so felicitous.

By comparison with these and other guests, the Monteiths themselves are pallid and forgettable. Both have been



married before, and like most of their guests they are the victims of their children. When he is duped and bled dry by his lecherous, indolent son, one's sympathy for Stan is less than harrow-

ing. Lilly, we are left believing, will pursue the dream alone, but we find little satisfaction in it. And the hotel itself, the building with all its appurtenances, seems strangely unreal, like a mock-up in a TV studio, an illusion sustained only by the consummate acting of the principal characters — who, when all else is said, make the book eminently worth reading.

If the beads on the narrative skein of *The Golden Age Hotel* are of uneven weight and lustre, those that make up *Summer Island* achieve the symmetry of well-matched pearls. Murphy's language is urbane and polished where Stein's is earthy and rough-hewn. Indeed, in the early pages, where the protagonist is only eight years old, this sophistication places some strain on one's credulity. It is hard to imagine an eight-year-old — even one who has read *Ivanhoe* — saying, "I've been working on a hypothesis that electricity is what God really is," or using words like "resourceful." But if this precocity is a liability to the author and a minor annoyance for the reader at the beginning, the polished, ironical style is a pure delight thereafter.

The island in question is Ward's Island, a short ferry-ride from downtown Toronto. Each section of the book recounts the events of a summer spent at their cottage on the island by the narrator, his sister Gerbie, and their parents. The father, a journalist with literary leanings, is of course the source of his children's verbal facility and intellectual forwardness, and he steals the show. The time span stretches from around 1930 to the outbreak of the Second World War, when the father goes to Ottawa to ply his trade in the service of some department of government and the rest of the family go their separate ways.

The carefree exuberance of childhood mellows perceptibly into the speculative sobriety of early adulthood as we experience the humour, the pain, and the pathos of such events as the shooting of a crow, a practical joke that misfires, the antics of a young fire-worshipper, the passing of a long-loved cat, a suicide next door, and at last the break-up of the marriage — which, one suddenly realizes, has for a long time been subtly foreshadowed. Gerbie, leaving the island for the last time, "had been going to go on and say, *it's not the end of the world* and then, just before she got the words out, realized that this was just what it was."

If I have made all this sound a little lugubrious, let me hasten to say that it is not. *Summer Island* is a book one puts down thoughtfully and with reluctance, and with a mental promise to pick it up again some day. □

Tales of the foreign legion

By Ray Fillip

Between Two Worlds: The Canadian Immigrant Experience, edited by Milly Charon, Quadrant Editions, 326 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 86495 024 1).

THERE ARE those for whom roots are as disposable as root beer. Then there are those such as Milly Charon, who remains the eternal immigrant "torn by the weights of both worlds, leashed like dogs to the past." In an editing job worthy of Studs Terkel, Milly Charon has brought those foreign voices off the street and into our house.

Between Two Worlds is a bricolage of interviews, articles, essays, short stories, and personal testimonials that take the "ethnic" experience out of the invisible sidelight of émigré literature. Readers in this country who don't know what a "Razzia" is, or a "\$5.00 Canadian" would do well to check out this book.

Charon's collection comes at us like a bunch of celebrants lining up to tell you their life story at a party. We get a Gulag ebuller first from Estonian artist Joann Saarniit, who saw escapees roasted in a steel drum over flames, and a corpse "strung out on the barbed wire fence for months like a scarecrow as a gruesome warning." Saarniit pooled his \$1,700 along with 306 other Estonian refugees to purchase a minesweeper sold as scrap to Sweden after the war. Aboard "that wheezy old tub" they made it to Canada.

Margarita Cruz Shandborn chose exile rather than death in El Salvador. She fled from General Romero's military regime to work as a domestic servant for an affluent French-Canadian family. Her room was a restored pantry. The RCMP harassed her for supporting "social causes" back home — an activity for which immigrants seeking citizenship can face deportation. Some authorities make newcomers "feel like thieves very often, and the colour discrimination was worse in Ontario and escalated the farther west she went."

East Indian Meera Shastri came to Canada via an arranged marriage. Her job chances improved after removal from her forehead of the red dot that denoted a wedded woman. Her small son enjoys singing "O Canada" with boys who are little bigots. Raised on Indian food, music, and religion, he

asks: "How come I'm white at home and become brown when I go to daycare?"

From Kerop Bedoukian we learn how the law can be bent to accommodate well-connected immigrants. A successful Egyptian businessman, identified as "Mike," managed to procure a "special ministerial order" from the department of immigration in order to sponsor his younger brother, deemed "inadmissible" due to mental retardation.

War stories march throughout the pages speaking of trials, tribulations, troubles, tragedies, like the same tune over and over again on a tread pedal organ. But the gore is not allegorical. Real guts of real people who can still reflect gently about the sweetness of life. People such as Mayor Romano, an illiterate Lebanese, who lost his home and factory once the Palestinians took over. He was beaten while applying for a special business permit in Beirut. He sums it all up with "*C'est la vie . . . non . . . c'est la guerre.*"

Then there is Herman Brecht, a German orphan born in a cattle car, decorated with an Iron Cross for bravery at the cost of four bullets in his leg, captured by the Americans, handed over to the Russians, sent to Siberia, from where he spent 2½ years fleeing, sleeping in snowholes, starving, until he finally made it to Finland, a 98-pound skeleton. "I never trusted a group," he says with hard-earned wisdom. But he slowly came to appreciate the Inuit of the North, where he worked as a welder, hootch-maker, and hunter. Brecht also has hilarious anecdotes about being trapped inside a bunkhouse by a polar bear who dashed off after it "backed into the stove and burnt its ass."

Mary Rajtar Kolarik twice attempted to be smuggled across the Yugoslavian border into Austria, got lost, and was jailed for two days. Then on the third try she accomplished the feat by wading across an ice-cold stream at night with a hand cupped over the mouth of a friend's child.

Dilip Bhindi describes how Idi Amin "had had a dream that the Indian people were taking over the economy." Ugandan soldiers brutalized Asian refugees, demanding their money and possessions, while line-ups for immigration papers swelled outside the Canadian embassy.

We also discover from Dick Chen that there is such a thing as Kosher Chinese Cuisine. (His unique restaurant in Montreal was destroyed by an arsonist.) Jews came to China escaping the Greek and Roman invasions more than 2,000 years ago, and again in the sixth century there was another migration.

The new generation also has its say. Frank Cerulli mentions the drive for achievement that many immigrant

parents instil in their children. Shortcuts such as taking summer courses to complete university in three years instead of four. "If I got 75 per cent, it wasn't good enough."

The most innovative presentation concerning his new Canadian experience comes from U.S. draft-dodger Minko Sotiron.

So far, I've seen a giant gorilla on the Trans-Canada in the Rockies; a giant oxcart in Melville, Saskatchewan; the giant Canada geese in Wawa, Ontario; the giant nickel, not to forget Superstack in Sudbury, Ontario; and finally the Kenora, Ontario moose with its balls painted fluorescent pink, the better to see them in the dark!

No book is perfect, this side of scripture, and even then. . . . Charon apologizes for the rough-stitched grab-bag nature of *Between Two Worlds*. ("Haute couture it is not.") However, the minor irritation in such a dynamic assortment of tales is Charon's static image of a "mosaic" as the governing metaphor. Canadian society is a plural puzzle, a potential pressure-cooker, as this book so well outlines. Yet the accelerating mutations are not given a new name, no new informing model, beyond an antiquated macro-economic mosaic. *Between Two Worlds* leaves us suspended, singing vivas for Canada like the "What a country" commercials sponsored by Tourism Canada on national TV.

At least this book steers away from the ridiculous regionalism that has become a religion in certain literary circles. It forces us to look at ourselves and see Filipinos, blacks, Pakistanis, alien allsorts, walking down our street with babes in their arms. Think of them, think of this book, next time your spoiled brat starts screaming for a game of Space Invaders. □

To be continued

By Eleanor Wachtel

Thérèse and Pierrette and the Little Hanging Angel, by Michel Tremblay, translated from the French by Sheila Fischman, McClelland & Stewart, 262 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 8579 6).

WITH THE WIDE critical and financial success he reaped in the 1970s, Michel Tremblay felt he was losing touch with

the east-end Montreal working-class milieu that was the well-spring of his theatre. He'd bought a big house in Outremont (Pierre Trudeau country) and written the elegant but anemic play, *The Impromptu of Outremont*. Then, after 18-months gestation, Tremblay's fictional world was reborn back in the neighbourhood of his youth — or more specifically of his own gestation in the spring and early summer of 1942 — in the first parts of his *comédie humaine*, a tetralogy of novels, *Chroniques du plateau Mont-Royal*. The first volume, *The Fat Woman Next Door Is Pregnant* (1981) was written, he said, "to tell the public that I love these characters," the men and especially the women who'd peopled his plays since *Les Belles Soeurs*.

The same impulse of affection and tenderness infused a subsequent play, *Les Anciennes Odeurs*, a moving portrayal of friendship and complicity in the meeting of two old lovers. The warmth just spilled over from the novels onto the stage, Tremblay claimed. And this expansive mood continues in the sequel to *The Fat Woman*, *Thérèse and Pierrette and the Little Hanging Angel*, which won the 1981 France-Québec literary prize.

Where *The Fat Woman* depicted a vivid canvas of family and scenes on a single day, May 2, 1942, *Thérèse*, similarly compact, takes place on the first four days in June, 1942, climaxing with the parish Corpus Christi pageant and parade. The fat woman, now in hospital, is still pregnant, uncomfortable and serene. Instead of dreaming of escape to Acapulco, she's immersed in the pages of *The Charterhouse of Parma*, while Michel-to-be turns over playfully in her belly. The conscious cat, Duplessis, is nursed back to health by the family's personal knitting sisters, Rose, Violette, and Mauve, and their mother, Florence — all of them visible only to artists and free spirits like old Uncle Josephat-le-violin and Thérèse's four-year-old brother, Marcel. The practical this-worldly strain in the family struggles with and largely suppresses the antic side. No one believes little Marcel's stories; his mother laments, "If I've produced a lunatic I'll do everything I can to cure him, but if he's a poet there's no cure and I'll never forgive myself!"

In this book, the practical people take centre stage and the wonderful home-grown exotics — like Ti-Lou, "the she-wolf of Ottawa," prostitute-confessor to the great and powerful, now in graceful retirement — hover at the margins. The arena of conflict is the *École des Saints-Anges* with its teacher-nuns, 600 girl students, and principal, Mother Benoîte, the Dragon Devil.

Across the street is the church of Saint-Stanislas-de-Kostka, a self-aggrandizing pile, "a wealthy trollop who brazenly revealed her milk-swollen breasts to the well-to-do from boulevard Saint-Joseph, and her square, nondescript ass to the poor from the rest of the parish."

Eleven-year-old Thérèse and Pierrette are the elite of grade six, and Simone is their sidekick. It's Simone's operation for her hairlip, her transformation from ugly duckling into almost-beautiful, and her designation for the part of the "little hanging angel" in the Corpus Christi tableau, that sets the story in motion. The heroic qualities of these protagonists, their intelligence and compassion, are revealed early in her friends' reaction to Simone's operation:

"Jeepers, Thérèse, what'll we say if it looks as bad as before?"

"We'll say it looks better and then we'll confess!"

This is a humane, pragmatic Catholicism, which Tremblay sets up as the true spiritual resource of society.

Simone's metamorphosis precipitates a power struggle between the teacher-nun, Sister Sainte-Catherine — a dedicated, self-questioning, progressive woman — and the despotic principal, Mother Benoîte, who is devious, business-oriented, and thoroughly

political. The battle reverberates through the school into the community and parish institutions, and ultimately leads to the Sister's decision to leave her order and try to convince her beloved colleague, Sister Saint-Thérèse, to join her outside church walls. Woven through this central conflict are a variety of other confrontations and agonies — Simone's mother facing the small-mindedness of the church, as personified by Mother Benoîte; Sister "Clump-Foot," the school portress, learning to lie in defence of colleagues and of friendship; Gérard, a young man fatally attracted to the pre-pubescent Thérèse and fighting the sense of himself as a would-be rapist; Pierrette, troubled by the moments of estrangement the disturbing presence of Gérard brings to her relationship with Thérèse and just as conscious of her own unwanted effect on Simone's adolescent brother, Maurice.

These personal crises, and the foreshadowing of others, affecting virtually every character in the novel, present a community that is vibrant and seething. However, the intimate scale and sensitive handling render the turmoil with the quality of a pointillist landscape, an exquisite tremor.

Tremblay succeeds in his exposé of the

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pagan church and its earthly relations with its parishioners. "Mother Benoîte des Anges became aware of the exaggerated importance and, above all, of the futility of this grotesque play-acting that was used to numb naive souls; for the first time she realized how ugly was this display of gussied-up children and paint-daubed statues, insipid, laughable leftovers from medieval mysteries, and she was horrified." Equally, his criticism of the internal politics and moral failings of the clergy finds its mark. Sister Saint-Catherine

believed far more in the human being's capacity to heal himself through the force of will, reflection and wisdom, than in the superficial outward trappings of a religion that preached inner peace, grace and happiness through ready-made formulas and ready-made beliefs, leaving no initiative to its flock, which the Church crammed with promises for fear the faithful might see through its tricks and abandon it, leaving it destitute; for despite its preachings and sermons about the vanity of the things of this world, it was so accustomed to indulgence and silk.

But unlike many ham-fisted portrayals, where adult authors have retained a child's view of that institution and imbue the clergy with the larger-than-life aspects of monsters, Tremblay is even-handed, finding tyrants and schemers but also heroes, jokers, devoted teachers, good administrators, and great souls in the church. Although the book has elements of political allegory, and Tremblay is prefiguring the revolt



against the rigid, person-hating institutions in modern Quebec, it is never allegorical in style. The characters remain strongly individual. Tremblay focuses on thoughts and passions, and symbols serve this end, not the other way around.

Still, this seems a book in between, despite its warmth and humanity, and despite its brilliant depiction of the organization and celebration of the

parish pageant. It does not quite stand on its own; rather, it is more or less an advertisement for the continuing saga, not quite resolving any of its most interesting story lines. Even its central intrigues — of conflict within the school and of the gradual blossoming of the three friends of the title — are inconclusive, like the little hanging angel, left suspended in the storm. □

REVIEW

Getting it wrong

By I.M. Owen

Last Message to Berlin, by Philippe van Rjndt, Stoddart, 444 pages, \$18.95 Cloth (ISBN 0 7737 2935 9).

ON A CHILLY May evening in 1940 a man wrapped in a greatcoat is sitting in the garden of a London house, drinking cognac and soliloquizing, thus:

I cannot endure it! . . . I have betrayed them all, my friends, my people, my country. I suffer for my treachery but suffering brings me no relief, much less forgiveness . . . If they knew what I have done in their name they would vilify me, cart me through the street towards mob justice . . . And there would be nothing I could say in my defense!

Who is this guilty party? Winston Churchill, that's who. (Now try reading that speech aloud in your best imitation of the Churchill voice. It can't be done.) And what, as the English put it, is he on about? Merely that he has just arranged with Roosevelt to take all the gold bullion out of the Bank of England and ship it to the Federal Reserve in New York, which seems sensible enough under the circumstances of May, 1940.

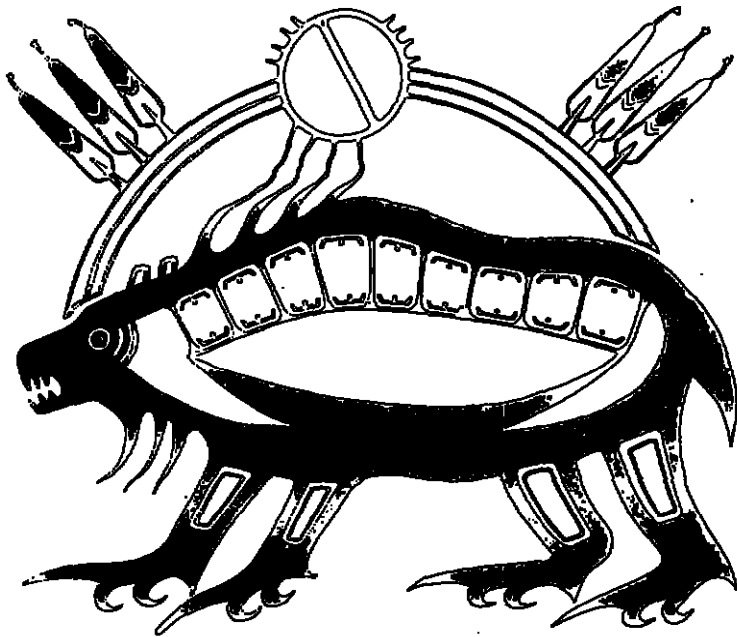
I won't try to detail the plot of *Last Message to Berlin*. The best that can be said of it is that it's slightly less preposterous than the plot of *Samaritan*, van Rjndt's 1983 novel — which was lavishly praised by other reviewers. The characters, or puppets, include a number of celebrities besides Churchill and Roosevelt: Paul Reynaud, Joseph Kennedy, Allen Dulles, Kim Philby, Adolf Hitler. But the principals are fictitious as far as I know, though they have real-life family connections: Jonathan Cabot (one of the Boston Cabots) and Erik Guderian, a former international financier. Actually his real name is Bittner, but he's the adopted son of Heinz Guderian, the Panzer general, and now that he's doing undercover

work for Hitler he has had plastic surgery and is known as Major Helmut Kleeman. As if this isn't enough, through most of the book he is disguised as Henry Schiffer, a Canadian corporal in the British artillery. In fact, there are no corporals in the Royal Artillery; the equivalent rank is bombardier. And when Guderian disguised as Schiffer is mingling with the British troops at Dunkirk he falls in with a sergeant whom he repeatedly addresses as "sir." In real life, the head that does this gets bitten off. If someone dressed as an NCO had done it, he would have been recognized as an impostor at once. Finally, when Guderian arrives in London he is recommended for the Distinguished Service Order — a decoration reserved for commissioned officers.

If I sound pedantic, it's because I am. But the author of a novel on such a subject, even if he can't create characters, write dialogue, or devise a convincing plot, could surely maintain a minimum credibility by getting his facts right. The appalling events of the days covered by the story — May 15 to June 17, 1940 — are as well documented as any in history. Neither van Rjndt nor his editor (if any) took the trouble to look them up and try to understand what was happening. In the first chapter Churchill goes to Paris on May 15 (actually, he went on the 16th, but that's a minor discrepancy), and tells Reynaud that he must get his troops "to Dunkirk, then to England." The truth is that on this day the BEF, along with the Belgians and three French armies, was holding firm on the Dyle line between Antwerp and Namur. The German breakthrough across the Meuse, south of this line, didn't happen till the next day; it was on the 19th that Gort began to consider an evacuation, on the 20th that the first German armoured units reached the Channel, on the 26th that London ordered Gort to withdraw to Dunkirk.

The real puzzle of the campaign is that on the 24th, when Guderian had captured Boulogne and surrounded Calais and was within 20 miles of Dunkirk, Hitler ordered a halt. If it hadn't been for this, the evacuation would have been impossible. Probably the advance was halted because Hitler still believed that Britain might make peace once France was eliminated — as he undoubtedly did. For a time I thought that van Rjndt was planning his story to explain this point. But at the end of the book he shows that he hasn't grasped it at all. On June 17, Churchill is congratulating all hands. He tells them that the result of their caper is that Hitler has called off Operation Sea Lion, his plan for the invasion of Britain. (At this time there was no such plan. As late as July 13, Hitler

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was still hoping for peace with his Nordic blood-brothers in England. The memorandum in which he reluctantly ordered the start of preparations for the invasion — and first called it Operation Sea Lion — is dated July 16.)

On the strength of his first two books (*The Tetramachus Collection* and *Blueprint*) I thought van Rjndt might with practice become a very good novelist. Instead, the more practice he gets the more inept he grows. It makes me sad. □

REVIEW

Fearful symmetry

By Judith Russell

The *Book of Fears*, by Susan Kerslake, Ragweed Press, 128 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 920304 33 1).

Whistle Daughter Whistle, by Carole Itter, Caitlin Press, 79 pages, \$6.50 paper (ISBN 0 920576 12 5).

Earthen Vessels, by Anne Copeland, Oberon Press, 134 pages, \$21.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 522 8) and \$11.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 523 6).

The Milkveh Men, by Sharon Drache, Aya Press, 83 pages, \$8.00 paper (ISBN 0 920544 37 1).

SUSAN KERSLAKE'S *Book of Fears* sets the mood for three of these four collections: hers is indeed a book of fears, 10 stories in which Kerslake prods fear as compulsively as one prods a bad tooth. The fear simply increases; Kerslake never lets up.

These are, with one exception, women's stories — a catalogue of menaces real or imagined. In Kerslake's landscape, the imagined menace is realized and played out through the mind and the memory of the victim. Ambiguity is the key, as ambiguity is the colour of menace. A child-murderer may or may not be what he seems. A brain tumour may or may not be madness — do the medicos care? Pastoral "Sweet Grass" is written from within the mind of the victim; apparently raped and with her throat slit, she dies as she speaks.

Kerslake's people are, nevertheless, survivors. In "The Wrong Story" a political prisoner struggles to explain torture and imprisonment. It isn't so much the wrong story as not the story at all. A naive audience cannot understand, doesn't know the questions. Kerslake exhibits a fine control here as elsewhere; her prisoner battles the loss of control that is the bogymen in the dark

of her other stories. In the words of one of her characters, these are "deadly tunes." They're also finely tuned.

Carole Itter shapes her fears differently in *Whistle Daughter Whistle*. She opens in "Some First Things" with the cold, frightening power of an angry woman — a deadly selfishness that kills. The title story whirls readers out of that anger into the protective and controlled monotone of the child growing up in a violent home. Itter's language here is precariously balanced — motionless storm clouds, shot with vivid colour.

The numbered sketches in the collection chronicle the life of a daughter. They are brief, delicate and sure, weighing the ties that bind mother and child together in love and loathing, dominance and submission. "Cry Baby" and "Each on Our Sides" weave the power and the helplessness together through colic and breastfeeding. They are ordinary experiences made mythic. Nursery rhymes in other stories give up a different meaning, reflecting, in the mirror of the prose, more violence than their simplicity ordinarily suggests. Itter's is the knowledge of violence, together with the fear and ease of it. Juxtaposed as they are in the collection, the "baby sketches" imply the violence in the longer stories.

Ann Copeland deserves better than Oberon has given her. *Earthen Vessels* is well bound, with an attractive cover, and heavy cream paper stock, but the pages are littered with typographical errors, distracting us from the author's strong, mature work.

Here are women again, and fears. Copeland's women are more complex though, and the fears more subtle, nor are they women's alone. "Garage Sale" moves a marriage up the social ladder, turns the husband into an object not quite good enough for an up-market woman polishing her "perfect polaroid world." "The Hostess" opens with "The body was beautiful, elegant" — a gem of an introduction. What follows is a carefully-dialogued display of attitudes: sons to mothers, youth to age, woman to woman, age to age, man to man.

Copeland's relationships, like all relationships, have their beginnings in both fear and understanding. What she handles extraordinarily well, though, is the fear of understanding, altogether deeper and harder to fathom. The stories do not release their meaning easily, but they detonate long after they are read.

Sharon Drache's *The Mikveh Man* is a departure, though like the other collections it deals with a visible minority. Drache's is a mixture of magic and reality, sometimes independent of one

another, sometimes combined. The title story is a case in point. The mikveh is a ritual bath for Jewish women. Rabbi Meir, as his gift for long service to the Jewish community, wants a different bath, a mikveh for men. Cousin Kalman from the Bronx manages just that, in the face of incredible odds. It's a story of faith, determination, and magic, told with sparkle.

"Reaching for Mendel Rosenbaum" is a send-up of the cultural clique in this country, unsubtle but with a swinging awareness of its own nonsense. "The Meeting" is another matter. The Holocaust is the backdrop in this well-crafted story, which might just be the core of a novel. Here, "I'm on your side" becomes a threat that perhaps only a minority can understand in the fullness of its many meanings.

Four strong writers. Four strong voices. There are unevennesses, but that is natural in collections. Typos are unacceptable from reputable presses, and editing is sometimes sloppy. But it is both intriguing and frightening that the fears catalogued are still characteristic of women, still common, and still current, unabated. Aya, Oberon, Caitlin, and Ragweed speak from coast to coast; but apparently little has changed, except that perhaps women are finding ways to identify and so control the fear, by writing it out, and writing it well. □

REVIEW

Portrait of a Titan

By Jean Wright

E.J. Pratt: *The Truant Years 1882-1927*, by David G. Pitt, University of Toronto Press, 415 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 5660 1) and \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 8020 6563 5).

WHEN I WAS learning about Canadian literature from the likes of Earle Birney and Reginald Watters in overcrowded army huts at the University of British Columbia in the late 1940s, the poet E.J. Pratt was considered almost a god-like figure. It seemed incongruous later to learn that he was still alive at that time, and indeed survived until 1964. Gods should not be mortal.

An even greater surprise is the advice that this book, by a Memorial University professor emeritus, is the first major biography of the man now deemed the greatest Canadian poet "of his time." I am happy to report that Pitt has done

his fellow Newfoundlander proud. This first volume of a two-part biography is thoroughly documented, scholarly, sound and, praise be, lively, engaging, and readable — no more than suitable for a subject who possessed the same qualities.

The book is long, well-illustrated, attractively presented, and unobtrusively scholarly. The plague of footnotes usually associated with this level of research has been cleverly avoided by a full "Notes and References" section at the back of the book. (Actually I like footnotes, but only at the bottom of the page. The economics of publishing today dictate an end to this civilized custom. Thus it is only suitable that the footnote markers have been banished as well.) A full bibliography, including citations from unpublished manuscripts, CBC programs, and taped interviews with Pratt and his friends, relatives, and colleagues, demonstrates Pitt's meticulous research. Indicative of thoroughness is his introductory expression of regret that Pratt himself kept so few records — few papers, no diary, no copies of letters — so "only" 1,000 of his letters have been collected for this work. Small wonder then that a work begun in earnest in 1969 is only now in print.

Withal, the author has written a book that mercifully avoids both the scent of midnight oil and the temptation to idolatry. He does not hesitate to moderate the fanciful versions of Pratt's life that the genial story-telling poet (and his friends) sometimes indulged in. Anecdotes clung to Pratt as barnacles cling to a ship, as a friend of Pratt's aptly expressed it.

The book conveys successfully the complex character of a rather enigmatic genius who spent fully half his long life going in wrong directions before he found his poetic vocation. "It was one of the great ironies of his life that most of his prime of manhood when creative energies usually run strongest was passed in a state of anchorless drift or, at best, of uncertain steerage." The titles of Pratt's prose works, which include "The Application of the Binet-Simon Tests . . . to a Toronto Public School" and "Demonology of the New Testament . . ." give some evidence of the highways and byways Pratt travelled before he came upon his life work. In his youth he failed in fact to show any interest in either reading or writing poetry. It was only when at the age of 32 he joined an evening class in literature given by Pelham Edgar that the interest was first sparked, and some time after that before he found his poetic voice. Information consoling to the middle-aged but not yet famous.



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Born in Newfoundland in 1882, Pratt was the son of a fiery, intensely devout Methodist preacher. The formal photograph of his parents shows an upright Victorian father with the eagle eye of the zealot. His seated wife looks anxious, resigned, and rather cowed. The portrait might be said to display the vectors of Pratt's drifting early life. Both parents were determined that he would follow in his father's footsteps; his mother worried excessively about his health.

The poet felt the weight of these concerns throughout his life, and never did summon up the courage to tell his mother that he had renounced the church. The poverty of the manse, a childhood of hardships in Newfoundland outports, three years purgatory in a St. John's store, and a series of unprofitable attempts to earn money dogged his early days. Uncongenial religious studies at Victoria College were followed by studies in psychology leading to an instructorship, a Ph.D. in philosophy, and finally an instructorship in the English Department and a beginning of his "real" life.

It was his new love (later wife) Viola Whitney who took him to the evening class that was to turn his life around. Later came marriage, family, growing reputation, and the feuds and friendships of literary Toronto before and after the First World War. But always Pratt was a conundrum.

Pratt's life confounded conventional wisdom, as a poet's life should. His wife described him as "several personalities — different personalities." His early days consisted of false starts, riotous adventures (selling wet sandwiches to drenched crowds at the Regina Exhibition, peddling his own "Universal Lung Healer"), and serious pursuits (working hard as a travelling preacher, many years of stern academic application). As a youngster he utterly failed in scholastic endeavours; as a man he spent many years in brilliant pursuit of university degrees. Jovial and lively in crowds, he complained of the distracting noise of his daughter's eraser applied two storeys away.

There were light-hearted adventures and terrible tragedy. His intense first love, a long university romance, ended when his fiancée died — she was buried on the day she was to have graduated. His beloved daughter was crippled for life at the age of four. Gregarious, he had — and needed — many friends but shied away from intimacy with all but a few. He reputedly was frail and suffered two "breakdowns" but rejoiced in physical activity, underwent hardship successfully, and lived to a great age. An amiable man, he was embroiled in no-holds-barred literary disputes. Indeed,

one fascinating aspect of this book is the accounts of the battles those Toronto literary Titans fought in the 1920s. The intellectual life of that time seems so much more exciting than the finance-dominated literary news of today. (Or perhaps it is only more interestingly reported.)

As well as giving us an important piece of scholarship, Pitt has written the story of a complex character and a subtext of the atmosphere of Canada in those now-seemingly ancient times. Let's hope volume two is as good. □

REVIEW

Plumbing the depths

By Rupert Schleder

Sole Survivor, by Maurice Gee, Faber & Faber (Penguin), 231 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0571 13017 8).

SINCE PATRICK WHITE was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1973, the names of Australian writers, as well as their film-makers, have become familiar in North America. Still, however, for a great many of us, New Zealand writing has meant Katherine Mansfield — and she has been dead now for 60 years — and Ngaio Marsh. Preparing for a seminar on the fiction of those islands, I became aware of novelists who wrote between the wars (Jane Mander, Robin Hyde, John A. Lee, John Mulgan, Frank Sargeson) and since the Second World War (Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Dan Davin, M.J. Joseph, Maurice Duggan, among others). The seminar was organized around *Owls Do Cry*, one of the novels of the admirable Janet Frame. Hoping to get a better perspective, we invited a graduate student from New Zealand to join us. He told us that we were missing one of their finest writers, Maurice Gee. So I've been catching up, reading seven of his novels and looking into his biography. I knowingly court the "biographical fallacy," for his life and works are inseparable.

The life is straightforward enough. Born Maurice Gough Gee, Whakatane, North Island, New Zealand, 1931; educated Avondale College, then University of Auckland; married; one son and two daughters; schoolteacher, librarian; since 1976 full-time writer; recipient of numerous New Zealand awards. What warrants more attention, however, are his two backgrounds: first, the small towns of the North Island, and second,

the generations of his family, especially that of his mother.

In his first two novels, *The Big Season* (1962) and *A Special Flower* (1965), Gee, drawing from his own experience, maps out his fictional territory — geographical, social, and cultural. The small town, with its snobbery, pretension, stratification, the gaps between those who go to private schools and university and those who people the boarding houses, is recorded in gritty detail. The battles between the contenders take place on the inescapable football field, at the dances, and in the homes. It is in the last that the knives are sharpest and the twists and jabs most probing, but the pressures here only epitomise those in the town between the conformists, the respectable, the barren, the blighted, the petrified, and those who, to free themselves, seem to have limited choices: alliance with the dregs, suicide, or hitting out of town altogether. This, Gee's physical territory, he presents so forcefully that it becomes ours.

It was not until some 10 years and three books later, in the 1970s, that Gee came into full possession of his fictional territory and plumped down the generations of his own family in the centre of those North Island small towns. In an article published in *Islands*, an Auckland periodical, he tells of his "Beginnings," when "the life of my imagination stretched back beyond my birth." Referring to his grandfather, Gee writes: "His story became a part of my own. My mother told it with passion and artistry. So I was increased." (A significant verb.) "I took into myself things that would demand expression."

This "demand" for expression produced in 1978 *Plumb*, the first of what would extend to a trilogy based on Gee's family, recording the tangled, tortured relations between and among the members of four generations over some 90 years. Each of the three novels is narrated by one member of his generation. Like *The Man of Property*, the first part of John Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga*, *Plumb* can be read by and for itself. Although it is the sharply defined and intensely felt characters that make the trilogy memorable, it also profits from Gee's talent for ingenious structural organization. For although the narrator George Plumb is an egocentric, deaf, isolated seeker after abstract ideas and ideals of conduct, Gee manages, through Plumb's "searching of my past," his "thorns of remembrance," and his successive "shakes of the kaleidoscope" to give the reader, living in another hemisphere and time, a surprisingly comprehensive insight into and feel for the passing years between 1890 and the late 1940s: the struggle against

religious and social conformity, the persecution of pacifists during the "Great War," what Gee terms "the Depression as Enemy," the "Yank" invasion of New Zealand in the Second World War. Unlike Anthony Burgess in *Earthly Powers* and Timothy Findley in *Famous Last Words*, however, Gee does not resort to blocks of potted "history." The factual details, the changing politics, fashions, moral standards are woven meticulously and unobtrusively into the fabric of the gritty everyday life of the family, immediate and extended, and their neighbours.

In "Beginnings" Gee puts the relative importance, for him, of these generations into focus. "But it was not his [grandfather's] story that captured me, it was my parents'." Three years later, in 1981, *Meg* was added, narrated by Meg Sole, the 11th of the 12 Plumb children. Complementing her father, the first-person narrator is modest, practical, sensitive, endowed with "skills of subtlety and quiet and wordless doing." Although concentrating on the second generation, she attempts to see and understand beyond it, and her detailed private observations illumine and enrich the public events that her father projected on his screen. *Meg* brings this saga — in both the ancient heroic and the modern ironic sense of that term — up to the 1960s.

Now Gee has completed the trilogy, bringing it up to 1981, in *Sole Survivor*, narrated by Meg's son Raymond Sole. (The pun of the title is not quite so unfortunate as the effect of the use of the initial "R" with the surname.) Although the third generation of Plumbs occupies the centre of the crowded stage, Raymond is constantly in touch with the fourth, while continually adding new perspectives to the reader's views of and assumptions about the first and the second. Gee presents these later generations as diminished, despite Raymond's attempt to build a corrupt, politically conniving monster in Duggie Plumb, his cousin.

Perhaps, however, the earlier generations are figures in a heroic saga only in retrospect. Although the new Plumbs are smaller, Gee, by choosing a journalist as narrator, encompasses a much larger territory of non-Plumbs. Neatly, in the end the Plumbs have come full circle through the Soles, for Raymond is setting out to work on a paper in the small town where his grandfather George Plumb fought his first battle for religious and intellectual freedom. Slim but full of reverberations, *Sole Survivor* is read with most effect not by itself but as the completion of the Plumb trilogy, the saga of New Zealand small-town life over nine decades. □

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Marty Gervais

'I've always wanted to tell stories. I'm very much a gossip. If someone tells me a secret, I can't keep it.'

By Mark Fortier

CH. (MARTY) GERVAIS was born in 1946 in Windsor, Ont., where — besides writing poetry, popular history, and books for children — he works as editor of the book page and the religion page of the *Windsor Star*. As if that were not enough, he is also publisher of *Black Moss Press*. In addition to several children's books, he has written *The Rum Runners*, an oral history of prohibition in the

Windsor-Detroit area, and (with James Reaney) *Balloon*, a play. His selected poetry, *Into a Blue Morning*, was published in 1982, and his latest book of verse is *Public Fantasy: The Maggie T. Poems*. He was interviewed in Windsor by Mark Fortier:

Books in Canada: *You are a journalist, poet, playwright, popular historian, publisher, children's writer: is there a central*

concern that holds all these activities together?

C.H. Gervais: I've always wanted to tell stories. I'm very much a gossip. If someone tells me a secret, I can't keep it. I've always been like that. My grandfather, who was a prospector, used to come and visit us and tell me story after story about the Cobalt silver boom days. He would tell me these horrendous lies, which didn't really bother me, because the story was so good. I didn't really want to know whether it was true or not. You see that spilling over into a book like *The Rum Runners*: when I sat in front of all these old-timers, I was enraptured with their stories just as I had been with my grandfather. And then there was a certain need to tell them. It spills over into my need to write poems about my family. It also spills over into journalism, where I want to write about the things I see and feel in the world around me, and into publishing, so I publish a book like *Why Windsor?* about the Jewish community in the area. We did a children's book called *Pickles: Street Dog of Windsor*.

BIC: *In the poems that you write about your own experiences, you don't take a narrative position so much as a reflective one.*

Gervais: Taking a narrative approach means you almost necessarily have to be less lyrical. I don't want to be just a reporter; I want to take that leap into art. I think the writer has to meld images into some kind of a message. But now I'm interested in the kind of things that Guillaume Apollinaire and other French writers were interested in — a kind of spectacular approach to writing where you hold nothing back. The kind of thing Chagall did in his painting. I want to get that child-like fancifulness in my writing. *Public Fantasy* is a book about Maggie T. Instead of in Ottawa I set her in Detroit-Windsor — I bring her into my world. I said, I'll throw everything into this: the Detroit Tigers, the Renaissance Center; I bring in things like El Salvador, Charles and Diana and their

children. And it's a lot of fun.

BIC: *What role does religion play in your work?*

Gervais: Only in my journalism. I shouldn't say not at all — I've been working on a series of poems, tentatively titled *Vital Signs*, which could be construed as vaguely, I hate to say it, religious. They're done as letters to saints, certain individuals. I did an interview with Gustavo Gutierrez, who is the leading liberation theologian in the world. I consider him a kind of saint. I did a letter to Saint Francis. There's also one to Dante. All of it has something to do with the environment, poverty, nuclear arms, the big moral and political issues of the day.

BIC: *What is the purpose of Black Moss Press?*

Gervais: To print books by authors who I feel have something important to say. I'm introducing new authors and subjects. We did bp Nichol — Nichol is well-known as a Canadian author, but not as a children's author. We did his book, *Once: A Lullaby*. We're introducing new poets; we're doing a book of poetry by a woman here in Windsor, Leila Pepper. We're publishing books that we believe in, and if we ever lose sight of that, our whole purpose has been destroyed. Poetry doesn't make us a lot of money — actually nothing. You're not going to make that much money out of fiction, either. If we do a book by someone, maybe it will sell only 800 copies. Ten years from now that person may have long gone from Black Moss Press, and might be publishing with McGraw-Hill or Simon & Schuster. But the first book will have been with a small press in Canada. I believe in the small presses. I think there's more valuable, more important material coming out of the small presses than from the larger ones.

BIC: *How is Windsor as a place to work?*

Gervais: I find it fine. I'm not caught up in the political jealousies that go on in Toronto. I find it more relaxing here.



It's not as if I'm isolated. My phone bills are \$200 a month; I'm going out of Windsor all the time. There is a writing community here, and yet it doesn't get together. We're all working on our own.

We're very much a labour town, even if you've never worked at Chrysler or Ford. It's part of your culture, even if you drive a Toyota. Even if you work in the university or are a writer. And we're steeped in American culture. In every restaurant in Windsor at 7 a.m. they're all reading the American papers. The *Globe and Mail's* not our national newspaper, the *Detroit Free Press* is. I don't think it's harmed us. I think it gives us a unique perspective on where we are. □

LETTERS

HOW TERRIBLY I have come to miss the judgement of Douglas Hill in the "First Novels" department, but never more than in November when Alberto Manguel failed not only to spell Veronica Ross's name the way she and her publisher do, but also tragically (I'm

tempted to say criminally) miscompromised what Ross has accomplished in *Fisherwoman*.

Fortunately, the work is short enough and the price low enough (96 pages, \$6.95) that lovers of quality fiction can afford to judge for themselves. I, for one, would urge them to do so. The unrelenting omniscience of Ross's voice provides the "psychological Nova Scotia" Manguel dismissed as "soap-opera intrigue."

Ann Knight
White Rock, B.C.

RECOMMENDED

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

FICTION

The Twelfth Transforming, by Pauline Gedge, Macmillan. Gedge's fourth novel — which deals with the strange reign of Pharaoh Akhenaten — returns her to the 18th-Dynasty Egyptian setting of her first,

Child of the Morning. To our relief, also like her first (and much less like the middle two), it is an ingeniously accomplished piece of work.

NON-FICTION

A Climate Charged: Essays on Canadian Writers, by B.W. Powe; Mosaic Press. Powe's stimulating, entertaining, intelligent, iconoclastic, and provocatively pleasurable book gives eight well-established literary reputations (Marshall McLuhan, Northrop Frye, Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies, and Mordecai Richler) a thorough shaking up.

POETRY

Secular Love, by Michael Ondaatje, Coach House Press. Though in the end Ondaatje still holds something back, his confessional poems of anguished, passionate love open doors into a private world of personal emotion that he had previously only projected onto characters (such as Billy the Kid) from the myths of his imagination.

RECEIVED

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

The A to Z of Absolute Zanziness, by Carol Mills, Harbour. ABC, by Elizabeth Cleaver, Oxford.
Above Tide: Reflections on Roderick Haig-Brown, by Anthony Robertson, Harbour.
The Agony and the Exit: Donato's Political Cartoons, by Andy Donato, Grosvenor House.
Air Fare: The Entertainers Entertains, by Allan Gould, CBC Enterprises.
All the Way Home, by Gabrielle Poulin, Obcron.
The Armchair Guide to Murder and Detection, by David Peat, Denon.
The Art of Darkness, by David McFadden, M&S.
Aspects of Harmony in Schoenberg's Six Little Piano Pieces, by Kenneth Hicken, Frye.
At the Ocean's Verge, by Ralph Gustafson, Black Swan Books (U.S.)
Atlantic Spectrum '85, edited by Leslie McKillop, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
Atlantic Wildflowers, by Diane Griffin, Oxford.
Auntie's Knitting a Baby, by Lois Simmle, Western Producer Prairie Books.
The Automobile Saga of British Columbia, 1864-1914, by G.W. Taylor, Morris Publishing.
The Baker's Wedding, by Mercie Fournier, South Western Ontario Poetry.
Ballard, by William Houston, Summerhill Press.
The Baltimore Connection, by W.E. Franke, Williams-Wallace.
Beautiful Chance, by Leroy Gorman, South Western Ontario Poetry.
Best Canadian Political Cartoons 1984, edited by N.M. Stahl, M&S.
The Best of Norris, by Len Norris, M&S.
Between France and New France: Life Aboard the Tall Sailing Ships, by Gilles Proulx, Dundurn.
Big Bear: The End of Freedom, by Hugh A. Dempsey, Douglas & McIntyre.
Bitter Sweet Taste of Maple, by Tecla Werbowksi, Williams-Wallace.
Blue Dog Plus, by Clifford Duffy, Dromos.
A Bold of White Cloth, by Leon Rook, Stoddart.
Brotherhood Week in Belfast, by Don Akenson, ECW.
By Reason of Doubt, by Ellen Godfrey, Formac.
Ca Y Est!, by Suzanne Majhanovich and Pauline Wahl Willis, Copp Clark.
Cabbagetown in Pictures, by Colleen Kelly, Toronto Public Library Board.
Canada, the GATT and the International Trade System, by Frank Stone, Institute for Research on Public Policy.
Canadian Haiku, by Una Wardevoorth, Frye.
Canadian ISBN Publisher's Directory, National Library of Canada.
Cankerville, by Diane Dawber, Borealis.
Carlos, the Dawn Is No Longer Beyond Our Reach, by Tomas Borge, NSB.
Castle Kingdom, by Edward Brado, Douglas & McIntyre.
Celebration: 75 years of Challenge and Change, by Marita Robinson, Grosvenor House.

CANWIT NO. 99

WE CAN THANK U.S. politics for the gerrymander (named for Governor Gerry of Massachusetts, who manipulated constituency boundaries) and bunkum (for the member from Buncombe County, North Carolina, who spoke needlessly in Congress to impress his constituents), but what has Canada contributed to the lexicon of political corruption? Is it possible to mulmurate over the universality of social assistance, or to broadbend the facts on unemployment? Contestants are invited to coin and define such terms of endearment, drawn either from the names of Canadian politicians or their ridings. The prize is \$25, and \$25 goes to Maurice Conklin of Mississauga, Ont., for the idea. Deadline: March 1. Address: CanWit No. 99, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

Results of CanWit No. 97

OUR REQUEST for suitable verse to celebrate Toronto's 150th anniversary produced a smattering of inventive, though less than we would have expected. The winner is W.P. Kinsella of White Rock, B.C. (which lies somewhere west of Mississauga), for his sneering parody of Carl Sandburg:

As we all know

*There is nothing either east or west
of Toronto*

*Trivial Pursuit maker to the world
Stacker of pancakes
Home of The National
Calm, sink-chested weakling
City of round shoulders*

*You tell us that Central Canada be-
gins at Guelph*

*And we believe you
That the Globe and Mail is a national
newspaper
That Buffalo is on the western
prairie
That anyone outside Toronto reads
Zena Cherry*

*They tell me you are wicked and I
believe them,
For I have seen your painted men
In front of the quiche restaurants,
luring the politicians*

*And they tell me you are brutal and
my reply is:
God, yes! Harold Ballard uses pro-
fanity,
The Toronto Maple Leafs wear
rouge and eye-shadow,
And I have been trampled underfoot
at the Eaton Centre.*

*And they tell me you are crooked
and I answer:
Yes, the harbours have been dredged
many times
And I have been short-changed in
your zucchini markets.*

China Hands, edited by Charles Taylor, M&S.
 The China Train, by Ivan Gantshev, M&S.
 Chronicle of the Hostile Sun, by Dionne Brand, Williams-Wallace.
 Citizen's Participation in Library Decision-Making: The Toronto Experience, edited by John Marshall, Scarborough Press, \$7.50.
 Coming to Terms, by Jack Brooks, published by the author.
 The Company Store, by John McIvor, Formac.
 The Complete Handbook of Family Health Care, by Agnes Chy-Lan, St. John Ambulance.
 The Computer Revolt, by Bernard Renaud, Press Porcéage.
 The Concrete Giraffe, by Lola Sneyd, Simon & Pierre.
 Conspirators, by Catherine Bates, Lansdowne House.
 Country Pleasures, by Andrew Olo, Fifth House.
 The Dance of Shiva, by William Dewart, M&S.
 The Death Kingdom, by John Montague, Firefly.
 Death Shift: The Divina Murders at Sick Kids, by Ted Bissland, Methuen.
 The Dinner Party, by Jean O'Leary, Black Moss.
 Finest of Autumn, by Ralph Gustafson, M&S.
 Don't Cut My Hair, by Sylvie Assanthiany and Louise Pelletier, James Lorimer.
 Invasion Ball, by Lee J. Hindle, Avon.
 Rural Allegiance, by Ben Danielman, Formac.
 The Dynamics of Government Programs for Urban Indians in the Prairie Provinces, by David L. Anderson et al., Institute for Research on Public Policy.
 Legends and Easy Chinese Cooking, by Iris Nowell, Hurtig.
 Entre les ciments et le terrorisme: Essais, by Victor-Lévy Beauchamp, VLB Éditeur.
 F. X. Garneau, Hubert Aquin, Revue D'Histoire Littéraire du Québec et du Canada Français, Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa.
 Fables from the Women's Quarters, by Claire Harris, Williams-Wallace.
 Faith, Hope, No Clarity, by Judith Haiven, New Star.
 The Far Islands, and Other Tales of Fantasy, by John Bucher, Donald M. Grant (U.S.).
 The Farm, by Jack Carroll, Reuben Sallows, and John de Winter, Methuen.
 Felling the World, by Dorothy Livesay, Goose Lane Edition.
 Fingerprint: A Collection of Stories by the Crime Writers of Canada, Itcan.
 Focus on Alberta: Industrial and Science Strategy Proposal, edited by Michael A. Walker, Fraser Institute.
 Fool Ball: Five Years in the American League, by Allison Gordon, M&S.
 Fun in the Kitchen with Angela Chubb, Irwin.
 The G. . . , by Marion Andre Czernicki, Mosaic.
 The Golden Age of Canadian Figure Skating, by David Young, Collier Macmillan.
 The Griller's Cookbook, by Maroon Chodosh and Maggie Wallace, Hurtig.
 The Good Dining Guide to Greater Vancouver Restaurants, by Cyril Bellshaw, Harbour.
 Grannies Are Something, by Mattio Falworth, South Western Ontario Poetry.
 Growing Up Blind in Canada, by Carol Talbot, Williams-Wallace.

Growing Up British in British Columbia: Boys in Private School, by Joan Barman, UBC Press.
 Gunshield Graffiti, by Thomas G. Lynch and James B. Lamb, Nimbus.
 A Holda Potfish, by Ulli Stelzer, Douglas & McIntyre.
 Harbour Thieves, by Bill Froman, James Lorimer.
 The Harrowsmith Pasta Cookbook, Camden House.
 The Harrowsmith Reader III, edited by James Lawrence, Camden House.
 Her Own Woman by Myrna Kostash et al., Formac.
 The Hewed Out Light, by Russell Thornton, Borealis.
 Historic Canada, by Kildare Dobbs and Marjorie Harris, Methuen.
 The History of Prairie Theatre, by E. Ross Stuart, Simon & Pierre.
 The Home Economist as a Helping Professional, by D. Kieren et al., Frye.
 Hors-d'oeuvres, by Carla Homan and Joyce Palmer, Hurtig.
 The Horses of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, by William and Nora Kelly, Doubleday.
 The Ideas of Karl Marx Are Immortal, by Harjial Balas, People's Canada Publishing House.
 If He Comes Back He's Mine, by Elizabeth Camden, Women's Press.
 I Love My Babysitter, by Sylvie Assanthiany and Louise Pelletier, James Lorimer.
 In Their Words: Interviews with Fourteen Canadian Writers, by Bruce Meyer & Brian O'Riordan, Anansi.
 In the Minds of Men, by Ian T. Taylor, TFE Publishing.
 The Indomitable Lady Doctors, by Carolotta Hacker, Formac.
 Instead of FIRA, by Samuel Wax, Institute for Research on Public Policy.
 Jerry Potts: Paladin of the Plains, by B.D. Farby, Sunfire.
 Journeys Through Bookland, by Stan Dragland, Coach House.
 The Joy of Bridge, by Audrey Grant and Eric Rodwell, Prentice-Hall.
 The Joy of Quilting, by Laurie Swin, Penguin.
 Jubilee of Death: The Raid on Dieppe, by Raymond Souster, Oberon.
 Ken Mitchell Country, edited by Robert Currie, Coicau.
 The Kids' Bakebook, by Shannon Ferier and Tamara Shuttleworth, James Lorimer.
 Labour Pains: Women's Work in Crisis, by Pat Armstrong, Women's Press.
 The Last Domino, by Stan Persky, New Star.
 Laughing All the Way Home, by Joan Finnigan, Deneau.
 Lazaro, by David Kendall, Seal.
 The Leopard and the Lily, by Joan Clark, Oolishan.
 La lettre infinte, by Madeleine Gagnon, VLB Éditeur.
 Life's Odd Moments, by Stuart Truman, M&S.
 Literary Manuscripts at the National Library of Canada, National Library.
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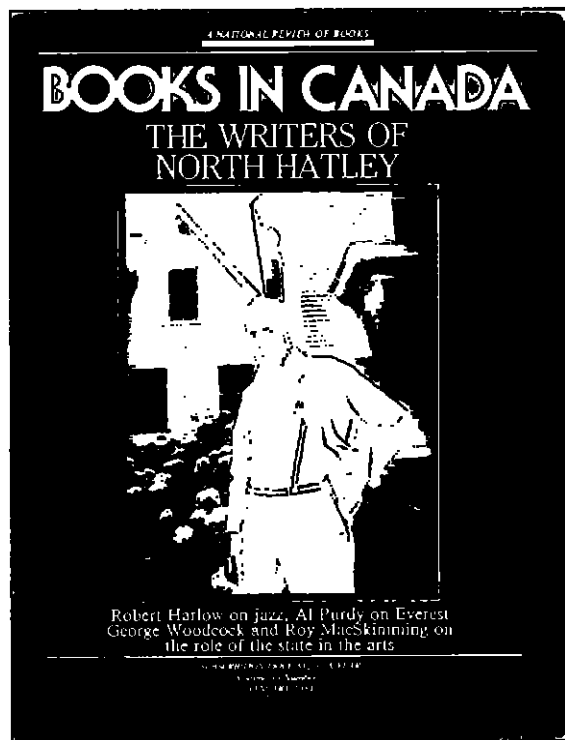
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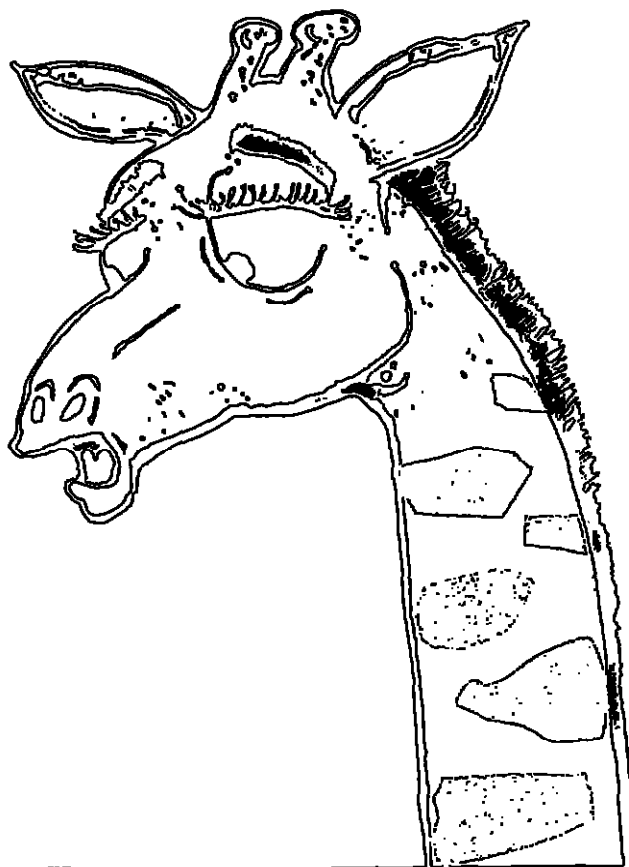
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