

A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

CANADA

November 1985 \$1.95

THE NEW WORLD
OF MARGARET ATWOOD

Close Dramas:
confessions
of a professional
pornographer

Harry J. Boyle on
Canada-U.S. relations

And an interview
with Jane Rule

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BOOKS IN CANADA

Volume 14 Number 8

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The perils of Pauline

Though celluloid sometimes may improve on print, two new films reflect the difficulties of transplanting the complexities of a novel to the screen

By Fraser Sutherland

CAN JOSHUA SHAPIRO, a slum kid turned novelist and media star, preserve his happy marriage to a Westmount golden girl? Like Job in one of his father Reuben's Bible lessons, he has problems. For starters, there are global false reports that he had a lurid homosexual liaison with a British writer. Even more appalling, his wife Pauline's beloved scapegrace brother Kevin, facing a fraud trial, has just self-destructed after his sister refused to testify for him. Blaming herself for his death, blaming Joshua for rejecting Kevin, Pauline is incommunicado, hidden by her psychiatrist.

If Joshua has troubles, so does *Joshua Then and Now*, the film scripted by Mordecai Richler from his novel, and directed by his buddy Ted Kotcheff, which recently opened the 10th Toronto international Festival of Festivals. A lot of them happened on the way to the box office.

At least the omens were good. Shortly after Richler returned to Montreal after years of expatriate life near London, Kotcheff started making *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1972) from his script. Costing less than \$1-million, it was a commercial and critical success, thanks in part to a supercharged performance by a cinematic newcomer named Richard Dreyfuss.

With that track record in mind, film producers Robert Lantos and Stephen J. Roth embarked on a four-year treasure hunt for \$9-million worth of backing to make *Joshua*. Lantos, who believed that Richler was "the finest writer this country has ever produced" and *Joshua*, published in 1950, "his most impressive work," matched him with Kotcheff — if indeed they needed matching. This was, in fact, their fourth collaboration: besides *Duddy*, Richler had scripted *Life at the Top* (1965) and *Fun with Dick and Jane* (1977).

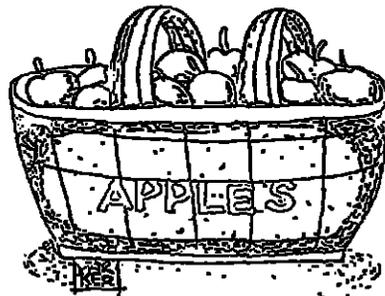
While Lantos and Roth chased paper (the film would eventually cost \$11-million), Richler completed a screenplay for Warner Brothers and published his collection of essays, *Home, Sweet Home*, besides involving

himself in the aborted attempt to send a musical version of *Duddy to Broadway*. Meanwhile, Kotcheff was busy in Hollywood, directing films that included the stupendously profitable *First Blood*. So far, so fairly good.

For a reported \$485,000 as payment for film rights and script, Richler began his adaptation, a damnably difficult task for, unlike the simple linear story of *Duddy*, *Joshua* is a sprawling, many-stranded work. In the end, great chunks of geography and population were excised: Spain, Hollywood, the William Lyon Mackenzie King Memorial Society. The married-love story of Joshua and Pauline became the cynosure.

But the cuts were far from finished. After the customary trauma of location-shooting — in London, Montreal, Ottawa, and Brockville, Ont. — and film editing, *Joshua* met less than a hero's welcome at the Cannes Film Festival. Out went a farcical subplot involving a blackmailing Mountie. At the same time as the film was being tightened, a mini-series was being spun out for showing on CBC-TV in the fall of 1986.

If *Joshua* booms at the box office after its production thrills and spills, it won't be due to the performances of James Woods and Gabrielle Lazure, respectively playing — sometimes it is hard to tell — the roles of Joshua and



Pauline. If not exactly wooden, Woods is decidedly inflexible, and Lazure is literally only half there — her voice was dubbed by another actress. Fluently English-speaking as the bilingual Lazure was, she didn't have a winning way with Westmount cadences, Kotcheff intimated to a press conference. But so what? European critics hadn't carped,

Kotcheff said. The adverse Toronto reaction was "a local phenomenon."

Not a local phenomenon is Alan Arkin, who created his role as the ex-pug Reuben Shapiro by jamming together the characters of three junkies he knew while working in the Second City comedy troupe in Chicago. The screen takes on intense interest every time Reuben's bullet head bobs and weaves into view, and among his glories is a lecture to the pubescent Joshua on "sex and the Jewish tradition" couched in ringside metaphor.

Arkin does not just steal scenes: he owns the movie. Still, there are other attractions in a film that, like the book, comes across as a series of comic set-pieces rather than blended reality. Kate Trotter, who in what seems to be real life is married to Toronto Free Theatre director Guy Sprung, has a nice turn as a kind of lascivious GAP (Goy American Princess) who tempts Joshua and beds Kevin Hornby, Pauline's brother. A terminal victim of the Peter Pan Syndrome, Kevin is played by the underrated Michael Sarrazin. Despite tennis-leaping to take advantage of every situation, this perpetually boyish creature of glowing prospects fails at everything — a familiar type in what passes for the Canadian upper class.

But *Joshua's* fundamental flaw is beyond the ability of any actor to mend when he or she is given a sappy line like Pauline's "I do things with you I never thought possible." Framed by Joshua's present quandary, the film is structured as a series of flashbacks introduced by cumbersome voice-overs ("1950 it was . . .") making it smell of print, not celluloid, and amounting to 129 minutes of authorial self-indulgence. Since Joshua's career follows the rough outline of Richler's own, we're lured into the shoals of autobiography. If we discount physique — Woods tall, lean, dapper; Richler short, dumpy, rumped — the unleading man's long, lined face even resembles that of the author.

There was one delicious irony in the making of the film. Because the dwellings in the Jewish slum district of St. Urbain Street have been creatively redecor-

ated by a new population of Greeks, Italians, and Portuguese, a new location had to be found for the apartment in which Joshua's mother Esther (Linda Sorensen) does a bar-mitzvah striptease. One was found, all right — in Westmount. *Plus ça change . . .*

JOSHUA WAS NOT the only film of Canadian literary interest at a festival that drew about 200,000 people to nearly 400 screenings, nor the only one to pose a question.

Can a sedate English professor, in town to obtain a divorce, find love and happiness with a Reno gambling-hall gal? The fact that the professor is a woman seems incidental to a conventional romantic predicament in *Desert Hearts*, the U.S. film Donna Deitch made from Jane Rule's 1964 novel, *The Desert of the Heart*. Love, after all, is a gamble. Patsy Cline, in one of the songs in the 1950s country'n'western hit parade that forms the movie's soundtrack, puts it another way: "I'm crazy for cryin'/Crazy for tryin'/Crazy for lovin' you."

Crazy or not, the professor, Vivien Bell (Helen Shaver) and gal, Cay Rivvers (Patricia Charbonneau) do end up in bed, despite such obstacles as Cay's surrogate mother, Frances Parker ("I can't claim angel's wings, but I *am* normal") and her would-be boyfriend down at the casino. Everyone takes long lingering looks at one another, and Cay's lips are frequently parted in a sensual smirk. Cay's vitality and Vivien's intelligence blend in ecstasy, but there is still the matter of a complex relationship into which both must grow. The film ends with them working hard on it.

Such a bastardized synopsis does some injustice to the film, which has good points. The heat and countryside around Reno are vividly realized, the sex scenes splendidly erotic, and the acting is often equal to Natalie Cooper's witty script. The Canadian-born Shaver, a sister of the author Mary Shaver (*The Naked Nun*) is convincing, and Audra Lindley, playing Frances, is pleasingly unidentifiable with the whiney Mrs. Roper in the former TV series, *Three's Company*. But the sequences seem implausibly connected and, considered as deeper context, everyone but Cay and Vivien seem less supporting than distracting.

Nonetheless, it's a better-told story than that in the novel, which — a serious and sincere attempt to convey lesbian relationships — is of more sociological interest than literary merit. The film changes personal names and many incidental details (Vivien arrives by train not plane), switches most of the locales from urban to rural, tacks on a different en-

ding, and alters characterization. The two women now are less mirror images of each other than complementary, older-and-younger parts of a unity. In a sense, Deitch has made the story more superficial. But the film's modesty comes as a relief after *Joshua's* hoopla and unfulfilled promises.

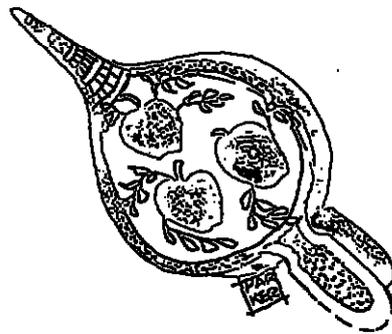
— FRASER SUTHERLAND

Lowther's legacy

THE LATE VANCOUVER poet Pat Lowther is very much alive these days, almost as if she were back in the streets and reading halls, ensuring that her reputation and career would continue to thrive. Random reminders of her legacy have popped up in the most surprising contexts in the decade since she was murdered by her husband Roy.

In 1960, Pat Lowther was 25 years old, a hard-working East Vancouver poet who was just starting to hone her style. Lowther was nurturing a talent she had possessed all her life; she had composed verses at the age of three and won a poetry contest at 10. The first poetry she wrote as an adult tended toward the wildly romantic, reminiscent of Byron and Shelley. She harboured these poems quite secretly, but shared them with Ward Carson, a left-wing politico and inventor.

Their friendship was not surprising, as both had similar political views and were intellectually curious. Carson was busy applying his unusual intelligence to cracking the mathematical code of the universe and fiddling with inventions aimed at conserving energy. He also inspired and encouraged a major release



of Lowther's verbal energies at a critical stage in her developing career.

What followed in the next few years has frequently been recorded. She began to circulate with poets and left-wing types, all the while perfecting her verse and shyly presenting it to others. In 1963, she met and married Roy Lowther, a former insurance salesman, teacher, and sometime politician-poet.

It soon became evident that the wife

was more talented than her husband, and she started attracting the attention of such established poets as Dorothy Livesay and Pat Lane, as well as others who were soon to come into their own: Allan Safarik, Lorraine Vernon, Brian Brett, and Maxine Gadd.

"She was no trouble at all, she just grew," Lowther's mother once said. And that's the way she was. She continued to produce and participate without ever resorting to "busyness." In her own quiet way, she rose in the next 10 years to become a highly respected craftswoman and supporter of both political and literary concerns.

At the time she died, she was on the brink of receiving the few rewards available to poets in this country. She had just spent a year as elected head of the League of Canadian Poets and had signed a contract with Oxford University Press to produce *Stone Diary*, her third book of poetry. She had also received an appointment as an instructor in creative writing at the University of British Columbia, and was heavily involved with the New Democratic Party and an industrial writers' group. Her technically skilled poetry touched on important concerns, ranging from motherhood to Central American revolution.

Lowther had a hard time keeping track of her poems. She lost some, gave others away, and forgot about them. She also had bad luck from circumstances beyond her control. Once, on a reading trip to the Maritimes, her manuscripts were stolen. She managed however, to carry off the reading by improvising.

This, incidentally, is the only Lowther performance ever recorded. Later, when she read with Margaret Atwood at a B.C. university, she was not deemed important enough to be recorded by a television crew assigned to report the event. Meanwhile, the university's taping system broke down and did not capture it either.

One of the most tragic losses was a feature-length poetry presentation that Lowther prepared for the Vancouver Planetarium in 1968. Based on the theme of evolution, it was supposed to be accompanied by a sound track composed by her husband Roy. The tapes apparently were erased.

But her poetry keeps popping up. Lorraine Vernon found among her papers a previously unpublished poem, "The Waterclock," which has since been printed as a limited edition broadside for the Pat Lowther Benefit held in Vancouver last summer. Many handwritten versions of published and unpublished poems reside in Lowther's notebooks, which are currently in the possession of her family. Often these

detail her tumultuous love/hate relationship with Roy Lowther.

In 1980, the inventor Ward Carson proffered a batch of poems Lowther had written at 25. Their existence surprised many of the people who thought they had sorted out most of the links in her life. These poems, as well as others found in magazines, comprised the *West Coast Review* special issue, *Final Instructions*.

The League of Canadian Poets, which has established an award in her honour, decided last spring to try to gather the bits and pieces that would restore Lowther to her rightful place as poet *extraordinaire* instead of just "woman slain." They set out to organize a major benefit, during which 12 well-known

female poets would read her work and others would reminisce. The poets included Dorothy Livesay, Lorraine Vernon, Cathy Ford, and Phyllis Webb.

Fate played a strange hand in the weeks before the benefit took place. Roy Lowther, due for release in the fall after six years behind bars for non-capital murder, died of a stroke in prison, claiming to the end that he was innocent. This lent some interesting publicity to the benefit.

But in the end not many people attended the event. Among the absent were a number of the expected literati. Why? It appeared that politics played a part in Lowther's legacy as in her life. Many male members of the League boycotted the benefit because only women

were asked to read Lowther's poems. Others did not show up because they were not personally invited. What was meant as a celebration of Lowther's life and work turned into a battle among feminists, socialists, and egotists.

Lowther had once again been surprisingly influential. She had touched so many people during her life that it was almost impossible to coordinate the kind of memorial she truly deserved. Yet in spite of itself, the benefit was heartening. Lowther's mother, sister, and daughter were there, and her close friend Allan Safarik bravely showed up to host the evening.

"I came because I loved her," he said afterward. "Now I don't feel so bad any more."
— DONA STURMANIS

ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

Unhappy landings

No matter what the dictionary allows, what a writer *thinks* he is saying is not necessarily the same as what he *should* have said

By Bob Blackburn

A NEWS ITEM about a new safety device for airplanes informed us in passing that "fires result in many crashes," an unfortunate choice of phrase that forced me to stop dead and try to figure out just what I was being told. Given that a fire may cause an airplane to crash or a crash may cause it to catch fire, the phrase could not be understood without a careful examination of the whole carelessly written item.

It had to be understood that the device was a powerful, smoke-penetrating emergency light, to be installed in the passenger cabin in order to alleviate blind panic and show the way to emergency exits once the aircraft was on the ground or water. It was not a device to aid the crew in fighting a fire that might cause a crash, but rather one designed to help passengers survive a fire that had been caused by a crash. It turned out, therefore, that we were dealing with fires caused by crashes, rather than crashes caused by fires.

Why, then, was the writer telling us, as he unquestionably was, that fires cause many crashes? That is true, no doubt, but hardly relevant here. Could it have been that he meant to say that fires result *from* many crashes? But that would hint, at least, that it is only when there are many crashes that we need fear fire. No, what he probably *thought* he was saying was that many crashes result

in fires, and what he *should* have said was, "Many crashes result in fire." That probably would have escaped comment, although, in fact, it is not quite correct usage. When *result* is used with *from*, it means arising as a consequence of. When it is used with *in*, it means to end or conclude as specified. Thus, while it is right to say that a fire resulted from a crash, it is wrong to say that the crash resulted in a fire, because the fire would have been only one effect of the cause, whereas *result* implies a totality of effects.

Probably I am now putting too fine a point on it. I would not be terribly upset by someone saying that a fire was a result of a crash, although I would balk at *the* result. And I would prefer to say the fire was a consequence rather than a result, or that the crash caused a fire, and reserve *result* for such uses as, for example, describing the relationship between careful planning and a successful operation. Finally, do you suppose that there is one person in the entire civilized world who doesn't know that airplanes often catch fire when they crash?

HERE ARE SOME short lines from the press:

"The courts should be the sole judge of whether the accused is guilty of the crimes he committed."

"Much will depend on the testimony of the woman he is accused of allegedly imprisoning."

And this, which was the *Globe and Mail's* Quote of the Day, attributed to the chairman of the colleges committee of the Ontario Federation of Students: "English is a fundamental thing. And, like, everybody should have a good level of it."

I AM INFURIATED continually by people who respond to criticism of their diction by saying the misused word is "in the dictionary," or "the dictionary says it's OK."

What dictionary, for God's sake? At last count, I had more than 40 dictionaries, and I expect that, if I live a little longer, I shall find one that defines *black* as *white*. So what?

Many people have an incredibly dim understanding of the nature and purpose of dictionaries. This may be the theme of a column one of these months, but in case I don't get around to it, there are a few things I'd like to tell them now.

The fact that a dictionary may say that a word is sometimes spelled a certain way doesn't mean that it is an acceptable alternate spelling. Nor does the mention that a word has been seen or heard to be used in a certain way justify *your* using it that way. There are some good dictionaries and a lot of bad dictionaries. Sloppy writers/love the bad ones, for obvious reasons.

And so on. I would welcome thoughts from readers on the subject of dictionaries. □

Lady oracle

'All the things described in the book, people have already done to each other,' says Margaret Atwood, whose new novel, though set in the future, reflects her concern with the present and the past

By John Goddard

AT THE FRANKFURT book fair four years ago, literary reporters were lining up for Margaret Atwood. Her novel *Bodily Harm* had just been published, and had just been named book of the month by German critics. Her local publisher, eager to accommodate the press, sat her in a tiny interview studio for an entire day.

"It was a little back-room cubicle with a curtain in front of it," Atwood recalls blithely in her spacious living-room. "You sat there and these people came in and interviewed you, one after another. It was sort of an old-style, red-light-district, prostitute set-up. The curtain would open and somebody would go out and somebody else would come in."

This fall in Canada is interview time

Margaret Atwood



again for Atwood, with the release of her sixth novel and 23rd book, *The Handmaid's Tale*. Her Canadian publisher, McClelland & Stewart, features the book on its fall list, touting it as "an unexpected and horrifying vision of the future." Twenty-five thousand copies have been printed — an exceptional number for a Canadian book — and Atwood is scheduled to promote it in 12 Canadian cities.

On this occasion, Atwood is at home — a substantial brick house edged with ivy, on a quiet, genteel street in Toronto's Bloor and Avenue Road area. The day is dull and overcast, and little light penetrates to the centre of the room, so Atwood sits in a kind of twilight, which somehow accentuates her flawless, luminous complexion. She is dressed casually in medium blue; a cotton blouse and corduroy jeans. Her curly hair is cropped high on the forehead, producing a slightly swept-back effect as it runs riot down the nape of the neck. Her manner is both charming and contrary: she shares an amusing anecdote about Frankfurt, yet she forbids that her living-room be described. "I don't want extrapolations from the house tied in with my personality," she says in her mildly nasal tone, which can be pleasantly distinctive but with this edict sounds haughty. "It has been done before and all the things have been Graeme's."

Graeme is novelist Graeme Gibson, and the first question is about him. The answer is evasive, equivocal, and quintessentially Atwood.

"The *Who's Who* says you are married to Graeme Gibson; is that correct?"

"No, that's wrong," she says firmly, then recants. "Well, it depends who's definition you're using."

"In the legal sense, then."

"Well, that depends a lot on Canadian law. Were we to separate, we'd be treated as if we were married. On the other hand, for income-tax purposes, we're not married, which is advantageous."

"Do you use the term?"

"I don't, but he does."

"So what do you want *me* to use?"

"You can take your choice."

FOR MUCH OF the past two years, Atwood, Gibson, and their nine-year-old daughter, Jessica, have been out of the country. They moved to Norfolk, England, for six months in the fall of 1983, mainly to give Atwood time to write, to free her of fame for a while. "I had this novel in mind for four years," she says of *The Handmaid's Tale*. "I was sort of debating whether to write it, because I thought it was too crazy. So I was writing another novel, and the other novel was getting too big — there was too much in it — so it did what amoebas do when they've eaten too much: it divided itself off."

The offshoot became the book she had in mind in the first place, and she began writing it in earnest when the family moved to West Berlin. She was invited there under a program that furnishes foreign artists with an apartment for several months, so that Berliners might feel less cut off from the world, less walled in. Besides writing, she gave several

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN GODDARD

readings, sometimes in German. (All her novels, some poetry, and a collection of short stories have been published in German, and her work has been published in at least 15 other languages.) The family then returned to Canada, and last January packed for Alabama, where Atwood served for a term as honorary chairman of the master of fine arts program at the University of Alabama, in Tuscaloosa.

"Although the world does not yet know it, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, has thrown down the glove to Iowa," she says, tossing an imaginary glove into the inky oriental carpet at her feet. "In other words, they're putting a lot of muscle behind their creative-writing program. They have poets and writers streaming through there giving readings and doing three-day internships, and big crowds turn out for them."

Atwood was obliged to teach one course and give three readings. "So I did that, and I also had lots of time to write. By the time we went to Alabama I was ready for the last push, which is always the most intensive part for me. That's a 10- or 12-hours-a-day type of thing. So there we were with nothing but the rebel yells to interfere with one's peace and quiet."

THE HANDMAID'S TALE is set in the United States — in Cambridge, Massachusetts — sometime in the near future. The worst human fears of the modern world are borne out. The reader is not told the details right away, but guerrillas acting for the fundamentalist Christian movement have assassinated the U.S. president and massacred the members of Congress. An oppressive, theocratic regime has taken power. Earthquakes in California have caused nuclear accidents. The air is poisoned with fallout and other toxins. Almost everyone is sterile, or produces mutant "unbabies" that must be killed. Abortions and homosexuals are publicly hanged. Authorities regulate all activity with central computers. Shortages of food are chronic. AIDS is epidemic. And anything remotely pleasurable is outlawed — except sex between genetically healthy partners, and even they are supposed to close their eyes and think of their country.

Atwood tells the story in the first person. The narrator, Offred, a 33-year-old woman, is certified genetically healthy but has yet to produce a child for the new regime. She is under pressure to do so. She lives in a household in which several women are subservient to a well-placed married couple, and which is ordered on the anti-feminist principle: "from each according to her ability; to each according to his needs." While the other women cook and wash, Offred's role is to get pregnant. Toward this end, she and the man of the house perform a monthly ceremony, as sanctimoniously as possible, with the lights on and everyone present. Offred has little else to live for. Her activities are narrowly circumscribed. She must wear confining garments. She is not allowed friends. Spies are everywhere.

"The main difficulty with writing this book was that when I started it I thought it was wacky," Atwood says, elaborating on her earlier remark about it being "crazy," and telling something of the risks she takes as a writer. "I thought it was loony. But this is true about a lot of the things I do. I mean I had the same reaction to *Surfacing* — that this was a really crazy book to be writing.

"I think the writer part of me is over here," she says, waving her hand vaguely toward the other side of the room, "and the other part is what you see before you. The other part is often somewhat appalled by what the writer is doing, but it doesn't stop me, although it does sometimes slow me up. There's a certain amount of resistance from the normality-oriented part of me. But when an idea takes you over and becomes so compelling, you realize you either have to write that book or not write at all."

Atwood says she set the book in the United States because the events could not happen in Canada. "I don't see the

GENERAL

P · U · B · L · I · S · H · I · N · G



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—Robert Walzer —
WALES' WORK

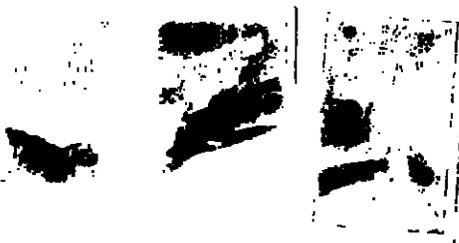


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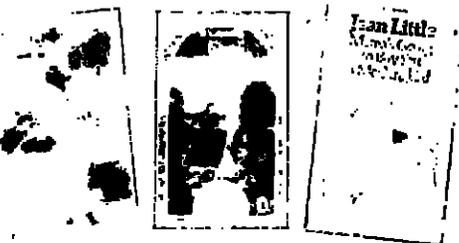
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scenario as being nearly as possible here," she says. "First, Canada is almost 50-per-cent Catholic, so you wouldn't get the same kind of acquiescence. And second, the water doesn't all wash to one side of the bathtub in the way it does in the States. The States tends to go in swings that are a lot more extreme than ours."

As to whether the events could happen in the U.S.: "Given the politics, the voting patterns, and the way things have been going there, [the book] is plausible."

CAMBRIDGE SEEMED a logical setting because of her long-standing connections there. She studied at Harvard for four years, earning a master's degree and doing most of the work toward an unfinished Ph.D. Her former husband, Jim Polk, now editorial director at House of Anansi in Toronto, is from the United States; the two met in Cambridge. And most of her ancestors are from New England.

"Massachusetts and Connecticut — that's where they all lived [until about 1780]," she says. "They were the second wave of the Puritan invasion — three sides of my family, the fourth being Scottish." Atwood dedicates the novel to one of her more notorious forebears, Mary Webster, who was hanged as a witch in Connecticut but didn't die. "They went to cut her down in the morning and she wasn't dead, and under the law of double jeopardy you could not execute a person twice for the same crime, so she remained alive. Tough neck."

Atwood also dedicates the novel to Perry Miller, her mentor in Cambridge, a scholar who resurrected the Puritans as an object of study. The dedications are a tip-off that the treatment of women and the influence of Puritans are among the novel's central concerns. But as the plot outline suggests, the book is also about a lot of other things. It is about the future and the past: "There is nothing in the book that hasn't already happened," Atwood says. "All the things described in the book, people have already done to one another."

The book is also about the present: "I have a whole scrapbook of newspaper clippings." She concentrates on three unprecedented characteristics of the modern world. One is American-style democracy, which the book treats as tenuous. "We've never before had one person, one vote — that's absolutely new. Greek democracy was not democracy as we know it at all. The other thing that's new is women having some control over whether or not they will have children. There were methods of birth control before, but very chancy, quite dangerous. The third thing that's new is the toxification of the atmosphere. PCBs aren't only going to wipe out the polar bears; they may wipe out male fertility."

THE BOOK IS also a running dialogue between conflicting feminist ideologies. "Some feminists are not going to like this book, because it shows women acting against women," Atwood says without apology, maintaining she is only being realistic. "In fact, here's a funny sideview on that. A women's street-theatre group put together a booth for the Republican convention that said "Ladies Against Women," and they had little membership cards, which required your husband's permission to belong. Of course, it was a put-on, a joke. But a lot of people thought it was real and wanted to join."

The book is also about power — not just power balances between men and women but how political power and revolutionary movements operate. Atwood's view is hard-bitten. The most powerful character detailed in the book is revealed to the reader as a flagrant hypocrite. Atwood's reasoning is this: "If you went into any [theocratic regime] you would find a certain number of true believers, but a lot of them would be at the bottom. There would be some as you went up through the ranks, but everybody else would be people who endorsed the official line because they thought it was a good way to get

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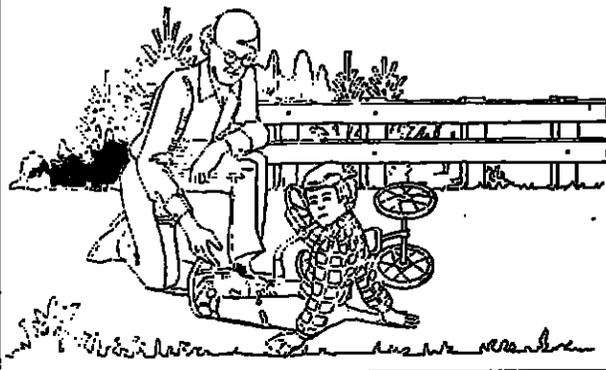
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ahead. A lot of people latched onto the Nazi train, not because they believed any of that stuff but because that was the party in power, and that's how power operates."

THERE IS SOME question as to what Atwood is trying to say about American society amid this stew of themes. For sure, she seems to be trying to say something serious. She has long had an interest in politics. She has travelled widely, has been to Iran and Afghanistan. She is a member of Amnesty International, and recently became president of a revitalized Canadian, English-language centre for PEN, the international literary exchange and anti-censorship association. Toronto literary impresario Greg Gatenby testifies to Atwood's commitment: "Her energy, her doggedness, her tenacity, her spirit, all combined with an adroit use of her reputation, make her an effective leader." Yet no coherent world-view emerges from the book. The reader is apt to ask, page by page: What is she getting at?

Trying to pin her down on the question is like asking whether she considers herself married. She comes on strong and specific at first, then backs off, recanting, denying, disavowing. And there is no way to tell whether she is being wilfully unhelpful or whether she is so bogged down in detail that she does not know the answer herself.

Take the matter of abortion and birth control. In the book, the practices of abortion and contraception in the 1970s and 1980s have contributed to a seriously low birth rate, so the narrator is doomed to the lot of a caged hen. What is the message here?

"I'm saying whenever the birth rate falls below a certain level, pressure goes onto women," Atwood replies. "It's happening in Romania. Birth control and abortion have been abolished and compulsory pregnancy tests have been instituted. Every viable woman has to have her urine tested once a month to prove she didn't have an abortion. Wages and salaries and promotions have been linked to fertility. And the state has declared that four is the number of children every self-respecting Romanian woman should have. Why is this? Because the Romanian birth rate is way below replacement."

"So the logical conclusion to your argument is what? We shouldn't be practising abortion and birth control?"

"That's not what I'm saying."

"Your book seems to be a warning against them though."

"No. It's neither a warning nor not a warning. It's simply a recognition that in extreme situations people behave in extreme ways. Instead of saying, 'Let's not have birth control and abortion,' we should be saying, 'Why are women choosing to have fewer children?' Well, one of the reasons is that nobody rewards them for doing it."

Take the matter of feminism. She says at one point that fundamentalist Moslems gained power in Iran and Afghanistan partly in reaction to encroaching Western culture, including women's liberation. In the book, reactionary, fundamentalist Christians seize power and strip women of all rights. Is the book warning of a possible backlash to the women's movement in America?"

"No," she says. "No, no, no, no, no. That kind of interpretation puts it all back on the women — that it's the women's fault because women's liberation is happening too fast. No, not that at all. The book is a look at historical patterning, the way things happen. It's not saying don't do this, or don't do that because this will follow. And it wouldn't necessarily follow."

In the end, Atwood disavows any moral or feminist purpose to the book.

"It's a comment on power structure rather than a comment on feminism," she says. "I'm actually a lot more interested in the way power structures work as power structure than in whether this detail or that detail is (a) good, or (b) bad." □

Closet dramas

Pornography is as much akin to theatre as to conventional fiction, says a professional pornographer. The porn story is a play to be enacted solely in the imagination

By Robin Metcalfe

NO MAN BUT a blockhead ever wrote, except for money," said the esteemed Dr. Johnson, and as a dues-paying member of the Periodical Writers Association of Canada, I am obliged to agree. To claim one is *only* doing it for the money, however, is a time-honoured ploy to avoid the stigma attached to pornography. I confess that if I were independently wealthy, I would still want to write arousing fiction. The workings of the sexual imagination fascinate me.

But why, friends gently chide me, do I insist on calling my fiction by that nasty name, pornography? Would I not prefer to consider it erotica? The supposed distinction between "pornography" and "erotica" seems to me a verbal fig-leaf to disguise a deeply rooted sexual shame. The appeal of "erotica" is conceived to be primarily aesthetic and only secondarily sexual. Discreet and tasteful, "erotica" exists in perpetual soft-focus, sparing us the messy physical realities of lust. This hierarchy of mind over flesh is echoed in the concept of "redeeming

social value": another fig-leaf, plucked from the thickets of jurisprudence. Pornography, "the writing of harlots," is committed to an explicitly physiological pleasure. Whether or not "redeemed" by aesthetic or social value, it must arouse the reader.

It shares this physicality with other popular art forms. As gay film critic Richard Dyer noted recently in the film magazine *JumpCut*, "the fact that porn, like weepies, thrillers and low comedy, is realized in/through the body has given it a low status in our culture." Each of these genres produces a physiological response: tears, terror, laughter, or, in the case of porn, sexual arousal.

While most writing approaches the conundrum of sexuality from a safe distance, arousing literature delivers it live and squirming. The reader's arousal becomes an element of the work, and an antidote to intellectual detachment. This "hands-on" approach to sex can make porn threatening to writers as well as readers. If fiction is crafted from the fabric of our own experience, then fantasy, as the child of our unspoken thoughts, requires an uncomfortable degree of personal exposure.

Physical discomfort is also among the occupational hazards, depending on how engaged one is in the work. Most people exercise their sexual imaginations in bed rather than in a steno chair, with their hands somewhere other than on a keyboard. Sublimation is not usually this direct, or this aggravating. Sometimes only dedication to one's art, and the pressure of overdue bills, can keep one at one's desk.

Contrary to even my own expectations, there is a market for "serious" porn. Although I write news and features as well, I introduced myself to the gay periodical market with arousing fiction. My first story was accepted after only two rejections, an admirable success rate as fiction sales go.

Unfortunately, even porn writers and publishers often betray contempt for the genre. The view of arousing literature as "mere" porn becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy, condemning it to marginality. In many of the magazines I write for, the sexual fiction is more uneven in quality than either the photography or the non-fiction articles. One gay editor recently returned a manuscript to me after a change of staff, inadvertently enclosing his predecessor's notes. "It is not [our] typical melodramatic format," the anonymous critic admitted with disarming candour. "Does that mean we can't use it?" "A 'literary' dirty story," someone had added in longhand. "Not traditional but it turned me on." It's the dilemma of some of the best porn stories: too sexy for the literary magazines and too literary for the sex magazines.

Porn's lack of status encourages editors to take unwarranted liberties with one's work. I have a special dislike for the highly stylized language of conventional porn stories: the "throbbing manhood" school of fiction. Preferring clear Anglo-Saxon terms to metaphors drawn from the abattoir, I have been dismayed to find the term "meat" edited into more than one story, presumably for the sake of variety. Editors also regularly substitute titles of their own invention. Any effort at subtle allusion is likely to be rejected in favour of such chestnuts as "A Hard Man Is Good to Find."

Such irritants pale, however, beside the advantages of porn over other more literary markets. It is relatively easy to make sales. You can experiment with both form and content as long as you deliver the goods. You get paid, modestly, but in real money. Leading U.S. gay male skin magazines, of which there are about a dozen, pay from \$75 to \$250 U.S. for one story — a lot better than two free copies of the *Oblivion Review*. And a hell of a lot more people read your work.

Consider the potential of "vulgar" literary forms: those marginalized by ruling canons of taste, not to mention the law, but which enjoy wide populari-

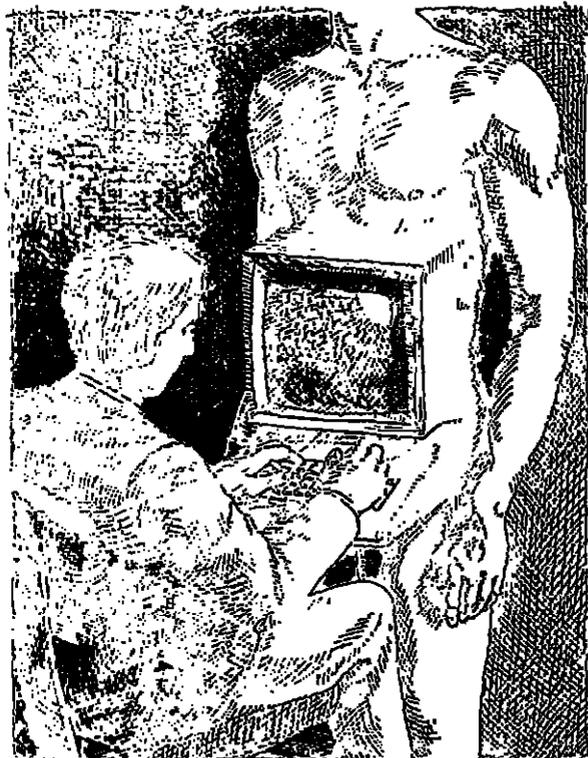


ILLUSTRATION BY NICK ZILBERSTEIN

ty. Their very vulgarity allows a degree of experimentation by adventurous writers that might attract unfavourable attention in more high-profile media. Science fiction, for example, saw an early flowering of feminist and gay consciousness. It has since attracted so many "serious" writers that its marginal status is in question.

Like SF, porn has a huge readership that includes people who otherwise rarely, if ever, read a novel or short story. For a writer seeking a mass audience, it is a promising literary form, particularly when the subject to explore is sexuality. Also like SF, porn is a literature of the fantastic. As much as to conventional fiction, it is akin to theatre: the acting out of mysteries in sacred symbol and word. A meditative aid to self-pleasure, the porn story is a play to be enacted solely in the imagination. Such works, never intended for the stage, are known as "closet dramas."

The deeper I delve into my own sexual imagination, the more aware I become of these erotic mysteries: sacred utterances, magical events and places, and transformations of identity. I have begun to "script" my erotic fiction, plotting this sexual dynamic first before fleshing out descriptive and narrative detail.

There is a debate raging over whether pornography shapes, or merely reflects, our inner desire. Given that sexuality is formed in early childhood, and exposure to pornography in our culture occurs much later, I doubt that porn has a formative role comparable to that of family life or television. Nevertheless, within certain limits, and with the collusion of a willing reader, porn may educate and expand sexual desire. Provided it does not contradict the fundamental basis of individual sexuality, porn can allow subtle reshaping of desire.

I recently contributed a short story to an anthology called *Hot Living: Erotic Stories About Safer Sex*, edited by John Preston (Alyson). Intended as a response to the AIDS crisis, these stories deal with the health risks of particular sex practices by eroticizing "safe sex." For gay men being asked to restrict or abandon activities they find highly enjoyable, the book offers a painless method to reconceptualize sexual pleasure.

Although I dispute many of the prevalent feminist axioms about sexuality, I share a concern about its abuses and the need for a new sexual culture. Sexually-arousing fiction is one tool for bringing that culture into being. Ironically, such a project is most threatened by the very laws anti-porn feminists have invoked. Precisely those publications that explore and raise questions about sexuality are

the most consistent targets of the censor. Copies of *Hot Living* addressed to Glad Day Books in Toronto were recently detained by Customs, as were public-health pamphlets containing "safe-sex" advice. We are still a long way from having a mature literature of the politics and pleasures of sex. □

REVIEW

The road taken

By Harry Thurston

Road to the Stilt House, by David Adams Richards, Oberon Press, 171 pages, \$27.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 574 0) and \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 575 9).

DAVID ADAMS RICHARDS prefaces readings of his work these days with Alden Nowlan's "Ypres: 1915." There is a passage in that homage to "farm-boys and mechanics" about the bravery of sorts that it takes to build a country:

*Perhaps their only motivation
was a stubborn disinclination.*

*Private McNally thinking:
You squareheaded sons of bitches,
you want this God damn trench
you're going to have to take it away
from Billy McNally
of the South End of Saint John,
New Brunswick.*

I was reminded of this by the epigraph from Camus that Richards has chosen for his new novel: "Man can overcome any fate by scorn." The fate of the five characters who inhabit the stilt house is a mean one: hopeless poverty.

The house on stilts sits on a road in the fictional county of backwater New Brunswick that Richards, 35, has delineated superbly in three previous novels:

The dark surrounded him as silent as any road in Canada — as dark as any also. His house was separated from other houses by woods. . . . He never asked himself why his ancestors came here, to this inch or so of soil.

The darkness of no hope that envelops the house of the novel's narrator, Arnold (whose nickname is Seaweed), derives not only from a bleak future but the severing of any connection to a better past. Arnold's ancestors (who are Irish) must have dreamed the New World promise of relief from the tyranny of state and church. But that dream has been rubbed out by grinding poverty. It no longer exists even as a question in Arnold's mind.

State and church do try to reassert their domination, in the persons of a well-meaning, middle-class social worker, Juliet, and an alcoholic priest, Billy. Arnold's response is scorn: "Juliet is our social worker. Billy is our priest. Even they don't see eye to eye on how we're supposed to live."

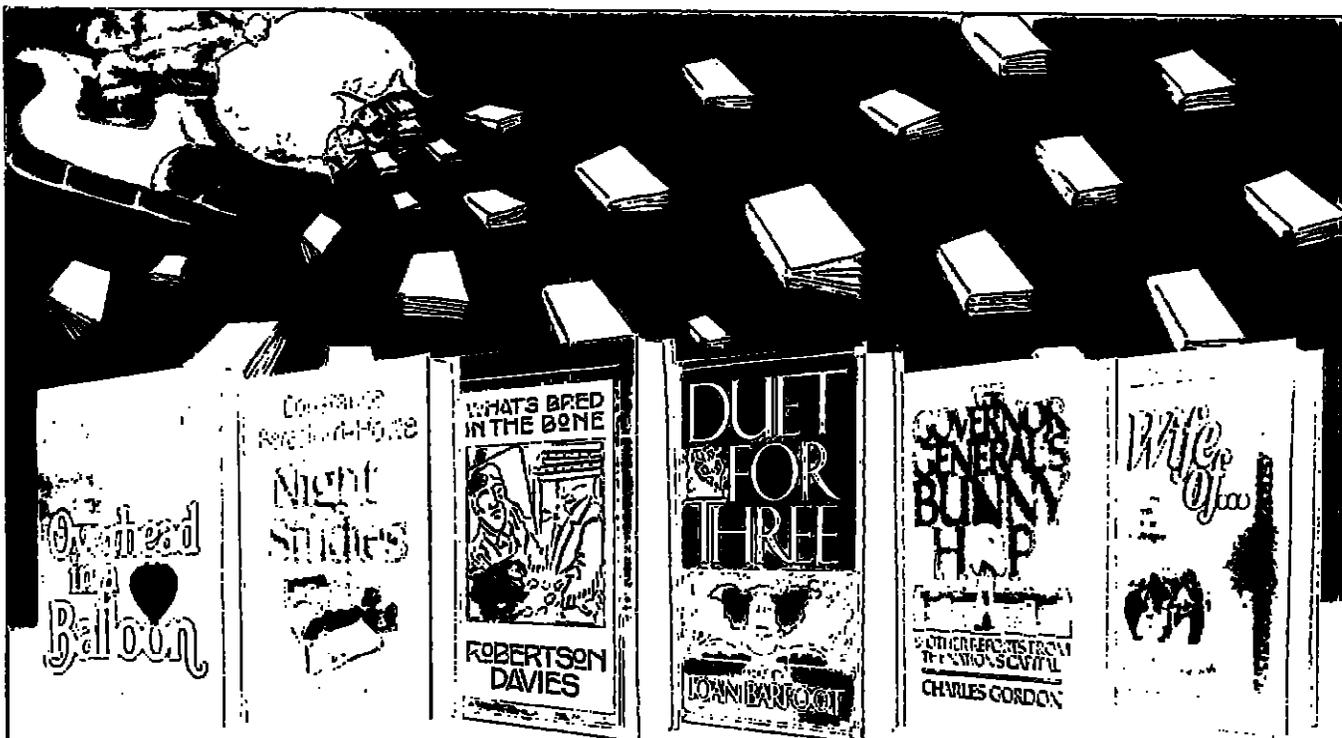
Despite its obvious overtones, this is not a social novel any more than are Richards's previous works. To be sure, Richards knows where his characters are coming from, but he never uses them as crusaders. Their concern, as for most of us, is the day-to-day interactions with those closest to them. As Arnold puts it: "It's strange to think of anything but the politics in my own house."

There are five in the stilt-house family. Arnold, "a skinny man, not more than 5'2", " who wears a hat with a feather in it and leather pants with a knife in the pocket; his younger brother, Randy, innocent but with hatred already festering in him; Mabel, their mother, a fat woman who is suffering from adhesions of the bowel; Harry, Mabel's boyfriend, a loafer and a coward; Harry's mother, Sadie, a spiteful old woman who has learned survival skills over the dead bodies of her husbands. The battle lines are drawn. Arnold loves and is loyal to his blood relatives, but no one is spared the spite of the other.

Beginning in the scorching heat of summer, the action of the novel takes place over a single year. During this time relations in the house seem to worsen with the weather. To add to Arnold's domestic discontent his girl, Trenda, leaves him for his nemesis, Jerry Bines. Bines is a stock character in Richards's novels, the dangerous man who cares for nothing: "He walks with a hard stride, side to side, as if he's looking for someone to kick."

Sadie torments him over the desertion — "Treat a woman bad she'll run away." The final indignity for Arnold comes when he discovers that Harry has been stealing money from Mabel and himself to send to a Gospel program on television. He puts his foot through the TV ("A wounded television was nothing; a picture of his soul") and walks out.

He returns to find his mother in hospital recovering from an operation and Randy in a coma, the victim of a suspicious accident at cub camp. Both die. A nurse who shows Arnold some kindness (an emotion he is ill-prepared to deal with) reveals his mother has died of a botched operation, not a blood clot as the official report would have him believe. Arnold, knowing his place, shrugs. "Seaweed knew something about the impertinence of power without questioning it or even knowing that he did."



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Arnold goes to the dump and burns his brother's clothes, then returns to a home now occupied by enemies, and the omniscient hornets. There is a terrifying simplicity to Arnold's thought processes that terminate in this irreducible logic: "... after listening to the hornets for ten minutes he got an idea of how to be rid of them. He burned the house to the ground." Harry dies in the fire. Sadie, the strongest, survives.

Richards provides us with an epilogue to this grim parable of poverty. The narrator is Norman, a cousin and neighbour to Arnold. We learn of Arnold's violent end at the hands of Jerry, in the prison built on their road because no one else would have it. Norman is at poor peace with himself for doing nothing to help — if anything could have been done. But it is Billy the Priest who confesses for comfortable society:

Meddling has killed them — legislation has destroyed their house — how can anyone be legislated to have honour, to love or hope for goodness — when there is triumph in the social worker's face and pride in the scout-master's eyes?

Richards's last novel, *Lives of Short Duration* was an epic, spanning 100 years. Richards seems to have made a conscious effort to narrow and focus his attention in *The Road to the Silt House*. Dialogue carries the weight of the novel. With its small cast of characters and confined setting, it is not hard to imagine transferring the book to the stage.

This is also Richards's most poetic novel. The descriptive passages are tersely lyrical. Richards continues to stress the language, to set up resonances pitched so high they have the effect of silence.

A cold wind came in October, and froze the ground. Deer tracks were in the far fields at dawn. Snow fell at the brightest hour of the day, when the sun was high, and neither pebbles nor boulders moved. The cold increased as the minutes passed. On the walls the flies stayed still or dropped to doom, the smell of apples in the quiet room.

I miss the community of characters common to his larger and earlier novels, and the complexities of plot, one story working out in wide loops and intersecting another on its eccentric journey — like charged atomic particles streaking through heavy matter. Instead, Richards has concentrated his formidable powers on the dark core of his literary universe.

Looking for precedent, I remember a novel Richards once recommended to me, *The Family of Pascual Duarte* by the Spanish writer Camilo José Cela. The narrator, a murderer, is not unlike Arnold, and, despite myself, I was drawn into sympathy with him — as I

am with Arnold. Duarte says:

I am not, sir, a bad person, though in all truth, I am not lacking in reasons for being one. We are all born naked, and yet, as we begin to grow up, it pleases Destiny to vary us, as if we were made of wax. Then we are all sent down various paths to the same end: death. Some men are ordered down a path lined with flowers, others are asked to advance along a road sown with thistles and prickly pears.

Richards has asked us to advance along a country road "sown with thistles," and it is a measure of his mature artistry that he is able to take us there and illuminate what we would sooner ignore. And yes, scorn. □

REVIEW

Between earth and high heaven

By H.R. Percy

The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks, by Robertson Davies, Irwin Publishing, 464 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7725 1539 5).

What's Bred in the Bone, by Robertson Davies, Macmillan, 448 pages, \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9684 7).

SAMUEL MARCHBANKS is the man for whom the word "curmudgeon" was coined and by whose attitudes and behaviour it is best defined. His opinions, acerbities, and misadventures were first dumped upon an unsuspecting public in the form of his *Diary* in 1947. His *Table Talk* followed in 1949 and in 1967 a freakish third shoe dropped, *Samuel Marchbanks' Almanack*, self-described as "an Astrological and Inspirational VADE MECUM" containing "Character Analyses, secrets of Charm, Health Hints, How to be a Success at Parties, Fortune-Telling by the Disposition of Moles on the Body and divers other arcane knowledge" as well as "the correspondence, *Pensées, Musings, Obiter Dicta* and Ruminations of the Wizard Marchbanks." This — all, of course, with the Davies tongue very far in the cheek — gives a fair idea of the delightfully zany but far from frivolous nature of the Marchbanks *oeuvre*, now in edited form appearing in one volume as *The Papers*.

Marchbanks has been and will long be a source of pleasure and cogent quotation to a sizeable band of devotees. This following is likely to increase, for although Marchbanks himself indignantly denies that his effusions are funny, at their flash-in-the-pan best they

out-Leacock Leacock (who never learned that the quality of humour is not strained). They also occasionally out-whimsy Charles Lamb and out-irony Laurence Sterne. The popularity of this plump volume is assured: the reader can plow into it with the smug satisfaction of imbibing "literature" while being vastly entertained. For in this *mélange* of cranky and often outrageous opinion and speculation there lies embedded much erudition, esoteric lore, and wisdom — wisdom of a sort sometimes hard to swallow, and it is the very relish of the churlish extravagance that carries down almost unawares the bitter pill of truth.

In its grasshopper passage over the broad field of human thought and experience the Marchbanks mind alights on a vast range of topics and covers the full gamut of mood. Well-honed satire and mordant commentary on the most profound moral, social, and political questions are interspersed with the tirades of an impractical man beset by the malevolent forces of a mechanized age. The furnace in Marchbanks's basement is his cunning and implacable enemy, symbolic of all the petty demands made by the exigencies of everyday life on the time and attention of a meditative man. Life is full of minor annoyances that have a way of blossoming into major preoccupations, such as the interminable lawsuit against the man who put a skunk in his car.

Marchbanks prides himself on being a nonconformist. In an altercation with his editor/creator at the end of the book, excited by his customary "gin and acid rain," he shouts: "I am — free, proud, undeluded by the hokum of the modern world; you are the Good Citizen, the Taxpayer, the Homebody, the Dupe and Donkey of democracy, the creature who goes through life chained and blindfolded, to sink at last in his taxed coffin into his taxed grave."

The chief butt of Marchbanks's continuing vendetta with authority is Haubergeon Hydra, the Poo-Bah of Canadian bureaucracy. He avenges himself upon Hydra for many real and fancied offences by bombarding him with bizarre suggestions and inventions for the betterment of the nation. But the favourite targets of his sardonic displeasure are Canadians themselves, who "dislike and mistrust any great show of cheerfulness." The Canadian has still "the accent in which his bare-foot old granny used to curse the timber wolves." Moreover, we cough at the theatre, and he offers an amendment to the National Anthem:

*O Canada, our home, our native land
Chronic catarrh makes all our tubes
expand;*

With raucous cough we greet the dawn,

*With snorts we hail the noon,
The emblems of our nation are
The kerchief and spittoon. . . .*

All the qualities that make Marchbanks a delight and a surefire success are present — though in vastly different proportions — in Davies's new novel *What's Bred in the Bone*: erudition, wit, irony, great narrative skill, and a surprising knowledge of such arcane subjects as embalming, art restoration, astrology, and the religious connotations of Renaissance art. Yet the frequent excessive objectivity of the narration imparts a bloodless quality and prevents the book from being the triumph one anticipates. However bizarre and outrageous the Marchbanks characters may be, they are compellingly alive and capable of being identified with. One knows them from within. Most of them in *What's Bred in the Bone* remain emotionally aloof. Their passions and conceits are posited with great eloquence and insight, but only rarely do they induce a vicarious response in the reader. The principal character, the late Francis Cornish, remains a cipher not only to his would-be biographer Simon Darcourt but to the reader, who after several hundred pages of explication by the Angel of Biography has had access to all the information Darcourt is denied.

At the beginning, Darcourt is bemoaning the lack of verifiable facts and suggesting that there may be aspects to Cornish's life that could prove damaging to the family banking interests. His listeners are Francis's nephew Arthur and his wife Maria, who with Darcourt are the directors of the Cornish Trust. The publication of the biography is planned as the Trust's first venture. In the later, somewhat tipsy stages of the discussion Maria makes reference to recording angels, and suggests also that Francis may have had a personal daimon. Angelic biographer the Lesser Zadkiel and the Daimon Maimas, hearing themselves mentioned by name, begin to eavesdrop. They decide to "play back" Cornish's life story.

Francis spends his early years virtually isolated from the outside world in the remote Ottawa Valley town of Blairlogie, where his lumber-baron grandfather, Senator McRory, is the man who calls most of the tunes. It is when the Senator becomes obsessed with the idea of having his daughter Mary-Jacobine presented at court that the destiny of the book's future protagonist takes its first dark turn. This event and the scheming preceding it are described in exhaustive detail (as a result of which Francis does not get to university until halfway through the book). Left alone in her

hotel room after the presentation Mary-Jacobine (Mary-Jim) orders champagne, to which she is not accustomed. It is served by a man who reminds her of her favourite actor. Seduction ensues, and she finds herself pregnant. Major Cornish, in search of a rich wife, saves her reputation but drives a hard bargain, including the requirement that any children of the marriage be raised as Protestants. We learn a great deal of this transaction but nothing of Mary-Jim's anguish.

The child, mentally and physically maimed by botched abortion attempts, is hidden in the Blairlogie attic. Francis, Mary-Jim's next-born, who pays secret visits to the attic, knows him only as "the Looner." It is by contact with the Looner, with Zadok Hoyle, who works as the Senator's groom but also as an undertaker on the side, with loving but eccentric Aunt Mary-Benedetta, and with Victoria the cook who cares for the Looner — and of course with gentle prods from the Daimon Maimas — that the character of Francis is formed.

His parents being always absent, Francis is raised by Mary-Ben, who instils illicit Catholicism but also, being a lover though not a connoisseur of paintings, the ambition to become an artist. When Francis begins to draw, his favourite models are the Looner and the corpses being embalmed by Zadok. Pretty strong formative stuff for any character, but although Francis has the grace to faint when he first sees the Looner he confronts and sketches the cadavers with astonishing equanimity.

All these influences, together with schoolboy bullying and the inevitable emotional-moral confusions of puberty (to which well-stocked canon the book adds little new) are clearly the ingredients of young Cornish's adult destiny. Another ingredient — the spice, so to speak — is added when the Major, his father, suggests to him at a very tender age that he might one day consider entering "the profession." The profession is the British intelligence service.

From this point on one has the impression that Francis's life is being nudged along the story line (brilliantly nudged, 'tis true) by the Daimon Davies, rather than being derived from forces within Francis himself. Impressive as are the discussions of technique and the mysteries of creation, one can never quite believe in Francis as an artist. Or, for that matter, as an MIS snoop. He becomes the devoted disciple of Tancred Saracini, a world-renowned restorer of old masters. He also meets, falls in love with, marries, and is betrayed by his cousin Ismay, but we are not privileged to share very deeply in either the ecstasy or the anguish of these events.

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During this time Francis, feeling himself artistically out of tune with his time, paints two original "old masters," which are accepted by experts as the only

extant works of an unknown painter. It is the more ambitious of these that is the potential source of the scandal that his heavenly biographer reveals and which the earthly one scents but cannot uncover. Francis, old and extremely rich but a veritable Marchbanks of curmudgeonry, faces an appalling moral dilemma when he is pressured to purchase his own unacknowledged work for the National Gallery.

There are other fascinating narrative skeins, including the life of Zadok

Hoyle, who makes an astonishing death-bed revelation. Zadok is by far the richest and most finely drawn character in the book, and it is only when we imagine what Thomas Hardy might have made of him that we realize how far the book falls short of its great potential. It has a cold brilliance that makes it eminently worth reading — and rereading — but it is not the exciting brilliance of *Fifth Business*. It is a cerebral rather than the emotional experience a truly great novel should provide. □

FEATURE REVIEW

Waiting for Israel Lazarovitch

Two new books — one a feminist tract, the other a self-deluding memoir — indicate that the real biography of Irving Layton has yet to be written

By E.W. Powe

Irving Layton: A Portrait, by Elspeth Cameron, Stoddart, illustrated, 448 pages, \$23.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7737 2051 0).

Waiting For the Messiah: Reflections on My Early Days, by Irving Layton, McClelland & Stewart, illustrated, 300 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 4919 6).

NOT LONG AGO, a poet friend and I were complaining about the literary rackets — with the customary justifiable cynicism used when discussing publishers and editors — when the subject turned to our mutual friend, Irving Layton.

"Elspeth Cameron is writing his biography," the poet said in his soft manner that masked an impending right-handed punch. "And he's at work on his . . . autobiography," he continued. (I'd read some of it in manuscript.)

"You know what they're going to be, don't you?"

"?"

"Alibiographies," he chuckled.

A year later here they are, side by side. But "alibiographies" is not an accurate description. Both books bring back the nagging anomaly that is Irving Layton — rhymes with Satan — a serious and gifted lyric artist who has done a great deal to shred his reputation over the years. These two books offer clues as to why, even now, many people refuse to take Layton seriously.

To get a point out of the way: I regard Layton as the only poet of his generation truly worth reading. He is interesting — no mean feat for a Canadian — and more: he has helped to put his poetry on the map internationally. Now that he spends a good deal of time in Europe drumming up support for a Nobel Prize, we have evaluations, interpretations

from two widely different angles about just what made this man an artist. Yes, Layton has had shabby treatment; he had been peculiarly vulnerable to the stereotype; but there are reasons why he has invited this reaction, and inadvertently the "alibiographies" tell us why.

First: Cameron's "portrait." The subtitle demands quotation marks. Pursuing the public market (there is no longer a literary audience, merely a market), she has written her book using novelistic images, dialogues, letters, interviews that read like monologues. This is not new. Richard Ellmann and others have managed to write masterful biographies in this style. However, they have benefited from the fact that their subjects are dead. I cannot express my opinion too strongly that biographies of living people should not be written. When the figure is so very much alive, like Irving Layton, why add to the pile of gossip, Ph.D. theses, and criticism that steadily accumulates around him? Much can be said but not now. Cameron has tried. Though she has written a bad effort that trivializes its subject, it is at least not boring. Given Layton's life, to be dull would have been a real feat — possibly worthy of a Governor General's Award.

Cameron's portrait is ambitious. We find milieu, background, history, place, in a Kenner-like catalogue of detail, with stylistic spice courtesy of *Chatelaine*. We are introduced to the Lazarovitch family, and to (literally) screaming caricatures of a Romanian Jewish immigrant family. Layton's household seems to have been a shouting match of invective, insult, and slavish adoration. The muscle-flexing that Layton likes to

display with friends and foes alike may have been a result of years, Cameron suggests, of being abused by Ma. (Future psycho-historians will no doubt rush to take note: Layton's love for defecating, farting, and urinating on his enemies in his poems as a result of family upbringing.) He was also introduced to his own personal Messiah-complex. Born circumcised, he claims he had followed the destiny his mother suggested for him. He had trouble getting his name right: he went through several tries before "Irving Layton" finally appeared. My preference is for Israel Lazarovitch, which has more resonance than the name he decided on.

The information about Layton's life is gossipy and crude. I know of few poets, or for that matter anyone, who slept with their mothers until age 14. What does this have to do with his poetry? I'm not sure. But soon we begin to see what's irritating about the style and view Cameron has chosen. There is a good deal of *Cosmo*-girlish adjective writing ("as sunny and cheerful as his own ebullient nature"), breathless description ("potential pain into intense beauty and sometimes unspeakable pleasure"), inadvertent Freudian comedy ("until he was thirteen, he would continue to share her bed . . . burying his nose in her sweet-smelling flesh"), romance-novel detail ("the burly, well-groomed Sandy, his brown eyes flashing"), and back to *Chatelaine* ("her straight russet hair framed a head so perfectly shaped"). The writing careens from *zeitgeist* chatter — "one time Aviva freaked out in Ireland" — to worse: "his state of poetic exhilaration" (euphemism for horniness), and on to the dubious: "Layton never had developed any true

sense of political consciousness." Historical errors abound; biographical details are suspect; her tone is uneven; meaningless chat is highlighted. When Layton is compared to everyone from Elvis Presley to Yeats, sheer shock is sure to follow.

I sympathize with Cameron's attempt to be readable. Certainly, to be readable is difficult when "the more unreadable the better" could serve as the epitaph for the publishing industry. And when the editors have plainly encouraged her to "let it all hang out," you can (briefly) pity how this upwardly-mobile professor from the University of Toronto has been left to dangle in public.

The irony of Cameron's biography is that she has taken someone who has been (mis?)perceived as an aggressive, tough-guy writer and written a feminist tract about him. The book should have been called *Irving Layton: All Canadian Mama's Boy*. The book has nothing to do with Layton and everything to do with literary politics. Chapters are often titled after his various affairs, wives, and girl-friends, so it dawns on the amazed reader that Cameron has played the joke of writing Layton's life from the point of view of his women. Imagine a portrait of Céline warmly drawn by Elie Weisel, and you will get the picture.

What emerges strongly is that Cameron does not much like Irving Layton. Her respect for the poetry is distorted by high-moral disgust at his antics and abuse. I wondered: if she did not like Layton, then why write his biography? Whose career is on the line here? Further, she seems to have little grasp of radical politics, leftist agitation in the 1930s, Jewish sensitivity, or the hostility toward Layton that was without question in the early days the result of anti-semitism. (Is it still? Cameron doesn't ask.) His peculiar view was forged in a country that had no sense of poetry or writing; his hit-and-miss tactics are to be expected from a writer cut off from both American and European controversies.

There are moments in the biography when we are offered glimpses of what the book could have been. Leonard Cohen's unusually articulate and gracious descriptions of his mentor stand out. Layton's Achilles' heel is Cohen — "The only narcissist I know who hates himself," he once memorably quipped — and that friendship will surely provide future academics with food for thought. You can almost hear the Ph.D. mills grinding.

Debates between Louis Dudek and Layton make up interesting parts. A

vicious handball game between the two, an event that appears in the biography from Dudek's view and in Layton's memoirs from his, has the makings of an authentic literary legend. (John Robert Colombo take note.) But these evocations are buried beneath yet more discussions of "the bad biscuit boy" and what Cameron clearly sees as relentless careerism. Her readings of the poems have a second-hand ring. And when she uses that cliché about Layton having written "thirty indisputably great poems" I was tempted again to demand an answer: which ones?

To be blunt: I read Cameron's book and found none of the Layton I know; the man who can be affable in person, all in all a helpful friend. Where the poet snaps is in his polemics, and especially these days in his letters. There Layton's urge to dominate and control his surroundings reaches its deafening pitch. He is obsessed with his place in history. To give biographers their due, there is something in Layton's methods that summons hysterical attention.

The problems emerge when approaching Layton's memoirs. The title: *Waiting for the Messiah*. Not promising. When first informed of its existence, I thought I'd heard it wrong. *Waiting on the Messiah?* A memoir by one of his



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wives? No: *Waiting for . . . the messiah*; that is, himself? Note the opening:

The stories I heard from my mother, and repeated by my older sisters, made me feel there was something mysterious and awesome about my life . . .

More than any other fact that sociologists and psychologists may unearth about me, it accounts for the glories and disasters I have known, my almost daily commuting between heaven and hell. For the feeling of strangeness became stronger as I grew older, and was reinforced by my readings about heroes and saviours — Moses, Buddha, Alexander the Great — and the unusual circumstances that always attended their birth. Didn't the story of my own birth fall neatly into this packet of legends, myths, or miracles? Conceit, or perhaps an imagination hungering for the extraordinary, enticed me to believe that I, Israel Lazarovitch, was also marked for something special. My life had been set on rails of a different gauge. . . .

I must have been about six or seven when my mother told me that I had been born circumcised: the messianic sign.

How is one to read this? Ironically? Satirically? Literally? It helps when you know Layton means by messiah a large symbolic function of a new human soul. This has been stated in interviews, but it is not mentioned here. Does Layton expect us to know what he is talking about? Or are we being exposed to his incarnation as "the mad poet"?

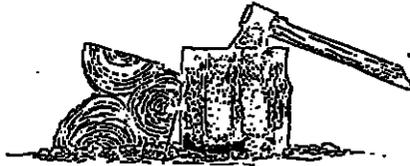
Serious issues are involved: the poet vs. society, the cynic-satirist, the poet worshipping the female form, erotica and loss, personality and disintegration. I admire Layton's early polemics and poems; I echo his defence of the humane. But I sadly report that his memoirs show how much will is left in Layton, and how little imagination. He smashes through these pages, allowing good passages to be destroyed by inappropriate diction, odd metaphors, clumsy syntax. Interesting anecdotes — the slaughtering of cockroaches, the death of his cat — get buried beneath a general imprecision. The tone is an unholy combination of egoism, paternalism, polemics, genuine gentleness, and sadness. He talks as if he has begun to confuse madness with senility. In his hurry to be controversial, he troops out his old warhorses: Canucky shmucks, Anglos, Wasps, and You-have-to-be-Jewish. . . .

Now, Irving, this racist stereotyping is what brought down the wrath of Cameron and others. You forget: Wasps sting. And if you're allergic to the creatures, there's no telling what damage they can do.

For too long when Layton responds to the numerous attacks he draws he then turns viciously personal. He invariably

stoops to categorizing others. When they repay the kindness, he explodes. This descending to personal name-calling is bad criticism. I am all for his emphatic defence of personality in this mass age, but his self-determined role has frequently blinded him to the harm his invective had done himself.

One of Layton's lessons, repeated through *Waiting for the Messiah*, is that the writer must criticize. He must oppose his time. He must be dangerous. The terrible paradox is that the dissent



and agitation Layton promotes must never be directed back at him. He seems to regard himself as utterly independent, "above it all." Well, Irving, nobody gets out of here alive; and if we have learned your lesson, this means no one is exempt from criticism. Criticism is hard to take, particularly if it is just. But the cost of Layton's insular lack of self-awareness, his inability to see what effect he has, has resulted in the self-delusions that emerge in the memoir.

In the memoir, Layton promises to tell all. Yet how are we to respond to writing that says he (Layton) has never had a talent for preaching? (I've often thought that he missed his rabbinical calling.) Or that he prefers the parish of pimps, prostitutes, and criminals? Always the generous host, you will usually see professors, publishers, interviewers, groupies, and other poets around him — the sort of clientele most aging authors attract. So if you must insist on being the mad poet, Irving, why do you persist in sounding so Hollywood? . . . so cliché?

There are good passages in *Waiting for the Messiah*. His description of what it means to be a Jew in Montreal, his political obsessions, his readings, and especially his portraits of F.R. Scott and others have some quality and satirical interest. His advice to young writers ("If you think you're a major poet, you might end up being a minor one. But if you start out thinking yourself a minor poet, you may not end up a poet at all.") is timely and eloquent.

Moments of honesty open up territory that should be explored. While the rest of the art world was discovering Pound, Lewis, Eliot, Yeats, and Joyce, Layton was engaging the 19th century. He was reading Shelley, Blake, Marx, and Nietzsche. The modern era was served up by Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson. He would retain this preference for the liberators, preferring Zola to Flaubert.

He could quote chapter and verse from Marxist-Leninist texts, but not from Cummings, Picasso, or Stravinsky. This "late coming," as it were, had peculiar effects on his writing. In old age, Layton's focus has been more on ideas than form, more on content than verbal ingenuity or innovation.

Also, the influence of Nietzsche on him (mostly bad) allowed Layton to conceive of his part as a reckless spiritual adventure. A history has yet to be written of the negative influence Nietzsche has had on writers who did not possess that philosopher's singular genius, his impeccable intellectual background, his tragic self-consumption. These factors account for Layton's obliviousness to parodying himself. Layton sees the effects of depersonalization — the disappearance of the human, the emergence of the superhuman through Big Media — and his only way of combating them has been to bellow.

Unfortunately, after too much of the megaphone invective, most people — already numbed by the other hysteria they encounter daily — don't pay attention. The reason: if you play the mad poet, you are not responsible; if you are not responsible, you can be ignored. When everyone is insane today, as the doctors will tell us, to be unbridled simply mirrors the crazed Nietzschean *zeitgeist*.

Exasperatingly, in the memoirs all these Layton anomalies, poses, and paradoxes play off an uneasy rhythm. Metaphoric flashes — meteoric reminders of a talent that was exhilarating — show that he has fascination. Layton's poetry and personality represent, in their folly and fright, a force against the insecurities and trivialities of most writers now. "The problem with modern writers is their uncertainty!" Layton told the poet, Kenneth Sherman. No one is more certain than Layton. He has wanted to teach from the beginning.

Yes, Layton is at home with his image of the 19th century — that imagined realm of repressed Victorian sex, black and white saints and criminals, lyrical tenderness, and evangelical politics — and not our nightlife whirl of living ghosts, pornographic hallucinations, and TV-set gods. He would have been better served by a scene that never understood him; but then it is hard to be any kind of serious writer today. Layton is, understandably, enraged at the superficialities of his biography; yet his autobiography is another mask, and not *The Diary of a Sinner*, the intense unmasking, many had hoped for. Both books change little, either pro or contra.

Israel Lazarovitch is still waiting for his true testament. □

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The other Americans

Though we may march to a different socio-cultural drummer, two books suggest that Canadians can — and must — harmonize our relationship with the United States

By Marry J. Boyle

The 49th Paradox: Canada in North America, Past, Present, and Future, by Richard J. Gwyn, McClelland & Stewart, 304 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 3733 3).

My Discovery of America, by Farley Mowat, McClelland & Stewart, 128 pages, \$12.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 6624 4).

THERE'S A SIMPLISTIC notion in Washington that Japan is accomplishing economically what it couldn't do militarily: it's defeating the U.S. The emotional reaction comes as the United States becomes a debtor nation with a mounting trade deficit with Japan. Congress and the Senate indulge in Japan-bashing and proposing protectionist measures.

The administration of President Ronald Reagan opposes the protectionist policies and bills. The president supports open trade among all countries, even as he ignores the public deficit, and calls for increased spending on defence and the military. In spite of the red ink, Reagan pushes for an extravagant space-based defence system called the Strategic Defence Initiative.

The president nourishes ardent right-wing support with his bellicose statements of urgency in opposing what he has termed the "evil empire" of Russia. Legislators, conscious of the immense popularity of the president and their own need for re-election, mute their normal opposition to his priorities. They lament the U.S. public deficit, teetering on a figure of \$2-trillion, and busy themselves with trying to correct it with trade protection measures.

As a result, the U.S. is in effect at war. It's an ideological war, although some of the proxy encounters, such as in Central America, come perilously close to the real thing. President Reagan ignores economics and concentrates on the dangers of communism. Congress and the Senate ignore the new global economic realities and set the stage for trade wars.

Canada has become, as a result, a focus for attention. We can no longer complain when the U.S. overlooks us as their greatest trading partner. That

stands out in bold relief along with the fact that our trade surplus with the U.S. is second only to the one enjoyed by Japan. That's why our exports from fish to lumber and hogs are threatened or pinched by protectionist devices.

And besides that, asks the Reagan administration, where do you stand on our Strategic Defence Initiative? They abhor the appellation of Star Wars, given it by a somewhat dubious media.

As if on cue, two books have appeared in Canada that are pertinent to the issues involved. *The 49th Paradox* by Richard Gwyn is a thoroughly researched book about Canada in North America, past, present, and future. It dispenses with the usual clichés about Canadians harbouring inferiority complexes and searching for identity. It downgrades the irritations and urges Canadians to get busy and exercise a constructive foreign policy as a middle power. After all, says Gwyn, "almost all of the Canada-U.S. disputes that have really mattered have concerned foreign policy."

My Discovery of America starts out as a romp by Farley Mowat, using the controversy-hungry media to exact a whimsical revenge on the U.S. immigration service in refusing him admittance. To his obvious amazement he stirred up sympathetic support from Americans for his campaign against the "loony tunes" of the immigration bureaucrats.

The Mowat experience discloses what we have always hoped, that in spite of the collective hardening of conservative sentiment, the American public retains a sense of fair play. The Gwyn effort stresses we are a different breed of North Americans, incubated in a sense by the Loyalists, a diverse rather than homogeneous group, who set out to create not a corner of Britain, but a better America.

Gwyn contends that we have achieved, if not a better America, at least a different America. He quotes Charles Taylor, who describes Canadians as "neither mired in nostalgic anglophilia nor obsessed with the contemporary American fad of revolutionary consciousness."

Our nationalism has been pragmatic.

In tough times, or when flag-waving seemed likely to be too high, Canadians lowered their banners. The feelings in Canada took the form of nationalism's milder variant — patriotism, a pride of place, a satisfaction in collective accomplishment. The sharp edge came as Canadians rejected the United States, but they never rejected Americans personally. We copied the best in the U.S. Increasingly, we have rejected violent, polarized, and militaristic acts.

Yet we are a dependency, and we are being challenged by the United States to declare where we stand on the issues of trade and defence, which it sees as vital. Gwyn says: "Empires want their dependencies to provide cannon fodder, not generals back at headquarters." Empires do not expect whimpering or moralizing when they call for loyalty from dependencies. Canada must decide when to say yes to such a call, and when to say no, for the sake of a larger imperative.

Pierre Trudeau in *The 49th Paradox* is given credit for at least establishing in the minds of the Americans our right to speak out as a middle power. By the National Energy Policy and his peace initiative, Trudeau got the message through that a different kind of people live across the border.

Then, a newly elected Brian Mulroney, who became prime minister as much for not being a Liberal as for his policies, began nuzzling up to Washington. He was obviously bent on eliminating the tensions that many blamed on Trudeau. His statement that "Canada is open for business again" and his background of growing up in an American company town in Quebec, caused even the hardest opponents to such Liberal acts as examining the intentions of U.S. investors to shiver apprehensively.

Mulroney and Reagan met in a fog of Irish blame with retinues of their experts and an atmosphere of theatricals. It was a media event, with more shadow than substance, and confirmed in most minds that they were "communicators" in an age of communications. Analysts, when the hoopla faded, interpreted that as meaning they were leaders who count on their abilities

to get along with people in finding consensus, rather than on originality or ideas.

Dubbed the Shamrock Summit, the Quebec meeting produced a few tidbits for the media, such as a treaty on Pacific salmon, signed after 15 years of haggling and stalling. Acid rain was given some attention. But Reagan did hand Mulroney something that horrified his officials — a promise to “go to bat” for Canada against protectionist bills of the Washington legislators.

When the Irish mist faded two issues stood out in bold relief. The empire was calling for answers as to where Canada stood on Star Wars. What about free trade? On the spot, the president and the prime minister charged their respective trade ministers to come up with specific negotiating principles concerning “the removal of tariffs and non-tariff barriers on substantially all bilateral trade.”

Mulroney promised to consult and give an answer on Star Wars. Gwyn's book went to press before Mulroney answered, but the author points out that a “no” answer would place at risk the special relationship the prime minister has taken such pains to cultivate. In turn, Mulroney counts on his relationship with Reagan to guarantee economic favours. Says Gwyn: if the reply is “yes,” the nature of Canadian foreign policy will be compromised for the balance of this century.

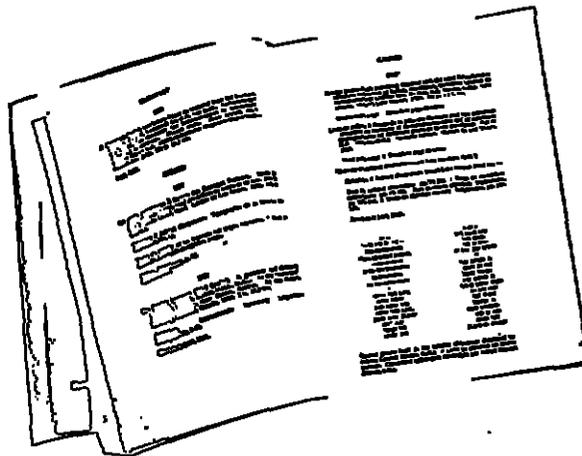
The Mulroney task wasn't helped in Canada by the Americans' sending of a ship through northern waters that we claim sovereignty over, and stubbornly refusing to ask our permission. The act stirred age-old emotional fears about the official insensitivity of Washington.

Prime Minister Mulroney has answered the empirical call by saying his government will not officially cooperate on SDI but will allow Canadian firms to do work for it. It remains to be seen if this somewhat equivocal answer will satisfy. Washington praises it, but how it may affect their cooperation on settling trade issues is a moot point.

As to free trade, Gwyn predicts that the Mulroney government will scale down its ambitions to that of a routine commercial pact. Free trade is less than the big deal it seems, because a virtual free trade already exists. The author plumps for free trade with some difficulty, because it will almost certainly evolve into economic union. Most of the economic dislocations attributed to free trade are inevitable, as is the erosion of national economic sovereignties, in the realities of the global economy.

Apart from being a splendid compilation, *The 49th Paradox* provides optimism for Canadians. Gwyn contends that we have to grow up and

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realize we are a real nation. We have to stop using that border as a shield and make it a springboard for reaching into all the world, not simply the States. "The notion that Canada could play an activist role in international affairs may seem to be presumptuous. It is presumptuous, but no more presumptuous than the notion of the 50,000 Loyalists that they could create a separate nation above the Great Lakes, or the notion of MacDonald that he could extend a colony across a continent."

The late Barbara Ward described Canada as "the world's first international country." That was based on our peacekeeping and foreign aid efforts and Gwyn says we must pursue our international options as we are drawn closer to the U.S. We may not have had the confidence to do that in the past, but he's convinced we have it now. We can harmonize our relationships with America even as we march to a different socio-cultural drummer.

The 49th Paradox acknowledges our common ties but stresses fundamental differences. Canadians have a liberal political culture. That's what shocks us when the U.S. exercises brutal force and political rigidities. It seems out of character for a nation founded on the principle of all being created equal and populated by welcoming the hungry and the desperate of the world.

There's an example in the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act prohibiting undesirables, from criminals to those with suspect political alliances and beliefs. President Harry Truman detested it but failed to be able to kill it by veto. Although it was a creation of a time of intense anti-communist feeling it is still in effect. Farley Mowat was refused admission by a Buffalo immigration official on the basis of it.

Mowat discovered that 40,000 people are listed in a "lookout book," which allows immigration bureaucrats to refuse them entry. Even Pierre Trudeau, before he entered politics, was kept out of the country. Mowat, who denies he ever threatened to shoot down overflying American bombers with a .22 rifle, found himself in the peculiar position of not being allowed in, although his books are best-sellers in America.

Mowat confesses he had always harboured the feeling that the "Imperial Eagle" felt a God-given right to impose its will on lesser breeds. In the storm of publicity he found, however, an overwhelming response from Americans against the authoritarian and undemocratic way he was treated. In effect, he and Gwyn feel that the heart of the United States — the people — remains dedicated to the humane truths on which the nation was founded.

That's most important for Canadians to remember and cherish in difficult times. It has greater significance than the so-called "special relationships" between our leaders. They come and go, but the people, our respective peoples, remain tied by history, circumstances, and geography.

Gwyn quotes New York political analyst Stephen Blank as saying, "I really want to see Canada have more clout in the U.S. You have a quality of civility, and you have an immensely superior social system. You have, although you refuse to admit and would rather not be told it, a civilizing mission in North America."

The conclusion of Gwyn and Mowat can be construed as admitting what Blank is saying, as they suggest that a dependency can act in a mature way. Why not? As Gwyn points out forcefully, "We are neither 'Europeanized North Americans' nor 'quiet Americans.' We are the 'Other North Americans.'" □

REVIEW

Disorder in the court

By Lynn Kling

Court Jesters: Canada's Lawyers and Judges Take the Stand to Relate Their Funniest Stories, by Peter V. MacDonald, Methuen, 208 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 458 99450 2).

DEFINITELY NOT for the coffee table, this book would fit just fine in the bathroom. It's a compilation of funny things people involved with Canadian law have said or done over the years, and each anecdote fills about half a page. Easy reading. Much of its humour is your garden-variety bathroom type: it seems every time any judge, juror, witness, or lawyer utters the word "shit" it's recorded for posterity. Also "fuck." Maybe the humour did not strike me as particularly witty given that my two-year-old son breaks into hysterics every time anyone utters these *bad words*. We spend many hours talking about the intricacies of these words — two-year-olds are endlessly fascinated with them. I wish that MacDonald and everyone else who contributed these particular anecdotes weren't equally so.

The chapter called "Boys Will Be Boys" is about infantile pranks that lawyers have played on each other. Most are one notch below water bombs. The chapters on puns and typos are not

much funnier. As well, there are the usual nagging-wife and dumb-hooker jokes that every book on humour in the courts seems obliged to have. Let me set the record straight: I spend a lot of time as a lawyer listening to complaints by wives and husbands, and it is an irrefutable fact that husbands out-nag wives 10 to 1. Please, no more wife jokes.

I also could have done without the racist stories. I don't care whether, as MacDonald says, "In those days . . . racial remarks were much more common and socially acceptable to both." They are not now and should be laid to rest.

Yet the book has many marvellous moments. The chapter on Patrick "Paddy" James Nolan, a hard-drinking, Calgary lawyer, born in Limerick in 1864, is a joy. It seems that few of Nolan's clients ever went to defeat — even when he faced his arch-rival, R. B. Bennett. As MacDonald says, "He often had them laughing so hard they could scarcely follow the evidence — which was all right with him because he usually didn't want them wrapped up in the facts anyway. If they got serious they might convict."

And there are plenty of cute little snippets about not-so-legendary figures like the following:

During argument in Provincial Court, Crown Attorney Ken Rae, Q.C., of Owen Sound, Ontario, took a verbal swipe at his opponent:

"Your Honour, my friend's ignorance of the law surprises me."

"Surely you can rephrase that," said the judge.

"All right," Rae replied, "My friend's ignorance of the law doesn't surprise me."

On another occasion, lawyer Tommy Horkins represented a man whose face was bleeding and bruised:

"Mr. Horkins," the magistrate said, "what happened to your client?"

Tommy replied: "He gave a voluntary confession, Your Worship."

And there is a wonderful chapter on George Theophilis Bradfield Walsh, a remarkable lawyer and Supreme Court justice, who was also a born comedian. When Walsh was pleading in court that a rich male client should pay only a meagre allowance to his wife, the judge leaned over and growled:

"Oh, Mr. Walsh, would you ask your wife to live on twenty-five dollars a month?"

Walsh sniffed back, "I'd prefer if Your Lordship asked her."

Apparently this is just the first in a series of books about Canadian legal humour. Many of the stories would be great for after-dinner speeches. I am sure a topical index, which the book now lacks, would be appreciated by speech-makers and listeners alike. □

CRITICAL NOTICES

ARTS & CRAFTS

An Atlantic Album: Photographs of the Atlantic Provinces before 1920, by Scott Robson and Shelagh Mackenzie, Nimbus, 160 pages, \$19.95 paper (ISBN 0 920352 40 8).

By John Oughton

THIS COMPILATION of amateur and professional photographs came together in an interesting fashion. Co-author Mackenzie worked on the 1980 National Film Board production, *Fixed in Time: A Victorian Album*. The popularity of the film stimulated the organizing of an Atlantic Provinces tour of the photographs on which it was based. Each community the tour reached was invited to add historical photographs from local collections, and the results were gratifying.

This book contains 156 of those images, printed in sepia. Had the publishing budget allowed, black-and-brown duotone would have produced sharper plates, but the reproduction quality is acceptable. An essay on early photography in the Atlantic provinces introduces the collection. As well as historically valuable panoramas of cities and landscapes, there are many individual and group portraits, the most bizarre of which shows two men in a studio packed with samples of taxidermy of nearly every Canadian mammal.

Other images that offer memorable fragments of Atlantic history: doughty survivors of the Canadian forces that fought off the Fenian Raids; an immaculately dressed-up black wedding party; William van Horne's nephew clutching a teddy bear almost as big as he is; three Micmac women with the baskets they have woven. The captions are sometimes more chatty than informative, but on the whole this book is a useful and often charming addition to the visual history of Canada's four eastern provinces. □

Kenojuak, edited by Jean Blodgett, Firefly, illustrated, 252 pages, \$49.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920668 31 3).

By John Oughton

KENOJUAK is probably the best-known Inuit artist. Her 1960 stonecut print *The Enchanted Owl* became the most sought-after Inuit image (fetching up to \$12,000 at auctions) after it appeared on a Canadian stamp, and her prints, engravings, and etchings nearly always sell out when the annual Cape Dorset print collection

is released. Her best prints combine a powerful vision of the inter-relationship of nature and man with a fluid line and strong composition.

The granddaughter of a shaman, Kenojuak spent her early years in the traditional Inuit way. Her family moved frequently, and adopted her out to relatives during hard times. From these beginnings, she became an internationally famous artist, and a member of the Order of Canada and the Royal Canadian Academy.

This is the first trade book on her work, although a limited-edition version was published in 1981. All her prints are included, over 160 in colour plates. Author Jean Blodgett adds a biography based on interviews with the artist, which reveals how much personal tragedy Kenojuak has overcome to keep creating: four of her 10 children and her first two husbands have died, and she herself nearly succumbed to tuberculosis. Also included are a chronology of the artist's life, a genealogy, photographs of a few of her carvings, and notes on her art and on the print-making process.

Lovers of Inuit art will encounter many old friends among these images, including the prints *Woman Who Lived in the Sun*, *Rabbit Eating Seaweed*, and *Arrival of the Sun*. On the evidence of this well-produced volume, Kenojuak is safe in her prediction that "When I am dead, I am sure there will still be people discussing my art." □

BELLES-LETTRES

Craft Slices, by George Bowering, Oberon Press, 152 pages, \$23.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 580 5) and \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 581 3).

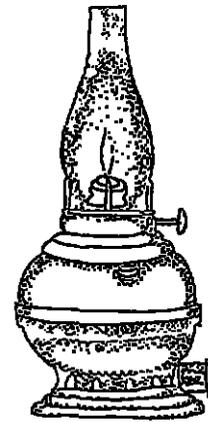
By Karl Jirgens

THIS ZINGY COLLECTION of literary slices finds its historical antecedent in the satiric essays of Addison, Steele, and Johnson, and has less in common with Pope's *Dunciad* than the cover note would suggest. Bowering serves views on literary theory and tradition with observations on writers sandwiched between views on geographic locations and their possible influences on artists and writers.

He mixes these musings with spicy pot-shots at the educational system, and tops them off with personal experiences,

insights into his own creative recipes, and self-critiques of his earlier spreads. To the literary gourmet, some of this will smack of older fare, though it's not without zest.

Bowering's tone is that of a saucy personal friend who is sharing a well-aged wine and a midnight picnic under a starry Canadian sky. He shifts from casual remonstrance to satiric understatement to playful abandon. He tries to avoid canonization and almost succeeds. Although he offers all these mouthfuls in alphabetical order, he has



shuffled the items on the menu, presenting us with what at first seems to be a smorgasbord of unordered tidbits but which quickly reveals itself to be a *gastronomy of observations*.

At this point I could enter into post-structural analysis and say that Bowering shifts the centre of his essays, deconstructing them by showing their pre-constructions, by revealing his thought roots, by having himself interviewed by an invented "Canadian Tradition" only to demystify its self-referentiality through the narrator's pose of *faux naïf*. I could say that Bowering blurs genres here, is self-reflexive, uses inter- and intra-textual references, appropriates and dis-appropriates methodologies, redefines the roles of author, artwork, audience. I could also say this is a significant book for theorists, perhaps an essential book for scholars. But that would be taking half the fun out of it; that would be eating the sausage without mopping up the *jouissance*. □

NOTE

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

Movin' East, by Harry Bruce, Methuen, 280 pages, \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 453 99570 7) and \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 453 99550 7).

By Nanel White

HOMESICKNESS is the oldest Bruce tradition, and since 1790 five generations of Nova Scotian Bruces, exiled from the Highlands, have suffered from it. The last three generations, all journalists, have voyaged back and forth between Nova Scotia and Toronto, like phantom ships "in the grip of a force 10 curse." This eternal return of the imaginative native forms the backbone of this collection of 50 short magazine pieces. They cover 20 of Bruce's 30-year career as reporter and journalist and embrace every conceivable subject: cat addicts; caber-tossing in Florida; Hugh MacLennan's brief career as a spy; seafood junkies; a Marxist critique of spectator sports; divas; and Diefenbaker. As a compendium of Canadian political, sporting, and cultural activities over the last two decades, *Movin' East* is a rare and pleasant combination of side-wrenching laughter and thoughts too deep for tears. The nostalgia for old days and ways is balanced by acute and wily observations made by a dedicated spectator on the 50-yard line of life.

The many by-ways and sideroads of Bruce's imagination are crammed with incidents and people, quizzically captured in their endearing and quirky humanness. Both the past and the present come alive in his hands as he conjures up both long-dead politicians and living bluenosers with devilish and homely accuracy. Wherever Bruce's globe-trotting jaunts and rambles take him, we are along for the outing, huddled beside him, wrapped in fur coats, hip flasks in our back pocket. For those who think that you can't go home again, hitch a ride with Harry Bruce into warm golden summers and foot-stamping winters, on those "vessels of the mind that run before gusts of memory and sail right onto the printed page." ☆

CITIES

Reviving Main Street, edited by Deryck Holdsworth, University of Toronto Press, illustrated, 246 pages, \$25.00 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 2542 0) and \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 8020 6556 2).

By Gary Fagan

"MAIN STREET is the glory of Canada," writes Pierre Berton in the foreword to this book. "If a community has no heart, it has no soul; and its heart should beat faster at the core." If that heartbeat

has slowed to the point of nearly expiring in the last decades, the culprit is the modern shopping mall.

Reviving Main Street is the generally readable report by the Heritage Canada Foundation (set up in 1973 with \$12-million from the feds) of their program to turn around the declining main streets of small towns across the country. Malls may be convenient, but they homogenize the landscape and suck business away from local merchants. Unlike the privately owned mall, main street belongs to the community. The question is, how does run-down main street compete? The answer is by making use of its natural architectural charms and its place in the community.

Harold Kalman provides an excellent historical view of the evolution of main street. In Quebec its touchstone is the parish church, in the Maritimes the town hall, in Ontario the court house. The rest of the book is a report on the Main Street project based on the experiences of coordinators in seven different towns. Part history, part practical how-to, the chapters are slightly confused and repetitious, but the information gets through. The coordinators' aims were never to restore main streets completely to their original appearance but to preserve buildings while making them commercially viable.

Dozens of photographs make the project's achievements clear. An ugly sign in Perth, Ont., comes down, a new building in Bridgetown, N.S., neatly fits into the streetscape. Other photographs show earlier design horrors, such as the ridiculously modern Toronto Dominion branch squatting incongruously in Nelson, B.C. This book may be a bit muddled in its goals, but the Heritage Canada program is not. □

FICTION: LONG & SHORT

Around the Mulberry Tree, by P. Scott Lawrence, Exile, 89 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 920428 7).

By Gideon Forman

"THOUGHTFUL" is the first word one associates with these 12 interconnected stories: thoughtful and enigmatic. Lawrence's short collection — his first — takes us to a philosophical Twilight Zone.

The locale for the pieces is a building, the Malory Arms, and their subject is the lives of the eccentric tenants. There is Louie Michaels, who sews a silk blouse for the life-size doll she finds in her apartment; there is Lambert, who judges seagull acrobatics with Olympic score cards; there is the astronomer Bauer, who searches the heavens for traces of

his dead wife. But Lawrence hasn't served us these oddities merely to be clever. His is an intelligent surrealism. The stories are no more bizarre than real life.

Numerous themes run through these tales, but perhaps the most striking ones are the pervasiveness of television and the characters' desire to do the impossible. "Minutes of An Evening," "Concerning the Egg," and "Tea With Mrs. Sharples" feature TV programs, integrating the shows' characters into the action of the story. The reader starts to wonder which are more real: the story's characters or the TV programs.

The people in these pieces are not content to accept limitations. Lambert, for instance, wants variously to be a horse and a dog. Told that planting a mulberry tree in the courtyard might not be possible, Mrs. Michaels replies: "Maybe it isn't. . . . But maybe that doesn't matter."

There are some problems: Lines like "Harriet wondered about her soul" bespeak an author sometimes struggling for profundity; the clipped modernist voice of pieces like "Concerning the Egg" can become monotonous. But in general the collection is solid. The stories are busy with Lawrence's imagination. □

The Lilacs are Blooming in Warsaw, by Alice Parizeau, translated from the French by A.D. Martin-Sperry, New American Library, 303 pages, \$20.95 cloth (ISBN 0 453 00481 4).

By I.M. Owen

PARIZEAU'S NOVEL about life in Poland from the end of the war to the founding of Solidarity arrives in English trailing clouds of glory: a prize in France and golden opinions from all sorts of people — Eugene Ionesco ("one of the best novels I have had the pleasure of reading in many years"), Liv Ullman ("a moving document"), Jean Éthier-Blais ("a total success"), among others. Impressed by these testimonials, and having already the respect for the author that one must feel toward anyone who worked in the anti-Nazi Resistance from the age of seven, I approached the book eagerly and in the full expectation of admiring it. I was disappointed to find it mechanical, amateurish, lifeless, and written in a flat style for which the clearly competent translator can't be held responsible.

In the spring of 1945 the 13-year-old Helena Stanowska finds her way home to Warsaw after nearly six years in the Resistance, followed by a German prison camp and a gang-rape by Russian soldiers. She is reunited with her

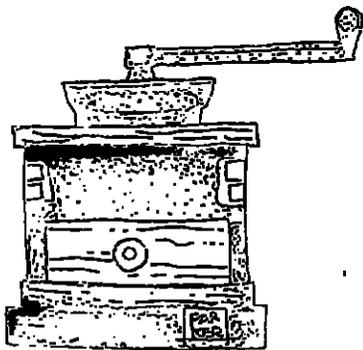
mother, her father, whose leg was amputated in a German POW camp after he rode in the last cavalry charge in Europe, and their Jewish doctor friend, who discovers that Helena is pregnant. The rest of the novel follows the lives of these people, and of Helena's daughter, through the next 35 years. It's a great subject, and might have made a fine novel. To me the result is tedious. But try it: you may agree with all those eminent people on the jacket. □

LEISURE & PLEASURE

Railway Country: Across Canada by Train, by Brian D. Johnson, photographs by Dudley Witney, Key Porter, 200 pages, \$39.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919493 64 5).

By George Galt

EVERYONE is happy in this picture book. It does not seem to matter that Canadian passenger trains lose hundreds of millions of dollars a year, or that most of their equipment is old, rickety, and in some ways uncomfortable. All of Witney's photographs are technically accomplished, and a few catch delicate combinations of light and space, but the fact remains that they record only the familiar images of tourist brochures — with an accent on trains for those particularly interested in the transcontinental railway journey. There is a bright, sunny surface to most of these landscape shots, and a folksy, "What, me worry?" look to the few frames that include people. A small selection of archival photographs adds some visual depth. But you won't find the dining-car chef sweating in his tiny kitchen, nor will you see any shots of the rank, crowded coaches where indigent travellers sit up for three nights from Toronto to Vancouver. And you won't get any feel for the seedy urban underbelly that droops around all



the major stations in the country (except perhaps the ones in Quebec City and Ottawa, which have been moved to the suburbs).

Like Witney, Johnson made the journey from Newfoundland to British

Columbia. His brief text has more grit than the pictures, and he is capable of lines that linger after the photos have faded: "Black-and-white cows graze dutifully inert, as if their mouths were wired to the pasture." Johnson met a lively sample of the travelling public on his trip, including a magician, a criminal on day-leave, a potato-chip salesman, and a world-wandering Englishman, all of whom make for entertaining anecdotes. But he also lapses into this kind of bland coffee-table observation: "Torontonians travel to Montreal for the Latin magic of the streets and nightclubs. Montrealers come to clean, conservative Toronto to do business or have a quiet time with family or friends. Or so the legend goes."

To understand *Railway Country*, it helps to know that the publisher's plan includes translation of the book into several European languages. No doubt these safe, unoriginal views of Canada will seem more compelling abroad. □

THE PAST

Skulking for the King: A Loyalist Plot, by J. Fraser, Boston Mills Press, 142 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 919783 20 1).

By William Clayton Law

THIS BOOK PROVIDES a detailed look into a little-known loyalist plot in New York and Albany, a description of the general loyalist experience in the north during the American revolution, a fascinating story.

In 1781 the loyalist exodus to Canada began in earnest. They had sacrificed all for God, King, and country. Some had lost home, others family, many both. And it had taken a great feat of will to remain loyal to the Crown, especially as the tide began to favour the rebels. As Fraser says, "... these 'King's Men' had expected to win the war ... they never imagined they would lose their homes and would be sent upriver. ... Exile was hardly what loyalty deserved."

Exile came as a shock at war's end but so too had the treatment loyalists received from their neighbours. The American Revolution had been a particularly harsh frontier war, or more accurately civil war, as Fraser makes clear. Thus when the men went off to join the British forces they often left their wives and children behind. But because they were seen as traitors by the rebels, their property was looted, confiscated, and the women and children often suffered physical abuse. Many died from this treatment. The loyalist Captain Hugh Munro had to leave his wife and six children to be cared for by strangers. At

the end of the war only one son survived, the others having died as civilian prisoners.

All hope lay in a British invasion from the north. But that hope ended with General Burgoyne's surrender in 1777. There then only remained "skulking." Under General McAlpin an assortment of Mohawks and loyalists dressed as Indians conducted night raids into rebel territory. The raiders relished their roles, even to the extent of appearing in church painted red and scantily clad in deer skin, to the shock of loyalist gentlewomen. Yet the raids were effective, at least in terrorizing the rebel population, and in 1780 resulted in the capture of the rebel Colonel Gordon. The raids had another purpose. The governor of New York refused to release loyalist prisoners. Thus in order to "... free their own families, loyalists had to capture the families of others."

Fraser's narrative evokes the suspense and drama hidden in the facts. There are illuminating digressions on prison conditions, frontier justice, and social conditions of the period. But his tale would have been better told if he had not tried to tell it in just 106 pages. His material is the stuff of epic, not short story. □

Inside the Gestapo: A Jewish Woman's Secret War, by Helene Moszkiewicz, Macmillan, illustrated, 192 pages, \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9833 5).

By Susan Newman

IN THIS LIVELY book, Helene Moszkiewicz recounts with perceptive wit her formative years as a Jewish teenager in war-torn Belgium. Catapulted by a fatalistic chain of events into working for the Resistance, she eventually finds herself inside the Gestapo. An old friend, Francois Vermolen, formerly a Belgian soldier, now is Franz, leading the double life of a Resistance member accountable directly to London and a Gestapo agent responsible for capturing Jews and spies. Helene, being fluent in German, French, and appearing non-Jewish, becomes Olga, Franz's fiancée and part-time secretarial assistant at Gestapo headquarters.

But *Inside the Gestapo* is more than an exciting suspense story. It is the candid story of an intelligent woman who survived that time, her sense of balance and humour still intact. Moszkiewicz remembers: "the buffet [at Hitler's birthday party] particularly impressed me ... at the first opportunity I stuffed myself until Franz impatiently dragged me away, grumbling I was over-eating." By nature talkative, she struggled to keep things inside, but an occasional

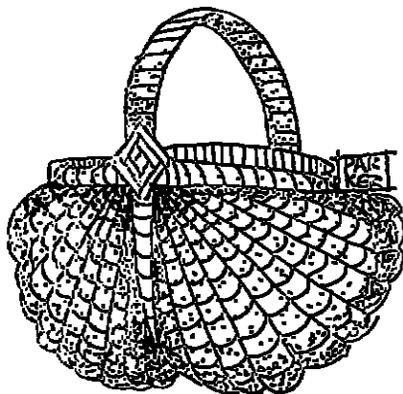
impulsive outburst, though at times dangerous, released the pent-up frustration. In order to get otherwise unobtainable information, Helene learned to use ploys — enticement and anticipation — without compromising her morals.

Considering that both her parents and first husband were sent away to death camps, Helene's account is gentle — almost too gentle. Instead of ranting about injustice or hurling anti-German sentiments, this natural story-teller reveals the disorganization within the Third Reich, the animosity between Wermacht and Gestapo, the unspoken hate for Hitler by many Germans, and the way Jews allowed themselves to be led away to slaughter like dazed cattle. Have her perceptions dulled in the intervening 40 years? Not likely. By employing the subtle art of understatement in depicting her younger, more innocent self, Moszkiewicz gives a story that is hard to forget. ★

The King's Yard: An Illustrated History of the Halifax Dockyard, by Marilyn Gurney Smith, Nimbus, 56 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 920852 44 0).

By Lisa Patrick

THIS DOCUMENTARY surveys the Halifax dockyard's important role in Canadian history from its founding in 1759, through the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the two world wars to the present. The yard's peace-time activities such as hosting royal visits, galas, and annual naval regattas are also traced, as are the roots of the Canadian Navy and its Royal College. It will provide interesting reading to Canadian historians, naval scholars, maritime



antiquarians, and those who are fascinated with our coastal history.

This well-researched book was written by the curator of the Maritime Command Museum at CFB Stadacona, who has included many drawings, paintings, and photographs. A plan of the yard's layout, dated 1784, is especially helpful to provide a base from which to under-

stand changes that have taken place over its 225-year history.

Like the dock itself, the information is sometimes dry but descriptions of the press gangs in the late 1700s, the antics at Naval regattas, and the massive explosion in 1917 are vivid. Still, so much detail may seem dull to general readers.

What makes this book most readable is that it is not only a chronicle of the King's Yard, but also a history of the people who figured in its growth. It is a fond remembrance of the Halifax of the sailing ships and a confident suggestion of its continued importance. □

Swift Runner, by Colin K. Thomson, Detselig Enterprises, 114 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920490 9).

By Douglas Glover

SWIFT RUNNER was a Cree warrior who lived in what is now Alberta during the middle years of the last century. These were the tumultuous years of white occupation. Swift Runner saw the near extinction of the bison, the decimation of his people by disease and starvation, the Métis rebellion, the arrival of the Northwest Mounted Police.

In 1879, depressed, starving, and perhaps addled by too much contraband whiskey, he went on a rampage of murder and cannibalism that left nine people dead, including his wife and children. The Cree said he was possessed by the Windigo, which means, variously, a mythological creature that feeds on human flesh or a man possessed by the spirit of such a creature or, in modern parlance, a person suffering from a "Windigo psychosis." Arrested by the Mounties, Swift Runner confessed, converted to Catholicism, and was hanged.

This is the stuff of a terrific story — Swift Runner as a kind of Cree Macbeth molded by the forces of personality, history, race, and religion into an agent-victim of near-mythic proportions — and Thomson is clearly trying to get this across in his book. But his reach exceeds his grasp. *Swift Runner* is a pastiche of newspaper clippings, amateur psychology, and fictionalized renderings of Swift Runner's thoughts — a cross between gothic romance and New Journalism. Thomson leaves no clue as to where fact and speculation join. One gets the impression there is a fair amount of primary material to back this story: police reports, trial summaries, diaries of the priest who confessed Swift Runner, even scholarly articles on the "Windigo psychosis" (these are mentioned in the bibliography). But too little hard data makes it into Thomson's narrative. One is left feeling that here is a remarkable story left pretty much untold. □

Three Remarkable Maritimers, by Allison Mitcham, Lancelot Press, illustrated, 139 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88999 270 3).

By Laurel Boone

THIS ENJOYABLE book resurrects its subjects from scattered documents to give Canadians three new heroes. It deserves national recognition and distribution.

Mitcham tells the stories of Moses Henry Perley (1804-1862), Silas Tertius Rand (1810-1889), and William Francis Ganong (1864-1941). Perley engineered the settlement of the Maine-New Brunswick border dispute, designed the most humane immigration policy New Brunswick ever practised, wrote pioneering reports on the fish and fisheries of New Brunswick, and laboured so diligently on behalf of the Micmacs and Malecites — whom he regarded as the equals of the white settlers — that the government removed him from his position.

Rand was self-educated, but he kept diaries in a mixture of English, French, Latin, Greek, Micmac, and shorthand. Living in penury, and taking Indian languages and culture as seriously as others took those of ancient Greece and Rome, he collected and published Indian legends, a grammar of the Micmac language, and Micmac-English and English-Micmac dictionaries that are still in use.

Ganong became the authority on Acadian natural history and ethnology. Using Rand's and Perley's works along with the reports and drawings of early European visitors, he explored and mapped the area and interpreted its Indian place-names. His monograph on the oldest maps of the area is a bible to modern collectors, and his own maps form the backbone of New Brunswick cartography.

Mitcham describes the achievements of Perley, Rand and Ganong in simple, vigorous prose. Her research is thorough and wide-reaching, and she includes illustrations drawn by Peter Mitcham and a selected bibliography. ★

POETRY

Essential Words: An Anthology of Jewish Canadian Poetry, edited by Seymour Mayne, Oberon Press, 182 pages, \$27.50 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 576 7) and \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 577 5).

By Kathleen Moore

CAN AN ANTHOLOGY of Canadian Jewish poetry be appreciated outside the shelves of Jewish public libraries? This book hopes to be that unique bridge to "... a cultural tradition of enormous richness

and diversity. . . ." However, its poems are very often exclusive in their subject matter, and their frequently conversational style records an insular dialogue of Jew with Jew, rather than as Canadians who also happen to be Jewish. Neither does the selection represent the broadest range in the lives and writing of Jews.

Biblical references obscure to the non-Jew and oblique inferences about traditions such as that of the scapegoat ("circling white roosters/above their heads"), the morning prayer of the orthodox man grateful for not having been created as a woman ("...thanking almighty God for his manly birth. . ."), and the lack of a glossary for terms like *teffilin*, *Tzadik*, *minyan*, and *tallith*, bar easy access across the cultural border.

Sometimes painfully self-conscious to the point of narrow-mindedness, *Essential Words* emphasizes the Jew as victim, and the non-Jew as victimizer. In George Jonas's "Once More":

*Eichmann has died seven times, but the
real,
the real murderers all live in my
street. . . .*

*They go to work each day at 8 o'clock.
Some take the bus, some drive, and
many walk.*

*They have a child or two, they like a
smoke,
their wives wear rings, Sunday they cut
the grass!*

Clearly, not only Wasps are capable of imposing stereotypes. And, if, as the back cover says, "Many of us have been slow to recognize the importance of the Jew in Canadian writing," such a description of the average Canadian is not likely to speed the growth of awareness.

The texture of the anthology has been unimaginatively woven. Poems are filed alphabetically by author, so that the occasional emergence of a theme departing from a dark preoccupation with destruction and destroyers strikes an absurd and irrelevant note. While many of the poems are excellent, and those of A.M. Klein ineffably so, others seem to have been chosen only, to fill out the ethnic crowd. Some of the fine pieces include K.V. Hertz's "Morning After the Fifty Megaton," Joseph Sherman's "Of Tongues," and Avi Boxer's "Street Revisited" and "No Address." Klein's special achievements, discussed in the foreword — his empathy with another culture (the francophones) and his celebration of things Canadian with typically Jewish energy and delight — have not, in this collection, been oft-repeated. Miriam Waddington's "The Transplanted: Second Generation" is an exception.

Essential Words might have found a

more sensitive model for its approach, in a travelling exhibition from Czechoslovakia of Jewish art, artifacts, and books. A sharing of treasures, *The Precious Legacy* celebrates the religious culture of the people. The silent fact that these items of great beauty survived the Holocaust, poignantly communicates a universal sense of loss to all viewers, and a sense of thanks that this people still lives, despite the world-wide mental illness that created those, and other war-years. In that spirit, Leonard Cohen's "Out of the Land of Heaven" could have set a joyful tone for an anthology that would be, not a black vision of Jewish fate, but a celebration together with all Canadians of one people's particular gifts. □

The Better Part of Heaven, by Ken Norris, Coach House Press, 135 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88910 273 2).

By Libby Scheier

CAN YOU BE a romantic and post-modernist at the same time? I guess so. Norris's thematic approach to love is nearly 19th-century in its unfulfilled yearning for perfection, but his easy wandering among the forms of poetry, fiction, memoir, and travelogue is decidedly post-modernist. The back cover calls this book a "travel poem/text" that "builds on both the Japanese and Canadian traditions."

Norris writes simple, flowing poetry, saving his more intricate etchings for prose. He alternates lightly between sadness and humour in what he refers to as a "lyrical-confessional" mode.

He verges on the classical male-chauvinist romantic in his descriptions of chasing after women who are never good enough, but his self-doubt and self-deprecating humour save him from falling into that mold. In "Perfection in Pieces" he laments his grass-is-greener tendencies: "I miss my lovers, I miss my friends. When I was there I didn't talk much to them and I wanted to be here. Now I don't talk much to the people here and I want to be there. Sure wish I could put my asshole Self out of its misery, send it there for a while, while I stay here and really enjoy myself."

Another recurring theme is Norris's longing for his lover back home, and in this he does not so much sound like a romantic but a medieval Provençal writer, idealizing the perfect love from afar. Again, Norris prevents himself from falling into a stereotype, by observing himself with knowing humour.

We learn about poets from their reactions to place. Norris does give us a sense of the contrasts in the Pacific islands — their beauty, and their corrup-

tion by missionaries from "the civilized world" — but location remains a sub-text to the main themes. Norris's persona combines Woody Allen, Bob Dylan, and William Wordsworth. □

Post-Sixties Nocturne, by Pier Giorgio di Cicco, Fiddlehead Poetry Books/Goose Lane Editions, 49 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 86492 050 4).

By Steve Noyes

OF CONTENT: these poems are certainly about desperation: "I will remember fears, and wonder if two/plus two is one, or if man were not altogether/a spot of luck, or an idiot waiting for thunder." Yet the quality of that desperation emerges from di Cicco's impatient, static-like language. Contrary to normal practice, much of the stress falls at the beginnings of lines; and this emphasizes the swiftnesses of the thoughts *across* the lines as opposed to the thoughts *fulfilling* the lines. What matters is the incisive agitation of this voice, as in "God Never Remembers the Spelling of Things":

*. . . I always hunger for them, their
blighted years. Their eyes shine, not
with
hope but through adhesive care, strung
out,
as it were, with vision. . . .*

It's a discursive style, a distracted shorthand (not unlike Gustafson, but with longer lines). It's tempting to label the poems as "chants of despair" or some such, but this would reduce them. Like all good poems, they surprise us continually with their ability to transform, to make thought intensely real.

*. . . The prosaic touches me,
moves me deeply, like all the ants and
uncles in armchairs,
growing El Greco length in memory.
They burn like wicks, and
flame to heaven. . . .*

The whole structures are equally interesting: poems start (like Donne) tersely, as if in mid-thought: "Fear, do we talk of fears? let's do." They typically end, not with calm summation, but with a deepened intensity: "And now I drink, imagining love." In between, di Cicco's responses are often contradictory, tortuous; in this sense the poems are anti-artifacts, self-erasing, "like practising scales with one hand and/giving the finger with the other."

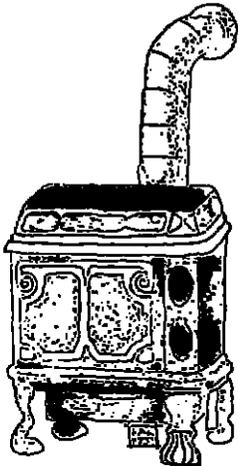
Post-Sixties Nocturne is not unflawed: some passages are overly rhetorical ("My fingertips are/tuned to madness"). But it's an honest book, its language original and its concerns unfeigned. In these poems, and in the future, we are eager to hear what di Cicco will say next. □

Shop Talk: An Anthology of Poetry, by the Vancouver Industrial Writers' Union, edited by Zoë Landale, Pulp Press, 126 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88978 169 9).

By *George Elliott Clarke*

OWING TO THE near-monopoly that scholars enjoy in its manufacture, too much of our poetry consists of dry, intellectual artifacts, not works of life. *Shop Talk*, an anthology of work poetry, challenges this state by fleshing the bones of work with muscular poetry that sweats life. However, of the nine poets represented, only Glen Downie, Landale, Erin Mouré, Tom Wayman, and Andrew Wreggitt effect the animation convincingly, giving work an identity and capitalism a human face.

Mixing anxiety and violence, Downie's gutsy realism always startles, as in his line from "Ghosts Hate New Things": "The walls pulse and tremble as if thinking of flying away." Landale's impeccable imagery domesticates work, and in "The Myth of the Self-Made Man or: Casualties, 1982" equates debt-drowned fishermen's boatlessness with homelessness: "Their boats were arrival, were home." Mouré dreams brilliant, lyrical poems that damn work's alienating effects and prize the relationships that survive it. In "Who We Are," she cries, "I ache/to find you . . . who we are:/your bright halo of comfort/my body out in the clear." Wayman wavers between prolix extravaganzas like "Forrie, O'Rourke, Penner, Sorestad" and magnificent poems like "Paper, Scissors, Stone" and "Hammer" with



its ringing conclusion: "and no one can say what [the hammer] will drive/if at last it comes down"; his insights into work, workers, and bosses are unparalleled. Wreggitt's poems passionately empathize with workmates' problems. "Endako Shutdown, 1982" discusses laid-off workers whose "hands still reach out in dreams/for levers and tools."

The poems of David R. Conn, Kirsten Emmott, Phil Hall, and Calvin Wharton rarely escape the commonplace. These poets are hampered, respectively, by hackneyed imagery, sentimentality, dull language, and conventional insights. Their poems need more thought.

Shop Talk is a valuable collection. The poets make you care for them and for their experiences — on trains, aboard boats, in hospitals, classrooms, and factories. This poetry works. □

POLITICS & POLITICOS

From Bourassa to Bourassa: A Pivotal Decade in Canadian History, by L. Ian MacDonald, Harvest House, illustrated, 324 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88772 030 7) and \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88772 029 3).

By *Alexander Craig*

THIS BOOK IS the story of one of the most remarkable comebacks ever in Canadian politics. It's also a survey of the convulsive, exciting politics of Quebec in the last 10 years or so, by an astute and experienced commentator, who is also a regular columnist for the *Montreal Gazette*.

A sharply observed piece of extended journalism, it has a fair bit on polls, but no attempt is made to look at the voters behind them by, for instance, examining the social, economic, and cultural factors that impel them one way or another. What the reader gets instead is the product of long, extensive interviewing with leaders and high-level party officials and activists.

Quite a number of well-chosen photos help to round out the lengthy pictures the author gives us of the main political actors of the period, particularly the complex personalities of Ryan and Bourassa. MacDonald is also adept at presenting details of the leadership and referendum campaigns — for example, a valuable summary of the "Yvette" phenomenon, when large, spontaneous meetings around the province of determinedly federal women helped to ensure the Parti Québécois lost the referendum.

Other good features of this book include sections on ways in which politicians, provincial and federal, use advertising, and the uneasy relations existing between provincial Liberals and their "cousins" in Ottawa. The over-emphasis on leaders means that the author does not fully succeed in giving an idea of the flavour of the highly charged, polarized politics of the referendum period throughout Quebec. Otherwise, this is a snappy, at times dramatic account of a crucial period in the history of Quebec and of Canada. □

SCIENCE & NATURE

Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance, by Stephen Herrero, Hurtig, illustrated, 288 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 8329 0377 9) and \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 888530 279 7).

By *Ann Lukits*

BEFORE 1970, half of all the grizzly bear attacks on people took place in Yellowstone National Park. Yet Calgary biologist Stephen Herrero, a world authority on grizzly bears, used to think nothing of taking his family to Yellowstone, where bears would prowl among the tents and trailers at night searching for garbage or improperly stored food. Today, after studying these magnificent and unpredictable animals for 17 years, Herrero admits: "If I had known then what I know now, we would have packed and left."

That reaction is probably typical of what most people will feel after reading *Bear Attacks*. Even the most experienced campers and hikers will pause before entering bear country again. Although his aim wasn't to "horrify," Herrero reluctantly included terrible summaries of how grizzlies and less aggressive black bears have attacked people.

Despite the author's discomfort with them, the horror stories are what save this book from sounding like a research thesis. Written in a cautious, academic style, it is filled with dry, scientific data, including a number of tables and graphs. Herrero seemed unable to decide if he was writing for his colleagues in the scientific community or the general public. The result is a kind of literary hybrid: a cross between a research paper and a popular "how-to" book on avoiding bear attacks.

Bear Attacks is slow-going at times but the stories and Herrero's careful analysis of them offer useful insights into bears and how to behave around them. But they're also the stuff nightmares are made of, and readers should be warned. □

SOCIETY

Successful Aging: the Myths, Realities and Future of Aging in Canada, by Mark Novak, Penguin, 368 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 14 007213 6).

By *Connie Jestie*

UNLIKE SOME BOOKS, this one does not describe the hobbies seniors can practise in their newfound leisure hours, but is a meticulous evaluation of the present and future state of growing old in Canada.

Loaded with relevant statistics, fore-

casts, and intimate profiles of seniors, Novak's book gives a decidedly optimistic picture of our country's elderly. Not only are Canada's old healthier, happier, more alert and self-sufficient than most of us think, but according to Novak things are getting even better. Zigzagging across the nation, he presents examples of housing and recreational facilities that shine. They're new and creative answers to an old question — how do we best help our aged?

Novak's praise and bouncing enthusiasm however, come to a halt at the feet of Canada's pension systems. He describes in detail where and how much money seniors get to live on, and these figures are not so cheering, especially for women.

With North America's swell of aging baby boomers, seniors' rights groups, and rising fears about who will finance the golden years of this huge generation, Novak's book is timely. It's a sane, informative, and sensitive evaluation that encourages everyone toward some creative problem-solving. ☆

REVIEW

Wide open spaces

By John Oughton

Heart of the Rockies, edited by Carole Harmon, Altitude Publishing, 96 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919381 19 7).

Horizons: Contemporary Canadian Landscapes, edited by Marci Lipman and Louise Lipman, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 48 pages, \$19.95 paper (ISBN 0 85619 057 6).

Barns of Western Canada: An Illustrated History, by Bob Hainstock, Bracmar Books, 144 pages, \$26.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919749 05 4).

THE CENTRAL FACT of the Canadian landscape is that there is no centre to it. No matter where one stands, there's always more.

In Japan, a much smaller country, the long history of appreciating landscapes has fostered a tradition of famous views: you stand on a certain cliff, look between two pine trees up the coastline, and there, framed, is a tiny island. You can probably find a painting or woodblock print with exactly the same view recorded in it.

When Japanese tourists visit Canada, by contrast, they find the expanse of our vistas overwhelming. There's no frame to enclose all the space. Consider the effect of the Prairies' land and sky on

someone used to a landscape of hills and valleys, hemmed in by trees and buildings. Canada has some famous postcard scenes — Peggy's Cove, Lake Louise, Niagara Falls — but these are only a few clichés in a vast expanse of newness.

These three books illustrate some of the many ways that Canadians have confronted the land. *Heart of the Rockies* is an impressive visual celebration of the five national parks in the Rockies. The national park system began 100 years ago, and the wisdom of including so much of the Rockies in them is underlined by the apparently pristine slopes and lakes shown in these recent pictures. The book's editor, Carole Harmon, also provides most of the photography. She is accomplished at portraying nature, equally comfortable with mountain peaks or close-ups of delicate alpine flowers. Sharp, vivid colour plates complement the generally fine images.

However, this collection is so defiantly a picture-book that its paucity of text leaves some questions tantalizingly unanswered. The Rockies seem to be somewhat of a Harmon preserve. Some of the early 19th-century pictures are by Byron Harmon, and a few photos are credited to Don and Aileen same-name — including one of a Mount Harmon. As well as a bit more information on the photographers, the book could use a map that locates the five parks within the Rockies chain. Beautiful as these images are, they are hard to relate to each other without some notion of the area's geography.

A much wider range of Canadian topography is included in *Horizons*. It is designed to allow the reader to cut out and mount the images as posters. Most of the landscapes chosen are by mainstream, well-known artists: Pratt, Colville, Danby, Onley, Tanabe, Lemieux, Graham, with the exception of works by the delightful folk-painter Joe Norris and a couple by younger artists. Tim Zuck's Pratt-ish seascape is brightened by the comic touch of a bright cardinal on a railing, and Medrie MacPhee's brooding train station is a strong, ominous composition.

The Lipmans have included one native artist, the venerable Inuit Luke Angahadluk. Oddly, there is no landscape visible in this print at all, other than the white background. The editors probably wanted to stay away from already widely reproduced images in this collection, which may explain why a recent Casson appears on the cover instead of an Emily Carr or Lawren Harris.

Casson's muted winter landscape of a barn recalls Elinor Wylie's lines, "I love the look, austere, immaculate/Of landscapes drawn in pearly monotonous." Like houses, barns symbolize the strug-

gle to make a corner of the landscape into a shelter. Some of the many variations on this theme are celebrated by journalist/photographer Bob Hainstock in *Barns of Western Canada*.

As Hainstock notes, Western Canada has had only a century of barn-building. Many of the styles were inspired by older structures in the areas from which immigrants came: Eastern Canada, the United States, and Europe. Hainstock does a creditable job of showing the varied construction styles that influenced Western barns. For a relatively humble class of building, barns have found many forms: six-, eight-, and 12-sided, L-shaped, multi-peaked and gabled, even turreted.

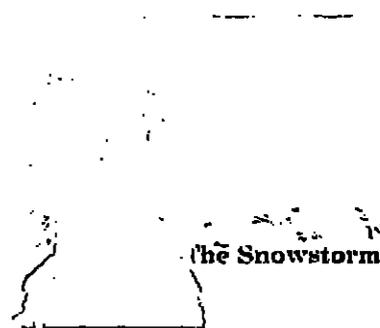
There are some lively bits of trivia for barnophiles: the largest barn in North America, one measuring 400' x 128', was erected at Leader, Sask. by 100 carpenters under the direction of one "Horseshoe" Smith. Unfortunately, Horseshoe's luck ran out, and now only the foundation survives. Barns for fox farms had "fox towers" (which, as Hainstock points out, gave the barns an oddly nautical air). Their purpose was to allow observation of the mating of the wary animals, so that the male could be moved on to his next assignment at the appropriate time.

Although Hainstock had some help in

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BREAKWATER

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research, this book is primarily a one-man labour of love. He is a better photographer than writer: the copy-editor left untouched too many sentences like "Relatively cheap in cash outlay, the technique had the advantage of being fast, strong and reasonably warm." It is also odd that a volume dedicated to barns has no interior shots; it's more of a guide for the barn-watcher than for those who like exploring spicy-smelling lofts and stalls, and admiring rafters and beams. But it does fulfil Hainstock's expressed intent of adding to the documentation of a vanishing part of our heritage: the hand-built barn. □

REVIEW

Photographic memories

By Donna Mills

Toronto Since 1918: An Illustrated History, by James Lemon, James Lorimer, 224 pages, \$26.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88862 730 6).

Elders of the Island, by Mary O'Brien, Lionel Stevenson, and Terry Dunton Stevenson, University of Prince Edward Island/Ragweed Press, illustrated, unpaginated, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 920304 53 2).

Rodeo Cowboys: The Last Heroes, by Ted Barris, photographs by Robert Semeniuk, Western Producer Prairie Books, 144 pages, \$14.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919 035 09 4).

BOOK BUYERS ARE lured by photographs, but it's rare to see the medium used splendidly. Thoughtful conception, and expertise in photography, design, and production are still the exception. Three current books, each aimed at distinct regions of Canada, raise important questions about the use of photographs and the quality of the results.

Toronto Since 1918 is an articulate and thoughtfully researched book — the sixth in a series of urban biographies developed by the National Museum of Man. James Lemon has achieved a surprisingly readable history of Toronto's politics, transportation, building, population, neighbourhoods, and city councils. While the focus is on the patterns of growth and change, Lemon skilfully scatters references to individuals and incidents. Marshall McLuhan and Fred Gardiner are there along with the Spadina Expressway and Christie Pits. The people who inhabit the city are, never very far from the centre of the text.

In the foreword, Alan Artibise, general editor of *The History of Canadian Cities*, writes: "While illustrations and maps cannot by themselves replace the written word, they can be used as a primary source in a way equivalent to more traditional sources."

I wince at the implication of these words, which suggest a traditional view of photography: that images are there to illustrate the text, that they are not really able to stand on their own as revealing documents or delights for the inquiring eye. At worst, they are useful in breaking up a long sequence of text pages.

Perhaps Artibise would take a look at just one photograph — the 1948 picture of the Dutch family at Union Station. What the caption does not, and cannot, indicate is the information and the emotion that is there. The styles and materials in the clothing and the luggage, the design of the doll, the contraption the boy is holding, and the ticket labels tied to the adults' overcoats: there is a bounty of detail. Add to that a departure from a homeland, the journey, the family's anxiety (but how do we "read" their faces?), and imagine what this photograph means to this family and the thousands of Canadians who met their new country this way. Are the people in this photograph alive today? What stories each of them would have to tell. I wonder, too, if the wooden shoes survived the last 37 years. The wealth in this one image is more than "in a way equivalent."

Lemon acknowledges assistance in his search for photographs, but there is no mention of major research or the use of a photo editor. The less-than-adequate quality of reproduction, some of the choices in photograph, and some of the layouts makes me question the importance that was given to the subtitle, *An Illustrated History*. The attention paid to the visual elements has not been equal to the rest of this book's contents.

The jacket raises other questions. The photograph, with its romantic post-sunset view of Toronto's skyline, invites buyers of mediocre photographic collections. The touristic gesture — probably an effort to broaden the market — misleads. The audience for this book is Toronto watchers, social historians, urban geographers, and a legion of citizens who have a healthy pride and curiosity about their city. I hope they overlook the cover and discover the detail and scope that Lemon has brought to the text. It's a welcome contribution to our history.

Elders of the Island reveals photographs of 30 people from Prince Edward Island. The images are all unabashed attempts to present older people in a positive way. "Being an elder, I think, is

a great honour" is the way the epigraph reads.

The book's design and the quality of reproduction invite care in looking. Large images, sensitively chosen and simply displayed, have a quiet presence. One takes one's time, and the book nearly lets the photographs speak for themselves. The designer has also been in no rush to get the reader to the visual material; the opening pages train the reader to linger and read, to slow down before meeting these people.

I wish I could be as enthusiastic about other aspects of this book. There is a question about believability: it's all a tad too positive and uplifting. The authors have created the book they want: their own fiction. The quotations that appear opposite the photographs are evidently from taped interviews with six people, only two of whom are photographed — the 28 others didn't say anything? I am bewildered by this editorial decision; it seems manipulative.

Also, I don't believe the quotations. They sound as if they were written by urban college undergraduates. "When we are leading creative lives, we are responding to life with our own personalities, as individuals." And "You just have to have a wonderful image of yourself to know you're worthy and you're a shining light." People don't talk like that, especially Islanders.

The photographers have not been self-indulgent. The subjects seem at ease and it appears as if only available light was used. Two techniques, however, repeat themselves. Many photographs are shot from slightly below the subject, and the predominance of "waist-up" cropping with out-of-focus hands in the foreground wears thin. In a few photographs there has simply been a lack of care in noticing distracting elements.

Older people have smaller environments, but the near-absence of the fact of the Island is puzzling. Surely this is part of their lives and of their home. It's certainly part of the book's title.

Some of the photographs are admirable: the man on the railway tracks, the woman with the cat, and the man in the plaid jacket and hat all contain ironies or questions. I only wish the authors had recognized and shown these aspects. Fictions are part of every quotation and photograph and life.

Speaking of fiction, *Rodeo Cowboys: The Last Heroes* is a discouraging exercise in that department. The planning, or lack of it, has resulted in a truly egregious production. I hesitate to grace this indulgence by calling it a book.

A sample of text from the first paragraph reads, "Yet here, the rodeo exhibition remains — survivor of the fall of Rome with her chariot race and

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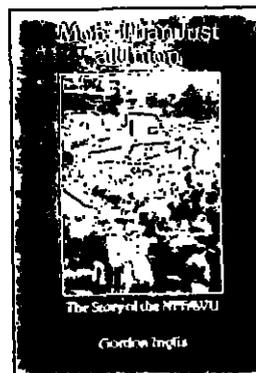
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gladiator's battle to the death, descendant of King Arthur's joust." Overkill is the operative word. One might find that the words melodramatic and pretentious also apply.

The photography fares even worse than the text. Romantic photos mix with shots of equipment; exercises in nostalgia combine with cute cowgirl poses; but mediocre action pictures and "studied" faces dominate. There are sequences that are out-of-sequence and grouped photographs that have no relationship to each other. Technically, much of the work is grainy, out-of-focus, and even dirty.

Lost in this commercial grab-bag are a few interesting photographs and one shot — for what it's worth — that is splendid. The super-close-up of a cowboy with a leather face and felt hat is a wonderful colour photograph. Mind you, the designer has put an absolutely irrelevant picture beside it. I mention this portrait because it's only one of two or three photographs where colour matters. The photographer, designer, and publisher should acquaint themselves with what colour photography is about as a first step in their post-production round-up. □

REVIEW

Box populi

By Deb Blackburn

Jolts: The TV Wasteland and the Canadian Oasis, by Morris Wolfe, James Lorimer, illustrated, 160 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88862 649 5) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88862 648 7).

QUITE A FEW books about Canadian television have been published, but certainly not so many that there is no room for another. This one falls nicely into a rather large gap. Generally, earlier ones have been either fat and scholarly or slim and trivial. This one is slim but sometimes sinewy.

Morris Wolfe wrote a monthly column of television criticism for *Saturday Night* for seven years. That, he says, was long enough; he had said everything he wanted to say. He has, however, decided to say some of it again in this format.

The "jolts" of the title refers to a TV trade term, jolts per minute, or jpm. A jolt may be anything from a murder to a glimpse of forbidden flesh, or simply a bit of flashy editing or special effects — anything that will regain the quickly

flagging attention of the viewer. The jolt, says Wolfe, is the basic building block of commercial television. "The actual content of American programmes doesn't matter much any more. Whether it's *The A Team* or *Sesame Street*, it's only the structure, the number of jpm's, that counts."

This had to be explained because of the title (the subtitle is appropriate enough). The fact is that the original title of the book was *Who Needs Canadian Television?* It should have been retained, because that is the question the book attempts to answer. It does not contain jolts, nor is it primarily about jolts. Wolfe is a serious and thoughtful critic, and all this stuff about jolts tends to get in the way of what he has to say that's worth paying attention to.

"I found I wanted to use my column to explore the differences between American and Canadian culture," he says, and that is what he did. Since he is not one of those critics who dwell on the impact of TV and its audiences and pay scant attention to the impact the audience has on the medium, he has been able to take an interesting overview of the results of this interaction in both the United States and Canada.

The greater part of the book is devoted to an organized critical analysis of dozens of specific programs and series from both sides of the border, and this leads Wolfe to the conclusion that there is a difference between the Canadian and American cultures and that it is clearly evident on our TV screens. His quick summary: "Canadian television tends to be more realistic (and satirical), American more idealistic (and cynical).

"The irony is that although there is a difference, a difference that reflects who we are . . . that difference remains invisible to most Canadians." Viewers, says Wolfe, don't want to look at their own reflection in their own TV, preferring instead the "fast pace and beautiful lies" of the American product. Americans are the best in the world at producing escapist fare, and Canadian adults spend 80 per cent of their viewing time watching it. (The figure is even higher for children.)

How this situation came to be is Wolfe's next subject, and he provides a valuable and concise account of the history of Canadian broadcasting, which, of course, was vastly more influenced by politics than was the development of the U.S. system. It is a story that reveals a great deal of bumbling, and not all of it could even be called well-intended.

Wolfe also includes a fascinating look at what little information is available on the physiology of viewing — what happens within our brains and endocrine

systems — and the relationship between the current rock-video craze and trends in production techniques in regular TV. He reports on the experiments of filmmaker Douglas Trumbull with speeded-up projection of films to produce a much more intense emotional experience in the viewer, leading to the prospect of "the microfeature, a high-impact sensory experience, compressed in time."

The overview presented in *Jolts* is pretty glum, but Wolfe is not prepared to give up. Realistically, he dismisses the idea of expecting any voluntary help from private TV, but he still sees hope for the CBC. "There's no doubt that CBC television is a countervailing force against the homogeneity of American commercial television and its Canadian imitators," he says. We've come to realize that CBC radio is not just a convenience, it's a necessity. The same thing is true of CBC television." And he goes on at length to prescribe detailed measures he contends would enable the CBC to fulfil its mandate. Possibly his recipe would work, but it is impossible to overlook the fact that this would require a magical transformation of the nature of our politicians and bureaucrats. □

REVIEW

Going through the wars

By C.P. Stacey

A Military History of Canada, by Desmond Morton, Hurtig, illustrated, 305 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88830 276 2).

HERE IS ANOTHER volume of lively history from the incredible Desmond Morton, whose recent output includes *A Peculiar Kind of Politics* and *A Short History of Canada*, not to mention dozens of newspaper, TV, and radio pieces. The present book was presumably developed from *Canada and War* (1981), a paperback intended for college use. That book began with Confederation; this one begins with Champlain's arquebus and ends with Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative — history thoroughly up to date.

A Military History of Canada is a welcome contribution to public education. For the citizens of a country that has fought four wars in this century, Canadians remain remarkably ignorant of military matters. A country with a sophisticated public opinion on defence policy could hardly have produced Paul

Hellyer, the great unifier, or let him get away with what he did; nor would it have tolerated Pierre Trudeau's proceedings, which left us with the emaciated forces we have today. It all arises from our happy North American isolation, and the fact that we have been able to rely on other people to provide our security. It is time we started thinking seriously about these things. Morton's final point is that Canada's ancient "military immunity" is one of the "vanished certainties" of the present day.

There is more than merely "military" history here. There is a great deal of politics and a good bit of economics. Morton writes, as always, well and pungently, and the text is supported by numerous well-chosen illustrations. (There are a fair number of mistakes in the captions. Experience has shown that publishers sometimes cross up authors in the matter of captions, so perhaps the blame rests on Hurtig's new office boy.)

Apart from the old basic message — that Canadians have regularly neglected their forces in peace-time to an extent that might have been fatal if they had not had the British and, latterly, the Americans to protect them — two main points may be said to emerge from the book. First, it is through her armed forces that Canada has played her most important part on the world stage, and has achieved the national status she has today. (Here, Morton might have said more about Sir Robert Borden's achievement at the Paris Conference of 1919.) Second, it was on the battlefield that Canadians found themselves as a nation. Vimy Ridge was "a nation-building experience"; "the Great War was also Canada's war of independence even if it was fought at Britain's side against a common enemy." But we are reminded that the two world wars were also grimly divisive, bringing down, particularly in 1917-18, a curtain of mistrust between French Canada and the rest of the country.

This old soldier finds himself wondering whether the book isn't a bit too easy on Hellyer. "By the time he left the department in 1967," it says, "Hellyer could feel proud of his achievement. He had out-wrestled generals and admirals, [and] devised a defence organization the rest of the world would surely copy. . . ." Not all Morton's readers, perhaps, will realize that he is being sarcastic. It would have been worthwhile to be explicit and say that nobody, but nobody, copied the organization Hellyer was so proud of.

Even a master of a subject (and Morton is certainly master of this one) pays a price for writing too fast. The price here is an unusually large number of slips and

minor errors, and occasionally a larger derailment. One such comes in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Morton writes, "In a grand gesture, Ottawa simply wrote off \$3.5 billion in British debts; it was generous and it could easily be afforded." This is just not the way things happened. And the Canadian-American defence agreement of February, 1947, was a very much more cautious document than the account here indicates. The reader would almost think that the author had momentarily forgotten that Mackenzie King was still prime minister at this time. King at the end of his career was both much less disposed to be generous to the British and much more suspicious of the Americans than Morton would lead us to believe. One cannot help wishing that he had devoted, say, an extra six months to making this good and interesting book still better. □

REVIEW

Dialing for drama

By Rachel Wyatt

Words on Waves: Selected Radio Plays of Earle Birney, CBC Enterprises/Quarry Press, 312 pages, \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88794 197 4).

EVERYTHING THAT Earle Birney writes is of interest. He is a man of words, a poet of our own. In *Words on Waves* he appears as a radio dramatist of the Golden Age of Radio. These plays are not representative of that Golden Age, but some of them are interesting examples of the poet's work in that period. The best of them, "The Damnation of Vancouver," his well-known verse play, demonstrates the ease with which he can push language to its limits and still be understood. It is full of wit and that sympathy over human idiocy which is apparent in so much of his work.

"Court-Martial," the story of Gunner Davis, who is charged with trying to commit suicide on active service, demonstrates again his feeling for the little man caught up in a vast web, manipulated by others and totally helpless. The lines in the summing up for the defence are not without some truth today, 40 years after they were written. "I ask for a conviction," the lawyer, Sanderson, says, "not of Davis but of the Society that warped him by parental neglect — and poverty — and inadequate schooling — and blind social disapproval — and joblessness. . . ."

And the listener knows that Davis, convicted, will keep on trying to commit suicide until he succeeds.

From that sad scene, let's move to a funny play. "The Griffin and the Minor Canon" is an adaptation of a story by Frank R. Stockton. A dragon in town always makes for a solid dramatic situation, and when you can find craven councillors who are willing to come up with a Modest Proposal to placate the creature, and a less than likely hero, you have all the ingredients for success. Listen a moment to the Mayor and his council discussing the menu for a Griffin's banquet:

"We can't afford both pork and beef."

"What if he only eats humans?"

"We'll give him the keys to the Orphan Asylum."

Better fewer orphans than more! All ends happily, however, with the townspeople much improved by their awful experience.

A less successful adaptation is that of Joseph Conrad's story "The Duel." To begin with, a cast-list of 32 is a distinct drawback in a radio play. Distinguishing the voices is a problem for the listener unless each voice is quickly attached to a clearly defined character. The listener, after all, cannot see that Rosemary is the one with red hair and Jean the one with the tombstone teeth. It is the words out of their mouths that identify them. In this case, one might have preferred simply to hear the story read aloud in Conrad's own words than to try and sort out who is who in this large, invisible crowd.

It does not state in the book whether the play called "Gawain and the Green Knight" was written for children or adults. It is hard to imagine at what age people might sit still to listen to this: "Professors tell us that there may have been an Arthur. Lived in Cornwall about 1,300 years ago. Last great leader of the Britons. Saxons were trying to push them right off Land's End. . . ." And even Gawain is afflicted with wordiness when action might have become him better. Thus spake Gawain: "But here's a gage below thy dignity to lift, a mockery to be right quickly stilled, and so a folly suiting such as I to meet. For I am least in fame and worth of all thy Table Round, and so shall least be missed. . . ." And on and on. A plain "Let me go, sire," was obviously not thought acceptable.

The language in "Piers Plowman" and "Beowulf" is often lovely to read as is right in allegory and legend. But I wondered how many people stayed tuned to hear the second half, and Langland say lilingly, "I dreamed I stood in that fair field again. . . ."

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Perhaps in that Golden Age there was a different audience.

In radio, too, times change, *nos et mutamur*, and we along with them. And to write a successful radio drama now the writer must quickly invade the listener's most private place, the mind. That mind, as Martin Esslin has said, is the radio dramatist's stage. In the first few lines, the dialogue must entice and enchant and encourage people to put down the cat and listen. Sound and music have to catch the imagination and not irritate it with too many footsteps, too many dying chords, too many fridge doors closing. Most writers are part gossip and part eavesdropper, and a radio dramatist must be particularly alert to the natural conversation of others. It is the stuff of the trade. It is what makes people perk up their ears. When they hear a disembodied voice which sounds vaguely familiar saying, "I'm going to kill you now," they are far more likely to stay tuned in than if they hear a lengthy explanation of the reason for the murder.

This book should not be used as a guide for students who want to write radio drama now. It is a sample of what one of our foremost poets was writing then. And for once, the title of a book is perfectly apt. These plays are exactly what the cover says, *Words on Waves*. □

REVIEW

Caged men

By Ann Lukits

Bingo!, by Roger Caron, Methuen, 256 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 458 99700 5).

WHEN KINGSTON PENITENTIARY erupted into one of the worst riots in Canadian penal history, on April 14, 1971, one of the 600 inmates who witnessed the rampage was there because of an untimely judicial mistake. He was 33-year-old Roger Caron, who had been in and out of every major prison east of Manitoba since the age of 16, but in this case was serving time for a crime he did not commit, and for which he was later exonerated. The knowledge of his innocence probably saved Caron's neck. He did not actively join the rioters; instead, as he reflects in his autobiographical account of the riot, he devoted his energies to staying "afloat in the quagmire of lunacy" that engulfed the prison.

In *Bingo!* (which takes its title from prisoners' slang for riot) Caron portrays

himself an outsider during the 92-hour siege, which gutted Canada's oldest penitentiary and left two inmates dead at the hands of "borderline psychos whose minds were overloaded from excitement and the scent of blood." A caffeine addict, Caron spent most of the time scrambling through the tunnels and passageways of the 19th-century prison frantically searching for coffee and food.

Even when lawyer Desmond Morton, one of a five-member negotiating committee and the man who later proved Caron's innocence, asked to speak to him, the scavenging inmate could not be found. Against his will, however, Caron was forced to witness the riot's bloody climax, the savage torture of 14 rapists and child molesters by a breakaway group "who were hurting from years of oppression at the hands of guards." Caron describes the scene in stomach-turning detail.

This is Caron's second book, but the first he has written as a free man. Caron (who was given parole in 1979) began working on the manuscript in Kingston's Collins Bay Institution, where he received the 1978 Governor General's Award for *Go-Boy! The True Story of a Life Behind Bars*. *Bingo!* is painfully slow to start and repeats too much of *Go-Boy!*, but the tedious beginning is quickly forgotten once Caron moves inside Kingston's "pulsing, throbbing world of gloom." Years of confinement have trained him to observe the tiniest detail, and he skilfully reproduces the tension and suspense surrounding the plot to "bingo."

It is his first-hand experience of the Canadian prison system and the riot in particular that makes this book so fascinating to read. After spending half his life behind bars, Caron evokes the "crushing loneliness" and the forces that eventually prompted the convicts to "blow their corks." (Caron coped with the mounting tension by doing hundreds of push-ups and shadow boxing until he was exhausted.)

He blames the guards, not "the system," for instigating the riot. On the surface, he notes, it was caused by an impending transfer of inmates to the new super-maximum Millhaven prison west of Kingston. But it wasn't Millhaven's state-of-the-art security system that inmates feared; it was the prospect of increased lawlessness by guards.

"Most of the cons were up front enough to admit that they had not played by society's rules," admits Caron. "They were prepared to pay their pound of weary flesh. But the screws took it on themselves to extract more than the courts demanded. Some

of our keepers had a way about them that made the cons feel that the simple act of breathing was a privilege."

The book is a bitter condemnation of the hard-line guards who, Caron claims, control Canada's prisons. Written in forceful, tough-guy prose, the book is filled with stories of how inmates have suffered at the hands of their keepers. The book is certain to outrage guards, and Caron makes a strong case against them: "I believe deep down they don't much like the public at large. A certain percentage takes a perverse pride in the creation of their Frankenstein monsters, co-offenders about to wreak havoc on society."

Paradoxically, Caron never fully explains why some prisoners risked their lives to protect six guards who were taken hostage during the riot and later released unharmed. When the riot ended, a group of club-wielding "renegade screws" showed their gratitude by running the prisoners through a human gauntlet, where they were beaten bloody. "The evil that had gripped the militants in KP had now come around full circle." Eleven guards were later charged with assault in what was hailed as a landmark case (guards had never before been brought to trial solely on the evidence of prisoners), but all 11 were either acquitted or the case

against them was quietly dropped. Caron's book makes it easier to understand, though not to accept, the outcome.

Publication of *Bingo!* coincides with the 150th anniversary of Kingston Pen. It also falls on the heels of another book published by the Correctional Service of Canada called *Kingston Penitentiary: The First Hundred and Fifty Years*. Written by Andrew Graham, a former Kingston warden, and Dennis Curtis, the present-day regional communications manager, it devotes a mere 1 1/2 of its profusely illustrated pages to the 1971 riot. Not surprisingly, it receives only passing mention from Caron. □

EXCERPT

The lake

'I believe poetry is often revealed in the evening, at midnight on a day in July. . . . My thoughts fall into the water, and if I concentrate, somebody or something will answer'

By Joe Rosenblatt

A POWERFUL WIND whips over Eagle Lake causing chops of water to lick through bays and inlets. The moaning and writhing along the shore, an aquatic dirge. Fed by a chain of neighbouring lakes and rivers, the waters of Eagle Lake are chilling with eerie currents at different depths, so that even in July it seems some wild joker is dropping ice cubes into the drink. The black water connotes a sunless freezer; only the hardest of fish survive.

At mid-lake the water is deeper, darker, and colder, the light lost with each layer of icy water. It's as if a glimmer from a small pen-light had forced its way through an inkwell. The depth at the centre strikes the imagination; you begin to think you are privileged to be at the point where several ounces of lead and fishing line keep falling until you yawn or think the line has struck bottom, but then there is a sudden jerk and the line continues to fall. Everybody loves to brag about their favourite lake, and as it happens, it is the deepest lake on the planet and usually a northern lake, a forlorn lake, ignored.

At the dark centre, I kept hoping my fishing line would disappear into another dimension, an aquatic twilight zone where one meets souls of the departed. That notion tickled the fancy of a 14-year-old: the lake of death; and maybe some hand would surface with a mighty sword . . . or at very least, a prehistoric monster, half fish and part beaver, would surface to see who the

violators of the sacred silence could be. And were there swimmers foolish enough to go skinny-dipping in the frigid soup? I like to think I was the first person who saw a giant squid glide past a canoe in that lake. Perhaps sunlight played against the surface of the water, distorting anything that passed my view, but I had seen the *thing* and I didn't press the point, fearing ridicule. I didn't mention garfish or a creature with an elongated serrated narrow mouth lurking in the coldest depths; it wasn't a good idea to float about on the darkest water.

An aquatic mood, as opposed to a human one; a minnow or a pod of minnows are cells skittering like thoughts below the lips on the body of water. I thought of minnows as flecks of thought pursued by heavier thoughts in a chain of cannibalistic renewal: the smaller



diminish, the larger fatten. The losers, those slow dim-witted life forms — minnows — are soon devoured, and others who are sick, too weak, or who can't adapt to a more rigid existence, vanish, food stock to larger fish thoughts. The result of this purge is — not a molecule of fat wasted. No fat floats around the

heart of the lake, and sometimes if one listens to a dreadful silence, you are conscious of the pulsating beat as the canoe is swept to one side or the other.

I believe poetry is often revealed in the evening, at midnight on a day in July. I am staring at the expensive crystal-ware in the sky, and see bits and pieces of silver fall toward the lake; fireflies sizzle and dissolve. It's dry ice, splinters and shards of frozen carbon dioxide at absolute zero . . . falling into black water, devoured . . . a soul become gas . . . I see the lake as a body in deep sleep; the bed in which that body turns is a basin and denotes the outline of a bowl composed of volcanic matter, igneous buckshot from the explosion at birth . . . a basaltic bowl filled with bone-chilling tears and restless fish population, or impulsive thoughts.

Collectively, they form a conduit, or psychic telephone line to the other world above the surface of the lake, or the dream outside the dream where somebody answers all unrecorded messages. My thoughts fall into the water, and if I concentrate on just one pore on the surface, somebody or something will answer. A silence forms a skin over the lake, not a ripple or breeze present. The surface is glassy. The lake is pretending to be dead but I don't trust the lake. The lake can think, it absorbs thoughts because it stores energy from sunlight, from fish life, motion in the currents, from thought. The lake is breathing, filaments of thought move through its entire system, and then that brain explodes. The water heaves, picking up

momentum, inhaling, exhaling. . . .

The light dims in the sky and the lake appears dark and brooding before a summer storm and that mood moves like a viscous substance filling up the eyeball of its own sadness; and then the sky allows a sheath of light to touch the water and sunlight ripens, not at the centre of the lake, but closer into the shore before the water darkens and you are aware that the light has gone into the *drop, and from the drop the hole widens* and falls further into some psychic abyss where fingers of currents drag the luminescence down and devour it. Near the shoreline, the water is transparent, not a residue of impurity there, no foreign matter, and an illusion takes hold. The swimmer feels that he or she is above the purest substance on the planet, resting on a liquid eyeball and staring directly through to the pebbles at the bottom. You could stare 40 or 50 feet down and pretend you are resting on a magnifying glass. You can see every pore, every detail, a sunbeam of a fish darting

behind a rock formation. The creature dissolves inside a private condominium. A few bits and pieces of gravel go up in its wake and then fall. There is so much clarity here you begin to feel that any light ray would instantly cauterize the slightest contamination. A few minuscule strands of algae fall away, burnt by a light beam . . . or has a goldfish nibbled at it? A dark sliver flees across the floor and I wonder how that sliver of intelligence can flee from joy

The sun is warming my body. I do a dead man's float face down, hands in front, feet straight as a log . . . and soon my skin begins to itch from the heat of the sun. I dive as deep as I can, pushing a fluttering sunfish out of my way, but dive as I may, I still can't match the magnificent penetration of a sunfish jabbing through the water, having its fun, or sex, with the elements. A cold current catches the roof of my spine and I strike up to the surface with the cold trailing me. I'm stabbed by an invisible finger of ice. No wonder minnows enjoy

this form of coitus with mother water. I watch them thrive around the current. It revitalizes them. Born again minnows. I realize how they feel when they are sent into exile, into the holding tanks of Uncle Nathan's fish emporium. Fresh Fish. They craved and worshipped that cold current, one of many deities in the poltergeist establishment. How painfully lonely they must have felt in Nathan's limbo, his fish tanks, and what a poor substitute that cold water proved . . . that man-made current . . . not enough vigour to wash away the staleness of their spiritual decay. And soon they were united with a stronger current in a darker world. But in the midst of my dark forebodings I have this sensation: either I or the lake is a bulbous dream, a see-through dream, and both of us are trying to empty ourselves of all thought. The lake forces out its minnows, I expel my thoughts. Boo, I cry, blowing bubbles at golden hordes. Boo, they reply, before they evaporate into the cold deep ink. □

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Seeing things

Among the season's children's books are poetry by Raymond Souster, paintings by William Kurelek, and the story of a girl with second sight

By Mary Ainelle Smith

THE BRIGHT COVERS and catchy titles of fall books for children give some colour and light to this grey time of year. Here are some titles off the mark early in a bid to accompany young readers through the long winter days ahead.

Julie, by Cora Taylor (Western Producer Prairie Books, 101 pages, \$7.95 paper), is about a young girl's supernatural powers. But it is grounded firmly in the realistic context of a family farm in Saskatchewan. *Julie Morgan*, the youngest in her family, is the seventh child of a seventh child, the great-granddaughter of a Welsh woman believed to have had second sight. She is small and dark in a family of tall, practical blonds. But the differences are deeper than that. Julie sees things, hears voices that no one else can. These extra powers, which her family at first puts down to an active imagination, isolate Julie, who realizes that no one else can share or understand them.

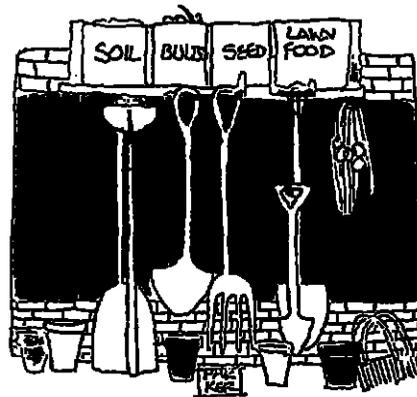
The story follows Julie from babyhood to age 10 as she adjusts to being alone with her special gift. Throughout the years various events bring into focus

her uncanny ability to know things that should be impossible for her to know. Her father is concerned, her mother broods over what she feels is an unhealthy difference in her youngest child, and her brothers and sisters — although they love her — are half afraid of her and half convinced that she is either lying or crazy. Then Julie summons all her special powers to help her father after a terrible accident and realizes that she is strong enough to use her unique ability as a positive force. *Julie* is Taylor's first novel, and she writes with a clear, strong style, making

everything in the story, even the supernatural, very believable.

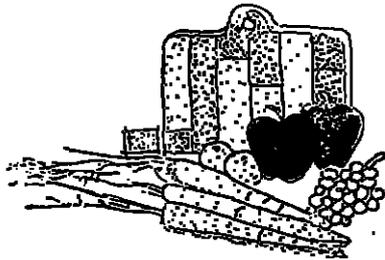
Through 28 paintings by William Kurelek (the Canadian artist who died in 1977) and a text by U.S. editor Margaret S. Engelhart, *They Sought a New World* (Tundra, 48 pages, \$14.95 cloth) reminds readers once more of the hardships and heroism that went into the development of modern North America. It is published simultaneously in the United States and Canada, as the stories of European immigration in these two countries have many similarities. The result is a book that puts Kurelek's work into a new and compelling perspective.

Annick Press has again prepared the colourful array of books for very young readers that we have come to expect in the fall. *My Blue Chair*, written and illustrated by Hans Zander (24 pages, \$12.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper), tells the history of a child's chair. Handmade in some European country, it passed through several generations of several families, crossing the ocean on one of these families' migrations. Then, well-used and shabby, it was accidentally thrown away, but rescued from the dump finally to find a place in a special museum exhibit of children's chairs



from all over the world. Zander's pictures focus on this simple but lovely chair as we follow its progress through the years.

In *Aunt Armadillo*, written and illustrated by Robin Baird Lewis (20 pages, \$12.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper), the child narrator tells about her strange and wonder-



ful aunt who carries two pet armadillos on her head, reads to the bears in the zoo, always has tea at four o'clock, and eventually becomes a wonderful children's librarian.

The Too Busy Day, by Carrolle Green, illustrated by Leonard Aguanno (20 pages, \$12.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper), tells of a pre-schooler's frustration when the adults in her life are too busy to have time for her. Green's gentle text and the warmth of Aguanno's art together provide a happy resolution to the little girl's problems.

Thomas' Snowsuit (24 pages, \$12.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper), is Annick's Robert Munsch book for 1985, a story already familiar to the many fans of Munsch's popular story-telling to live audiences and on records. Thomas, a young man with a mind of his own, battles all the adults in his life who try to force him to wear an ugly brown snowsuit. Illustrations are by Michael Martchenko, whose sense of humour seems to match Munsch's perfectly.

Three Green Things, by Kathy Stinson, illustrated by Mary McLoughlin (21 pages, \$12.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper), hinges on the question a little girl constantly asks her mother: "What are those green things?" While the little girl sees green worms in her omelette, green monsters in the closet and green snakes in the garage, her mother assures her that she is only seeing spinach, green garbage bags, and garden hose.

Matthew and the Midnight Turkeys (20 pages, \$12.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper) is Allen Morgan's second story about Matthew's dream adventures. In this book he shares a wonderful midnight pizza party in his backyard with some wildly dressed turkeys, who giggle and tickle enough to satisfy even the giddiest little boy. Illustrations are by Michael Martchenko.

In *Our Brother Has Down's Syndrome*, by Shelley Cairo (21 pages, \$12.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper), Tara and

Jasmine Cairo tell about their little brother Jai, who is mentally handicapped. The text is supported by Irene McNeil's colour photographs, showing Jai the way he is — a child who responds to the love and attention of his family. The story's main point is made right at the beginning: "Everyone is special. . . ."

The Annick ABC Activity Set is a bright red box containing an alphabet book, a game, and two puzzles, all with witty illustrations by Roger Paré. The 32 puzzle pieces turn over to form the game pieces, each one showing a letter illustrated with a detail from the book. Children can use them to make words or play a simplified form of Scrabble. The set costs \$15.95.

Black Moss Press has several new titles in keeping with the increase in the popularity of poetry for children. *Atmosfear*, by sean o huigin (21 pages, \$4.95 paper), is in the old-fashioned style of cautionary verse, but it warns children of a very contemporary danger. Our increasing pollution of the atmosphere will release an evil monster upon the world to destroy us:

*Take warning now
this is no joke
we're doomed by
all the dust and*

*smoke we pour into
the air each day
we've got to find
another way*

The accompanying illustrations by Barbara Di Lella are appropriately brooding and menacing.

Feelings, by Joanne Brisson Murphy (27 pages, \$5.95 paper), describes in verse the range of feelings a pre-schooler can experience:

*Sometimes when I daydream
by myself in my room,
I feel quiet like a mouse,
or a whisper,
or the moon.*

*Then if I'm wrestling
with my dad on the floor,
I feel noisy,
I feel loud
like a SLAMMING door.*

Illustrations by Heather Collins show a little boy in a warm family setting experiencing the ups and downs of growing up.

Black Moss has reissued, with some additions, bp Nichol's first book of poetry for children. *Giants, Moosequakes & Other Disasters* (36 pages, \$6.95 paper) appeals to children through the use of sounds, rhythms, and word-play, for which Nichol is famous:

Said Timmy,

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who thot cockroaches quite ugly,
 "They squirm, they crawl & they're
 distinctly buggy!"
 Said King Cockroach,
 who found Timmy made him nauseous,
 "He's big & weird — he really
 bothers us."

Illustrations by Maureen Paxton run rampant over the pages.

Another very pleasing book for children is made up of poetry not necessarily written with any particular age group in mind. *Flight of the Roller Coaster* (Oberon Press, 89 pages, \$9.95

cloth) presents 89 of Raymond Souster's poems, selected and arranged thematically by Richard Woollatt to appeal to readers in the 10 to 13 age bracket. Souster's clarity and use of simple images make this book a treat, somehow relaxing and refreshing compared to the explosive energy and busyness that some other poets seem to feel is the only way to catch youngsters' attention. For example:

The Emptying
 Remember how your mother

used to take your pants washdays,
 turn the pockets inside out,
 shake hard once or twice, then wait
 for the shower of gum cards, transfer
 stubs,
 marbles, hardened chestnuts, even a
 cent
 to fall on the basement floor?

Today that's exactly what the wind
 is doing to the leaves of my poplar trees.

Souster's book survives a condescending introduction by Woollatt, and is enhanced by Jack Ackroyd's intriguing cover illustration. □

INTERVIEW

Jane Rule

'I have tried to be honest about human relationships, and being honest about them doesn't always mean taking the lid off and finding a can of worms'

By Marilyn Powell

BORN IN Plainfield, New Jersey, in 1931, Jane Rule moved to Canada in 1956, and now lives on Galiano Island, off the coast of British Columbia. The author of *Lesbian Images* (Doubleday, 1975), she has often written about lesbians and lesbianism in such novels as *The Desert of the Heart* (Macmillan, 1964) — which has recently been made into a feature-length film — *This Is Not For You* (Doubleday, 1972), and *The Young in One Another's Arms* (Doubleday, 1977). Her books of short stories include *Theme For Diverse Instruments* (Talonbooks, 1975) and *Inland Passage*, published this fall by Lester & Orpen Dennys. While on a visit to Toronto she was interviewed by Marilyn Powell:

Jane Rule



Books in Canada: Let's talk about the new film of your novel, *The Desert of the Heart*, and how the film came about.

Jane Rule: I got half a dozen offers in the '60s to make a film of that book — I guess because it's very visual — and I refused all of them. I knew I wouldn't have any control over the project; I thought they would make a movie in which one of the female lovers would have to kill herself in the end. But then, about six or seven years ago, Donna Deitch, an independent film-maker in the United States, approached me. She'd been doing documentary and experimental films. I'd never had anyone talk about it the way she did — she'd obviously read the novel over and over again. I agreed from the beginning that I shouldn't work on the film, because I'm not a script-writer, that Donna and her script-writer should make their own movie.

BIC: What did Deitch see in the novel that made her want to turn it into the film *Desert Hearts*?

Rule: She said she wanted to make a film that was a celebratory statement about a relationship between two women. She'd read a lot of books, and this was the one book she'd found that seemed to her essentially joyful and realistic, and she thought she could make a perfectly candid movie for a general audience.

BIC: There are many horror stories in the industry about there being no relation between a novel and the movie from which it is made.

Rule: The attitude in the industry and the profession is that a writer sells movie rights for a whopping amount of money and then runs. I don't have any place to run. I stand on the material I do, and

this is a matter of trust. Also, I have a wonderful sense of artistic community, in which you become part of the loam of somebody else's work. It enriches you in a sense that your imagination has fed another imagination to make a different kind of work. The book doesn't have to be torn up to make the movie. They can be complementary experiences.

BIC: You're an optimist, aren't you?

Rule: Yes, I guess I am. But I'm also a realist. I don't expect Hollywood to build my kind of community. I think that, if you have an idea of community, you have to build it.

BIC: You have a new collection of short stories out, *Inland Passage*. When you look at yourself over time, can you detect a continuity in your writing, or are there ways in which your subject matter has changed?

Rule: I suppose that for an awfully long time what I've been doing is working with a concept of community — even in the short stories, though it's not as evident in them as in the novels, because, of course, short stories aren't big enough to establish a wide range of community. In my novels I'm working with what I call voluntary relationships of people who get thrown together and create a world for themselves. An awful lot of us have had to do that. It's always interesting to me to see what kind of world people can create, the support they provide for themselves that we think usually resides in families. But in the short stories I go back much more often to family, simply because it's already created. So there are a lot of stories that have to do with it. And there are some that don't. There are some that are ironically playful. For example, "Dulcie," the first story.

BookNews: an advertising feature



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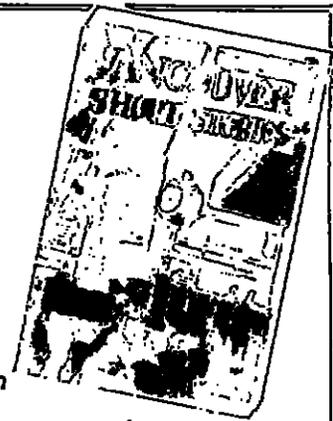
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thought it would be fun to write from the point of view of the muse. Of course the muse is badly used, and she comes to the conclusion at the end that she doesn't really like artists. What she likes is art and to get as far away from the creative energy as possible. The story is about not making a community, about making mistakes. If you took that story alone, you might say I was a very bleak person in the way I think about people relating to each other.

BiC: *But in Inland Passage there is one family that continues through a series of short stories, a man, his wife and two children — very attractive people, the way we wish a family could be. Is there some wish-fulfilment in your imagining them?*

Rule: I am very fond of that particular family, even though my feminist friends accuse me of living on the moon if I think that is the way families work. The fact is, my mother is very loving of me. She thinks most of the people I write about are hideously unattractive and live awful lives. About once every two years I write her a story, and they have become the Harry, Anna, and family stories. In each of them there is something out of my childhood. For instance, my father actually made accurate

skeleton costumes for us for Halloween. So the characters aren't based on my parents or on my brother and me, but they incorporate things out of our lives. I really love writing those stories, which are for me a loving vacation. They're intended to be funny. My parents are extraordinarily happily married people, looking forward to their 60th wedding anniversary. They're very lucky, and they're fairly rare. I don't think it's really wish-fulfilment on my part, but a pledge to those who have done it, presented with love and with humour.

BiC: *How has the label "lesbian writer" affected your attitude toward your work?*

Rule: I used to feel it was an awful cage to be put in. And then I thought: "But I am being put in it, and there's nothing I can do about it, so what I must do is use it." Most interviewers (it's not so much true now) wanted to talk about my being a lesbian. And that's all they wanted to talk about. I used the interviews to educate the public. But of course I don't write just about lesbians. The lesbian community is furious with me because I have no right to be writing about heterosexuals. On the other hand, my agent who's now retired — when she first met me, she said that the girls at *Redbook*

were just mad about my work, but they couldn't understand how someone like me could appreciate the problems of young married love. And I said: "I shop at Safeway." I live in a heterosexual world; we all do.

BiC: *Do you regard your work as a kind of reaching out, an effort at integration, dealing with all kinds of relationships?*

Rule: Actually, *Inland Passage* is a new collection, but some of the stories aren't new. When I did the collection *Outlander* in 1981, it was quite a conscious effort to get lesbian work together for the lesbian audience. But I haven't done a general collection in 13 years. In *Inland Passage* I wanted to show my range, to show experimental stories; affectionate family stories; simply to demonstrate the short stories that have remained pleasing to me for a long time. For example, "Joy" was written many years ago, when nobody would buy it. In 1977, I was going through my files and pulled it out. I sent it to my agent; it was bought immediately, and it won the best short story in Canada for 1978. So I feel as if a lot of the things I've done are getting their audience now, because people aren't as uptight. I feel as if I haven't changed much as a writer. I'm interested in human relationships. I have tried to

BAR MITZVAH

Sarah Silberstein Swartz

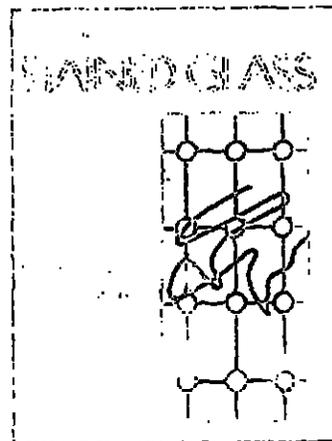


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be honest about them, and being honest about them doesn't always mean taking the lid off and finding a can of worms. Sometimes there's a feast, and I think you have to write about both the good and the bad.

EC: *You observed once that writing up to the age of 40 is a kind of apprenticeship. Now you've passed that age, has your opinion changed?*

EB: Well, I was terrified when I said that. I had been comforting myself with the notion that novel-writing is a middle-age art. You really need to be old enough to have a span of memory and to reach your prime. I know a lot of people come up to their 40th birthday horrified that they're getting older. That didn't bother me in the slightest. But I believed that I was going to wake up on my 40th birthday and have to find the voice of God in my writing. My mother told me not to worry, that I'd been speaking with the voice of God ever since I was six years old. I feel now as if I've written the majority of things I need to write. I don't mean I'm going to quit. But I come across ideas now that I realize I've already handled. A set of characters will approach me with their concerns, and I'll notice that he's first cousin to so-and-so, and she's somebody's younger sister — and I'm not sure whether either is independently interesting enough for me to spend two years in their company. Already sometimes I feel that I don't want this work to draw me away from what seems to me the proper use of the last years of my life. I've got a real investment in daily living. The pull of writing is still too strong for me to think about not writing. But where I imagine what it would be like to be finished saying what I have to say, I experience relief and release.

EC: *Is there something that you can feel in your bones, even if you don't know exactly what it is, that still must be expressed in your writing?*

EB: There are gentler things on my mind, ways of trusting, ways of being vulnerable, ways of coming to terms with who you are, without accepting heavy value judgements. And so I've thought about dealing with people looking back on their lives, or with people who have not been "successful," but who have seen what their lives are and have accepted them. I think that's hard to do, and I think we aren't told to do that. And probably I have a few angry things to say, and I think I ought finally to say them. The world moves too slowly in terms of bigotry, and I'm tired of it. Perhaps I should write an essay, because I don't believe fiction should preach. The essay form is the place to speak personally and firmly. I think I've done a good job in the lesbian movement. And

I think I was doing it before there was a movement. And I suppose I've earned a time to be impatient. I would like to roar just once like an old lioness. □

LETTERS

Not guilty

I HAVE READ the strictures of Christopher M. Armitage of North Carolina (Letters, August-September), on my piece, "A Man of Horizons." (The piece is not an "essay" as Armitage would have it but a personal memoir based on half a century's friendship with F.R. Scott.) Frank loved puns and would have liked Mr. Armitage's "guilt by association" as I do without feeling guilty. But it is really outrageous that Mr. Armitage neglects mine on those lines of Keats that Frank was ruthless amid alien corn, even from North Carolina. Frank liked what is native.

Ralph Gustafson
North Hatley, Que.

IF ONE INVITES a revered poet, in his late 70s, who as it happens is also recovering from illness and painful surgery, to deliver a few words in memory of a senior poet who has just died, and he accepts, and offers you two pages of personal and poetic reminiscence, beautifully written and revealing his own mind, gentle, loving, and full of specific detail, is it really proper on your part to allow someone at the bottom of the table to begin insulting your speaker roundly for not offering "a balanced judgement" of his friend's "diversified activities" (Letters, August-September)? Should you not have silenced the churl, or at least have refused him the use of your pages?

Louis Dudek
Montreal

THE CHOSEN FEW

IN HIS REVIEW of the book *A Meeting of Streams* (August-September) Neil Bissoondath calls the "field" (that is, South Asian Canadian Literature) "a fairly minor one, with no work of great import having yet been produced and no writer of world status having yet emerged." More than 40 writers are thus disposed of. Allow me a few comments on this statement.

The contributors to this volume, active writers and critics, would obviously disagree that their subject is a minor one. Furthermore, it is not clear what Bissoondath means by a work not being of "great import": to whom, in what way, and over what period of time? Surely it is too soon to judge the import

of these works (in terms of their influence on other writing over the years), most of which are quite recent?

And what is it that confers the quality of "world status"? A review in the *New York Times* or the *New York Review of Books*? Certainly, by some definitions. In terms of readership and influence abroad (after all, that is where most of the world lives), how many Canadian writers (to broaden the field) have this hallowed status? A handful. Yet the importance and interest of Canadian writing does not rest on the fate of these chosen few.

The sweeping judgement in Bissoondath's above statement produces one rather baffling result: among the writers it summarily dismisses is Bharati Mukherjee, whose most recent book is discussed at quite some length in the early portion of the review. Mukherjee now lives in the United States, where presumably she will soon acquire world status, if she has not already done so.

The review concludes by picking on a single article, by Brenda Beck, to drive home a single point: how absurd multiculturalism can get. What it fails to do is to give any indication of the other articles in the book, some of which flatly contradict Beck's methodology and conclusions.

The result is a one-sided, negative view of a book that contains many and diverse conclusions, not only about our society but also about its writing.

M.G. Vassanji
Editor
Toronto South Asian Review
Toronto

RECOMMENDED

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

FICTION

Various Miracles, by Carol Shields, Stoddart. Though Shields's 21 short stories seem almost to flaunt their smallness, together they reveal a range of tone and overall liveliness markedly greater than her novels have yet to achieve.

NON-FICTION

The Canadian Encyclopedia, Hurtig. The multiple voices of this information epic will leave its readers with the sense that a vast and variegated land has met its match in print.

POETRY

Domestic Fuel, by Erin Mouré, House of Anansi. Mouré's celebration of art over artifice combines with a stunning purity of language to demonstrate an articulate consciousness in full bloom.

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 All-... Dict., by Elizabeth Workman et al., Prentice-Hall Canada.
Amal in the Rain, by Terry Crawford, Oberon.
Apple State: Silver Crown, by Nancy-Lou Patterson, Porcupine's Quill.
An Atlantic Album: Photographs of the Atlantic Province, 1492-1920, Nimbus.
The Atlantic Anthology, Volume 2: Poetry, edited by Fred Coyne, All Roads Press.
Beautiful Joe, by Marshall Saunders, M & S.
The Book of Marches, by Paulette Turcotte, Split Quota.
Canada and the Arab World, edited by Yusef Y. Ismail, University of Alberta Press.
Canadian Public Administration, Bibliography: Supplement 4, 1974-1977, by W.E. Graham and J.M. Alain, The Institute of Public Administration of Canada.
A Compendium of Canadian Folk Artists, by Terry Kobayashi and Michael Bird, Boston Mills Press.
Confusion of an Options Strategist, by Alexander M. Glavin, Hourglass Press.
Counting in Canada: The New Frontier, by Mario and Lili Baroletti, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
Cry Wolf!, by Robert Hunter and Paul Watson, Shepherds of the Earth Publications.
Five Minutes Ago They Dropped the Bomb, by Chris Fafars, Unfinished Monument Press.
437 Equator History: The Hangar Bookshelf.
427 Equator History, by Nora Bottomley, The Hangar Bookshelf.
A Garland from the Golden Age: An Anthology of Children's Literature From 1850 to 1900, edited by Patricia Daniels, Oxford.

Given Names: New and Selected Poems, 1972-1985, by Judith Fitzgerald, Black Moss Press.
The Glass Air, by P.K. Page, Oxford.
Glass Houses, by Tom Marshall, Oberon.
Harvest of Stones: The German Settlement in Renfrew County, by Brenda Lee-Whiting, U of T Press.
The Hyperactive Child: A Parent's Guide, by Eric Taylor, Prentice-Hall Canada.
Ice Swords: An Undersea Adventure, by James Houston, M & S.
Institutions and Influence Groups in Canadian Farm and Food Policy, by J.D. Forbes, The Institute of Public Administration of Canada.
The Joy of Stress, by Peter G. Hanson, Hanson Stress Management Organization.
Jude, by Cora Taylor, Western Producer Prairie Books.
Kodachromes at Midday, by Gilcan Douglas, Sono Nis Press.
Last in Line, by Alan Metrick, Key Porter.
Legacy of Honour: The Panets, Canada's Foremost Military Family, by Jacques Gouin and Lucien Brault, Methuen.
Lark with a Lonely Land, by Michael Barnes, Boston Mills Press.
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CANWIT NO. 106

UNTIL RECENTLY, the company that does typesetting for *Books in Canada* had as its phone number 245-TYPE — an advertising gimmick that, it appears, is spilling over to the self-promoters among the country's writers. We have learned, for example, that Farley Mowat's listing is CRY-WOLF, and Susan Musgrave's (so we're told) is HOT-POET. Contestants are invited to compose telephone slogans (combining letters, numbers, and of course the appropriate hyphen) for other well-known Canadians. The prize is \$25. Deadline: January 1. Address: CanWit No. 106, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9

Results of CanWit No. 104

ALL THE FILTHY minds out there conspired to produce a veritable orgy of replies to our request for soft-core titles for Canadian books. As one might expect, there were a number of duplications, the most common of which were: *Bodily Charm*, by Margaret Atwood; *Bare*, by Marian Engel; *The Whores*, by Timothy Findley; *Filth Business*, by Robertson Davies; *The Erection of Joseph Bourne*, by Jack Hodgins; *A Choice of Enemas*, by Mordecai Richler; and *Under the Ribs of Beth*, by John Marlyn. The winner is Joan McGrath of Toronto for a list that includes:

With Persons Unknown, by Barbara Amiel and George Jonas

- Surfacing, Briefly*, by Margaret Atwood
- Roughing It in the Shrubbery*, by Susanna Moodie
- Joshua Then and Now and Again and Again*, by Mordecai Richler
- Les Poofs*, by Roger Lemelin

Honourable mentions:

- Ejaculation*, by Richard Rohmer
- The Double Hooker*, by Sheila Watson — Edward S. Franchuk, St-Jean-Sur-Richelieu, Que.
- The Moons of Uranus*, by Alice Munro
- The Skin Flute*, by Gabrielle Roy — Brian McCullough and Bridget Madill, Kanata, Ont.
- The Great Canadian Navel*, by Harry J. Boyle — Barry Baldwin, Calgary
- Watch How I End the Night*, by Hugh MacLennan — Francis M. Lynch, St. Thomas, Ont.
- A Piece Shall Destroy Many*, by Rudy Wiebe — Ray Weremczuk, Victoria, B.C.
- A Season in the Wife of Emmanuel*, by Marie-Claire Blais — Joe Graham and Sheila Eskenazi, Ste-Lucie-de-Doncaster, Que.
- There's a Trick with a Wife I'm Learning to Do*, by Michael Ondaatje — N.I. Mayer, Toronto
- The Moans of Jupiter*, by Alice Munro — Helen Porter, Mount Pearl, Nfld.