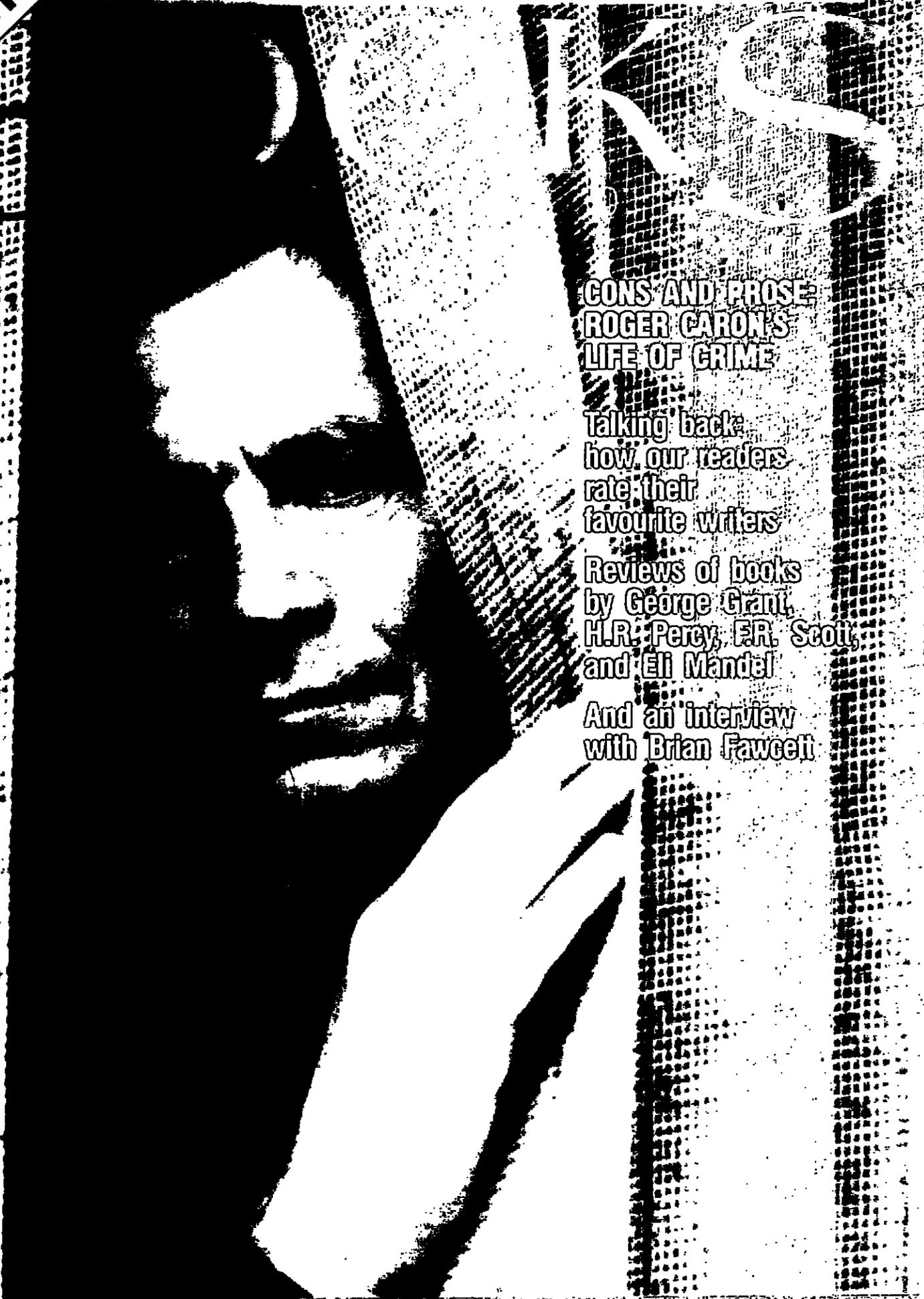


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H.R. Percy, E.R. Scott  
and Eli Mandel

And an interview  
with Brian Fawcett

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## The reel stuff

As an art form the novel **no** longer stands at the **centre** of our culture, but is its primary purpose to provide fodder for film?

**U**AST MAY THE *Canadian Forum* published a cartoon strip by Catherine O'Neill called "The Book Club," in which a group of women and men are soberly discussing Latin American fiction, specifically Manuel Puig's novel, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. When somebody mentions William Hurt's performance in the film version, group comes and the

disintegrates into a shouting match of happy voices: "I thought Jane Fonda was crummy in *Agnes of God*," and "When are they gonna make another Monty Python movie?" The cartoon is not only funny, but deadly accurate; novels may be serious, even important stuff, but what people really like to talk about are movies.

O'Neill's cartoon came to mind when I read recently of the sale of the film rights to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* — not to some patched-together quilt of Canadian producers and businessmen but to a New York production company that has hired no less than the British playwright Harold Pinter to write the screenplay. This sort of announcement is always the occasion for a flutter of excitement and a new belief in the value of Canadian literature. After all, if the Americans want to make a film out of it, the book *must* be good. But I wonder if we should be so pleased, and if novelists are really doing themselves a service by allowing their works to be made into films.

*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, *The Tin Flute*, *Dancing in the Dark* — the list of Canadian novels that have been turned into films is by now fairly long. The temptations for the novelist are obvious: besides the money, a film version (or so the argument goes) can bring a novelist a whole new audience, often a larger one than the novel itself received. But is that real success for a novel? Do we now see the primary use of the novel as material for another art form, as fodder for film?

Even those of us who love the novel must admit that it is no longer at the centre of our culture, the form of art that spans class and nationality to provide the

images of our time. Just as narrative poetry was eclipsed in the 18th century, so the novel has been superseded by film in the 20th. Here's a test: at a dinner party with friends try to find five novels published in the last few years that all of you have read. How about three? One? Now try five films and see the difference.

Not that film isn't a great art, not that film and literature don't by now have a certain shared history. Every film student knows how D.W. Griffith learned to cut scenes from reading Dickens, while novelists have been borrowing from film technique for decades. But that does not negate the autonomy of each form as its own being, of the novel as novel and nothing else. A writer spends years on a novel, often letting the ideas float in and out of consciousness for a long time even before getting down to work. What the novelist is usually looking for is the voice.

In a recent *New York Times Book Review*, for example, Mavis Gallant explains how the only way she could tell the story of her novel-in-progress is in a male voice; it wasn't the story she had trouble finding but the way of telling it. As Henry James first told us, a writer has an infinite



number of ways to tell a novel. Even the subtlety of difference between two "realistic" novels is enormous, no less great than that between a Robertson Davies and a George Bowering. If form is content, as to a degree it surely is, then any novel's story ought to be inseparable from the way it is revealed.

Yet the first thing a novel loses in its translation from minted word to image on the screen is its voice. Perhaps that's the reason for the truism that a mediocre book can make a terrific film (*The Godfather*) while a fine novel can turn out a dud in the theatre (*The Wars*). A novelist must be very cruel or very ruthless to join silently the conspiracy that tells us that seeing a movie version is equivalent to reading the book, that one is a replacement for the other. Nor can it be in the novelist's best interest to participate in the assumption that a novel isn't worth reading unless it has been made into a film, in which case reading isn't even necessary.

Henry James had a premonition of this problem in 1908 when he wrote his preface to *The Golden Bowl*. James, considering the practice of printing illustrations in a novel, wrote, "Anything that relieves responsible prose of the duty of being, while placed before us, good enough, interesting enough, and, if the question be of picture, pictorial enough, above all in itself, does it the worst of services, and may well inspire in the lover of literature certain lively questions as to the future of that institution."

James understood the power of the visual image, even if not as red or profound or complex, to push aside the image the novel can make by an alchemical combination with the reader's mind. And in this lazier age a pre-packaged image is easier for our minds to grasp than one that we ourselves must aid in creating. A film, even a mediocre one, can replace in the public's imagination the image that might have been put there by the novel. Is that what the novelist really wants?

Curious to know what kind of approach Harold Pinter's screenplay might take to Margaret Atwood's novel, I turned to his most recent film adaptation, *Turtle Diary*. As I had already seen the film (and thought it very good), reading the novel became a test of the argument that more people will read a book after seeing the film. The first shock came immediately. Like most movies, the film adaptation of Russell Hoban's novel uses an omniscient narration to follow the paths of the two quiet misfits who conspire to kidnap three

sea turtles from an aquarium. The novel isn't told like that at all, but by alternating diary entries. Just the notion of diary writing, of the ability and the desire to write a journal, is loaded with possible meanings the film never has.

To be honest, I was hoping to find the novel brilliantly superior to the film. But I couldn't help feeling vaguely dissatisfied. Some details seemed wrong: Neera's water beetle ought to have been male, not female, and her neighbour wasn't an out-of-work actor but a jet-lagged businessman. The novel is drearier, less triumphant, and probably more honest. Most annoying of all, I couldn't get the voices of the actors — Glenda Jackson and Ben Kingsley — out of my mind and allow the voices of the novel to take over. And as if the novel itself were conspiring against me, it even threw up a neat little irony: when Ben Kingsley — I mean William — compares his life to Burt Lancaster's in the film *The Swimmer*, he doesn't realize that the film is based on a short story by John Cheever. To the end, I never could quite shake the memory of the film, and that seemed both my and the novel's loss.

Don't get me wrong — like most people, I'm crazy about the movies. In high school I liked going with a gaggle of

friends and shivering in line for an hour; now I prefer weekdays, when it's quiet. But plenty of people are still crazy about reading and the novel, thank God, is not ready to become a protected species like classical ballet or opera. Nor do I expect — or really wish — for novels not to be adapted into films. Even Henry James tried, if without much success, to turn his novels into plays. But if you plan to see the film of *The Handmaid's Tale* you might be advised to read the novel first. Perhaps every such adaptation should begin with a warning immediately following the director's name: "This film cannot by its very nature contain the vision and meaning of the novel that it superficially resembles. Any vision and meaning it does have is purely its own."

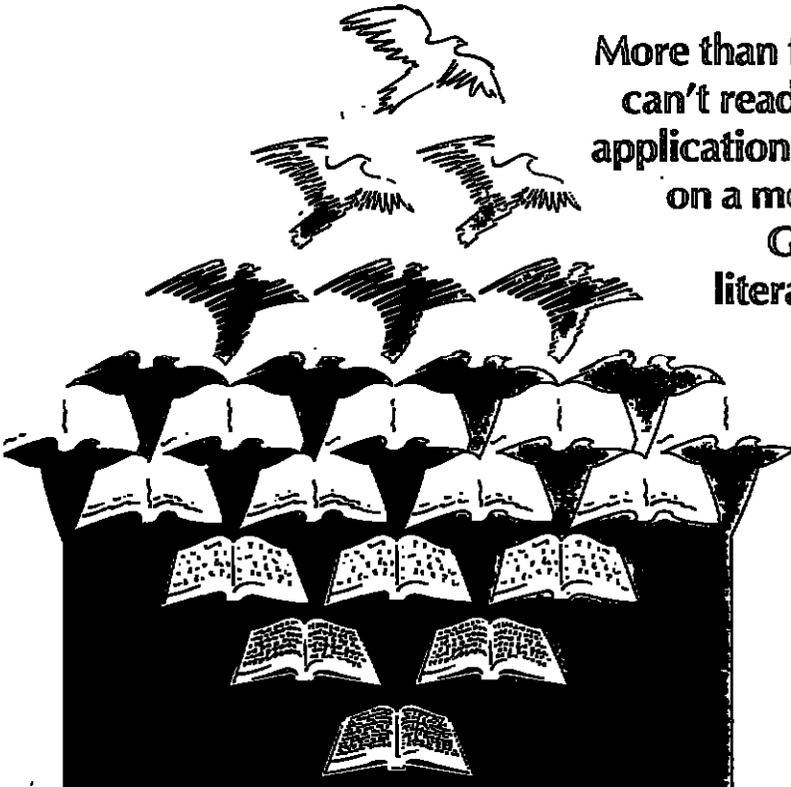
The novel is still a young form, and if it is no longer the central pleasure of a culture, as it remained in Henry James's day, it has not begun to use up its possibilities and, I believe, never will. In 1884 James wrote: "The advantage, the luxury, as well as the torment and responsibility of the novelist, is that there is no limit to what he may attempt as an executant — no limit to his possible experiments, efforts, discoveries, successes." That's just as true today.

— CARY FAGAN

## One small step

NOVA SCOTIA, I am told, has a 4,625-mile coastline, although this figure may have changed in the last year owing to government cutbacks in so many sectors. Stagflation notwithstanding, I'm still confident that most of those miles of coastal periphery are still out there and, like a man looking off toward some metaphysical road to physical well-being, I've decided that this is the year I will begin a hike around the coast of the province.

Circumnavigation has always been a hobby of mine. I have a dream that people will one day pass me on the street and say, "There he is, the great circumnavigator." In fact, I think I've wanted to be a circumnavigator since somewhere back around circumcision, learning early on to crawl around the living room behind furniture until I became tangled in electric cords and coated with dust-balls. So begin the exploits of such adventurers. The desire stayed with me through adolescence. Once I had my driver's licence, I began to circumnavigate the parking lots of shopping malls and Burger Kings often, if not always, in search of a female of the species. But those were younger days.



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Or maybe I've just been subliminally seduced by a billboard I saw in the **Tantramar Marsh** recently when returning to the province. It announced unequivocally: "Nova Scotia: There's More to Sea." I mulled over the sheer poetics of that statement halfway to Bible Hill, revelling in the thought that there were punsters alive and well in the department of tourism. Or it could have been something more deeply seated in that billboard fantasy: a bulging headland thrusting into a peaceful blue sky.

Whatever it was, it kindled a desire to hike the periphery of the province, to place foot after foot the entire length of the coast. After so many years of being seatbelted into an automobile, the rediscovery of the foot is in itself a reawakening. And the thought of hiking alone through fog, sun, wind, rain, and perhaps sleet (but mostly fog) stirred in me that deep-rooted spirit that must have sent others before me out on the great quests of yesteryear.

Like other great explorers before me, I wanted to be sure I had the very best equipment for this harrowing venture. I wanted expert advice and opinion. This took me straight to Canadian Tim where I purchased a bright red nylon backpack with an easily removable Smurf patch. When I spotted the portable indoor trampoline, however, I was dissuaded temporarily from the dream of my quest. For \$39.95 I could simply stay home and, like the rest of the ho&s of humanity, exercise. Jog in place in front of my television set every day to the 20-Minute Workout, give up on the peace of mind of pristine, empty beaches and get my exercise along with those three energetic bouncing nymphets day after day.

But no, that would have to wait. No trampoline, no skateboards, no Nautilus machines, no ceiling-mounted torso-building gravitational wondermachines. Just a man and his feet. And 4,625 miles of coastline.

It should be pointed out that these were not the mere machinations of yet another macho masochist out to set endurance records or destroy his comfortable income and career for the sake of a dream. I would accomplish my goal by biting off the mast a chunk at a time. A few miles a day, with time to digest, to meditate, to be certain that the great videotape of my memory would record every last detail.

On the day of the start of the great journey it was warm and the sun was less timid than usual. Not a bad omen anywhere. My pet raven was out harassing the herons on the marsh and my neighbour's St. Bernards were patrolling the gravel road. I would begin my hike, symbolically enough, at the mouth of the

Lawrencetown River. My wife, always willing to see an adventurer on his way, drove me in the family Pinto to the bridge at the river.

It's hard to say exactly what a man feels when he sets out, one step at a time, on a mission such as this. Marco Polo, Lewis and Clark, Sir Edmund Hillary. Or more appropriately, R.P. Scott, Antarctic explorer who reached the South Pole only to find that he had been preceded by the dastardly Norwegian, Roald Amundsen. Scott and his men died trying to hike the thousand miles back to the coast but, according to the *Columbia Desk Encyclopedia*, "remains and records of the epic journey were later recovered." That was the important thing: the story was left behind!

So I too was off. Waves of a diminutive but virulent nature dashed themselves against Egg Island as I rounded my first headland. The Canadian navy "as performing target-practice off the coast. Oil rigs were being towed to George's Bank. On top of the headland, a local contractor "as bulldozing off the topsoil to sell to suburban lawn owners, undoing centuries of recovery work needed after the retreat of the glacier. Ah, the glaciers. They were certainly here with me in spirit. I could feel them still tugging at the land as they retreated north for the last time — what, only a few thousand years ago. Some of us still long for the return of the glaciers, as we UC awake on a summer evening, sweltering in the fog. But that is another story.

Hiking these shores, one documents the work of the sea. The headland, carved and rutted by North Atlantic storms; the remains of things living and dead floating up to gather around the knees of the hills. One gets a sense of world community: here an empty plastic motor-oil container with a Norwegian label, there an arm from a Taiwanese plastic doll, somewhere else abandoned lobster-pot floats. AU signs of a civilization in decay.

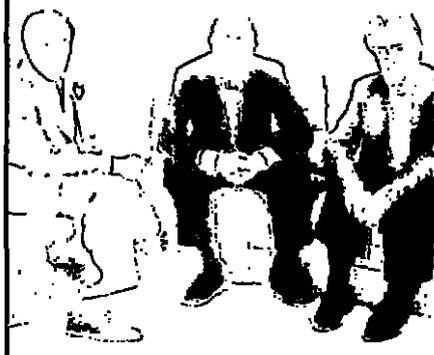
I walk the long rock-strewn strand of Lawrencetown Beach, carefully observing the cadence of my breathing, and soon recognize I have arrived back in the return of my own home. In my potholed mad past my neighbour the real estate appraiser, who hails me, readily recognizing the heroic quality of my morning achievement. And then I am home. My dog barking, the phone ringing unanswered on the wall, my mailbox full of personalized letters offering unbelievable opportunities in the exciting world of vendor-machine operation. But I am 'oblivious to it all.

For I have carved off my first two miles in the circumnavigation of Nova Scotia. 4,623 to

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20-Minute Workout, for I will not gloat so much over my own accomplishments that I am unwilling to take wholehearted pleasure in watching another exalting in the accomplishments of the body.

I dream of the coast ahead, the exotic

peninsulas and beaches yet to be trod: Terminal Beach, Half-Island Point. Rat Rock, and later Fancy Head. Cockscomb Point, Ingonish, Merigomish, Tatamagouche. And one day, arriving back at the mouth of the Lawrencetown River. I

won't speculate beyond that. There will no doubt be new challenges to be met. But by then I will have wrestled with maturity and will feel, as other adventurers before me, that discretion is truly the better part of valour.

— LESLEY CHOYCE

## ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

### DOS'S and don'ts

It's its when it is possessive, and it's its when it is contracted, alright? When there are two its, it's them

By Bob Blackburn

**T**HE SIMPLEST THING one might ask a writer to remember is that *its* is the possessive and *it's* is the contraction of *it is*, yet this is probably the most common error in written English.

There are similar ones. Readers of this magazine send me many clippings, usually from major newspapers and magazines, with circles drawn around *her's* or *their's* or the like. (I have yet to see a *hi's*.)

As a young reporter, I worked for some time at a desk adjacent to that of an experienced writer who held an honours degree in English and for whom I had great respect and liking, despite her lifelong inability to grasp the distinction between the possessive *your* and the contraction *you're*. I didn't realize then that I would spend the rest of my life bumping into what I still consider an inexplicable blind spot.

Contractions, of course, have no place in written English, or so I've been told by some readers of this column. They do seem to be at the root of many problems that might dismay the inventor of the apostrophe, who doubtless had only the best of intentions. They can be blamed for the loss of the *shall/will* distinction. (After all, who would fret about whether to write *she shall* or *she will* when she could simply write *she'll* and be unassailable?)

There are more problems with contractions. Then is the infamous *alright*. What do you say to someone who asks why, if it is all right to write *already*, it is not all right to write *alright*. You will get nowhere trying to explain that *all ready* does not have the same meaning as *already* and that there is not, and there need not be, such a word as *alright*. A possible response to such a lecture might be a Runyonesque "awright, awready." (Despite the way his characters spoke, Damon Runyon was an astute gram-

marian who once wrote a memorable diatribe about Cole Porter's lyrics, particularly the line *From Night and Day*. "I've got you under the hide of me.")

An editor of my acquaintance reports an increase in the use of *anyone* for *any one*, as in *at anyone moment*; *of awhile* for *a while*, as in *awhile ago*; or *anymore* (there is no such word); and, God help us, *of alot* for *a lot*, which I find hard to believe, even today.

Most of these errors and confusions could be avoided by applying common sense. A homicide detective or a madam would understand the difference between *anybody* and *any body* or *somebody* and *some body*; why can't a reporter make the same distinction, and why can't we get across to the writers who nowadays tend



to leave the apostrophe out of *can't* that *cant* is a word?

It is not necessary to memorize a lot of rules to know that it is not unusual to form the plural of pronouns by adding *s*, so an apostrophe is not necessary to indicate the possessive. The plural of *it* is not *its*; it's *them*, and so on (but one must stand one's ground on the use of the apostrophe to form the possessive of in-

definite pronouns). It doesn't hurt to bear in mind that the smallness of apostrophes does not justify squandering them. They should not be used, either, to form plurals, save to avoid confusion. This decade, for example, is the 1980s, not the 1980's. Were the dream of some bureaucrats to be realized we would have another CBC. Then there would be two CBCs, not two CBC's.

There is an interesting problem in the world of computers, wherein we find the very common term *DOS*. *DOS*, pronounced *doss*, is an acronym for disk operating system. The plural is *DOSs*, but since many computer programs in some circumstances change everything to upper case, no matter what you type, those who uses the beasts often write *DOSES* as the plural, despite the unsavory connotation. Since *doss* is a word (albeit not one that is on everyone's lips nowadays), it would be inappropriate to use *DOSS* for the plural of *DOS*. In this case, *DOSS* might be permissible. But what happens if you are comparing several such systems? Should you refer to these *DOSS'S* advantages over other *DOS'S*? I think not; rather you should thank God for of.

If you are a signpainter, you should heed Fowler's admonition: "To insert an apostrophe in the plural of an ordinary noun is a fatuous vulgarism." You should, however, dot your *i's* and cross your *t's* and mind your *p's* and *q's*.

Finally, if you are an etymological purist, you will pronounce *apostrophe* (when referring to the punctuation mark, and not to the figure of speech) with only three syllables, but you will also feel very lonely. It is alright to use four, any how

HERE IS A footnote. I place little faith in computer spelling checkers, but I paid quite a bit for one, so I run stuff through it. I just did, and it accepted *alright* without a whimper. That's what we're up against. □

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## Cons and prose

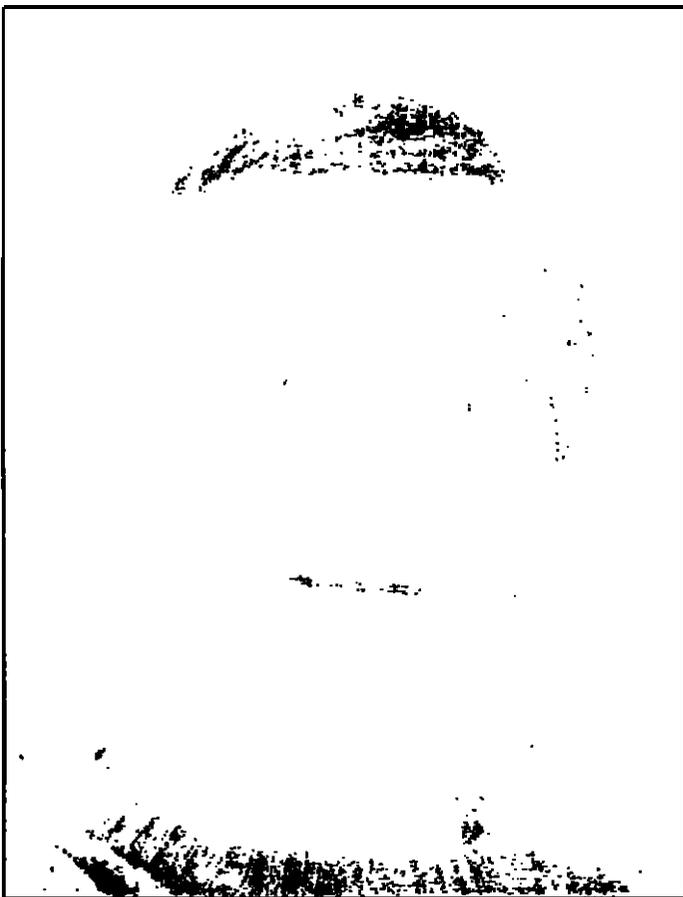
Though never entirely free of 'the volcano inside me,' Roger Caron has transformed himself from a violent criminal into a novelist

By John Goddard

**A**FTER SPENDING 24 years in jail, Roger Caron moved into an apartment on the Ottawa River, opposite the prime minister's residence. More than a kilometre separated the two buildings, but with a high-powered telescope propped on his ninth-floor balcony, Caron could easily peer over a line of trees into the prime minister's backyard.

"I used to watch Margaret Trudeau come by on Friday afternoons to pick up the kids," says Caron, who during that period of the early 1980s was also becoming one of Canada's best-selling authors. "I almost never saw Pierre, but one day I saw some activity in the backyard and went to my telescope. There he was — Pierre Trudeau in a red gym suit, bouncing up and down on the trampoline with two kids. The next day, a picture appeared in the paper showing

Roger Car



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN GODDARD

Trudeau with his arm in a sling and a caption saying he'd fallen off his trampoline. I felt kind of guilty. I imagined a flash of sunlight from my telescope blinding him, making him fall."

When Caron told the anecdote to an informal meeting of Methuen editors and sales reps, they promptly conjured up dark plots of international intrigue and political assassination. They implored Caron to build a book around the incident, sending him home with a contract, a 815,000 advance, and a working title: *The Telephoto Murders*. The book is to be published this fall.

"It's turned into a poignant love story," says Caron, sitting at his round dining-room table in the new, immaculate, two-storey house he now rents in Hull's west end. He has eschewed the international-intrigue angle to write of a young man driven by hardship and tragedy to a desperate attempt at revenge. The book now is called *JoJo*, a classic Caron title to a classic Caron tale. His last book was *Bingo?*, published by Methuen two years ago — a harrowing yet strangely touching account of the 1971 prisoners' riot at Kingston Penitentiary. His first book was *Go-Boyl* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson), a horrific yet deeply stirring chronicle of his life as a compulsively violent criminal. *Go-Boyl* became a literary sensation, winning the Governor General's Award for non-fiction in 1978 and selling more than 500,000 copies in Canada and Britain.

Caron describes *JoJo*, his main character in the new book, as "a victim of circumstance: very quiet, very likable — not a crybaby or a sniveller." The sketch fits Caron himself. He is a loner, almost a recluse, confining himself to a kind of house arrest so as not to arouse what he calls "the volcano inside me." But he can psych himself into being a charming host, and on this particular afternoon he talks engagingly for four hours with little prodding.

He sits erect with his arms folded on the table, an exceedingly handsome man at 49, with thick silvery hair cropped short over a well-proportioned skull. He is of medium height and weight, but has a well-developed build from pumping barbells four nights a week at the Ottawa Athletic Club. "I'm an extremely, compulsively organized individual," he says. He doesn't drink or smoke, but confesses to a coffee addiction that feeds his already hyperactive metabolism. Every so often he rises to pour another cup or put on a fresh pot at the otherwise bare counter of his spotless kitchen.

His face, in repose, is open and boyish. But when he concentrated to make a point, his pale green eyes focus so intently they appear capable of penetrating walls. He seldom laughs, except when telling jokes on himself about not fitting the norm. "My track record for missing deadlines is well-known, so Methuen is paying me \$2,500 every time I hand in two chapters." The laugh that follows is good-humoured but not relaxed or resonant. After 40 years of almost unimaginable pain and suffering, Caron keeps himself reined in.

"I never want to forget I'm a grade-six dropout, an ex-con on parole," he says firmly but without apparent bitterness. (He has been out of jail almost nine years, with a little more than a year of parole left.) "I know that the moment I figure I'm somebody special, the moment I start carrying a briefcase or

smoking a pipe like Peter C. Newman, that's the moment the rug will be pulled out from under me and I'll be back in the slammer. So if somebody holds two hands out to me and says, 'Here, Roger, take these gifts,' I'll say, 'No, thank you. just a little bit, please,' and I'll pick out just a little. I don't ask a heck of a lot out of life."

The table is quivering. It begins to quiver whenever Cam" becomes particularly intent on what he is saying. He was diagnosed a year ago as having Parkinson's disease, a degenerative illness that is affecting his left side, producing a tremor in his arm when he gets excited. Pinning his left arm under his right to hide the shaking only causes the entire table to tremble. "I had trouble accepting that I had Parkinson's at first." Caron says. "People tell me. 'You've climbed your mountain, you've paid your pound of flesh, you've got all your tortures and nightmares behind you. Now go out and enjoy life.' Then all of a sudden I get an incurable disease."

He copes the way he has coped with previous troubles — by refusing to feel sorry for himself, refusing to blame anybody, and by stubbornly looking for something to be thankful for. "My family has a history of heart disease and cancer," he says. "but a survey in the States found that people with Parkinson's almost never get heart attacks or cancer. So in a sense I'm lucky."

ROGER CARON WAS BORN into a large, impoverished, hot tempered family living next to the railway tracks in Cornwall, Ont. "From an early age," he writes in *Go-Boyl*, "I had a feeling that I was unwelcome." His father had owned a bakery in Northern Ontario, but moved with his 10 children after his wife died and the bakery went bankrupt. Roger was the first of three children from a second marriage, his boyhood world almost void of compassion. His father became a bootlegger and an alcoholic; his mother was a compulsively tidy housekeeper. They fought constantly. Shadowy apparitions filled Caron's dreams, reaching through the bars of his crib to awaken him in terror.

"By the time I was 11 years old I was different from most kids my age," Caron writes. "Apart from being sulky and rebellious. I was a loner." He tore recklessly around town, getting into trouble and bringing punishment on himself. His father beat him, his half-brothers beat him; even the local priest boxed his ears. Cars ran into him, horses knocked him down, and east-end bullies blackened his eyes. Once he stole the town's Victoria Day fireworks and blew himself through the air while trying to light them.

Rejected by the human world, Caron made friends with animals. He had a pet alleycat named Tiger, a scrapper that would stand up to any dog. "I believed we could actually communicate through mental vibrations," Caron writes. He tamed hawks, raccoons, groundhogs, and squirrels, often bringing them to school under his jacket or on a leash. He loved to fish. His favourite spot was at the foot of a precipice near the power station, where the water was wild and the fish were giant-sized.

Fishing trips with his father on the St. Lawrence River are among his few happy family memories. "Even when the fish weren't biting, there was never a dull moment with lots of good-humoured talk, beer, and cigars," he writes. "I liked it best when it got dark and the bonfires were set, their light illuminating all the bamboo poles resting on forked sticks, white corks bobbing gently in the breeze. . ."

Fishing is still important to him. Regularly from March to September, he ties his fold-up fishing rod to the crossbar of his bicycle and heads off to secluded spots he knows around Hull and the Ottawa Valley. Sometimes he drives to a campsite near Arden, Ont., where he rents a boat and spends entire days casting. "Fishing recharges my energy and puts me in touch with nature," he says. "And you never know when you're going to land that really big one."

W-he" Caron was 16 he tripped an alarm while burgling a

sporting-goods store and landed in jail, beginning a 24-year career as a hard-core con. He escaped custody six times in 13 attempts, and was officially released five times. But his periods outside were always brief, usually ending in violence, robbery, and re-arrest.

Caron says he has never murdered anybody — his convictions were for robberies and jailbreaks — but he was constantly brawling. When two guards caught hold of him on his first escape attempt, Cam" exploded. "With a bellow of rage I kicked [one] guard in the belly and watched with satisfaction as he sagged slowly to the ground," he writes in *Go-Boyl*. "Another violent lurch left the second guard with nothing but a handful of hair." He took on anybody, including the biggest brutes, sometimes two or three at a time.

Once, in Montreal, he pummelled two thugs at a friend's apartment. "Blood was streaming down the face of the guy at my feet and I was going to ease up on him when I caught him reaching into his coat pocket! I kicked him on the side of the temple and the concussion caused one of his eyes to pop out of the socket and dangle on his cheek! I" an uncontrollable rage I grabbed him by his hair and hauled him screaming to his feet while reaching with my other hand for a gin bottle to clobber with him."

Cam" took his own lumps, too, calculating he has been mended with more than 2,000 stitches. The more he fought, the more tortured he became — "a mass of inner hostility, a bubbling volcano full of bewildering emotions."

MOST PEOPLE old enough to remember the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy, on November 22, 1963, also remember what they were doing when they heard the news. Caron was hunched over a toilet bowl in the solitary-confinement block of Kingston Penitentiary. He was serving two years in solitary, keeping up to date by scooping the water from his toilet bowl at night and talking through the sewer pipes to convicts sent down for short terms. With three resonating hits of the faucet button on the sink, a inmate could summon others to the "patty line." Cam" remembers the dialogue one night going something like this:

"Hey, man, who came in?"

"Me, Jack."

"Jack who?"

"Jack from the machine shop."

"Oh, yeah, how ya doin'?"

"They gave me seven days on bread and water for insolence."

"Yeah, well, what's happening?"

"Well, did you guys hear that Kennedy was just assassinated?"

"What? You're kidding. The president?"

Caron was at one of his lowest ebbs, entombed in a concrete cell with a steel door, one of 20 such cells in the block. "I nearly went bananas," he recalls, his left arm shaking the table. "My past was a dark abyss full of nightmares, and I had nothing to look forward to." That Christmas, when a member of the Salvation Army gave him a bag of jellybeans, Cam" used them to spell swear words on the floor to enrage the guards. The guards snatched the jellybeans away, but the episode got Cam" thinking about the power of words.

At 18 he had become a voracious reader — everything from the adventures of Sir Edmund Hillary to psychic phenomena — and now he started writing. He acquired a pencil and scribbler, and wrote for the next 12 years while moving from prison to prison as "the most unwanted prisoner in the country." At one point the manuscript totalled 1,800 typed pages. Perhaps predictably, publishers gasped at the sight of it and replied with rejection slips.

"One publisher wrote back and said they almost went for it, but it was too big a risk because nobody knows me. They said if I was Peter Demeter [the Mississauga businessman con-

victed of having his wife murdered in their garage] they would publish it, because people know the name. So I read this and walked into the cell next door and said, 'Hey, Peter, they say if I was you, they'd publish me.' Peter Demeter, at the time, was my next-door neighbour."

Caron kept rewriting, and sending the book back out. Finally, McGraw-Hill Ryerson took it in 1976, assigning editor Elizabeth Hemsworth to cut the manuscript from 900 pages to 300. Pierre Berton wrote a three-page introduction, saying that "... this

Winning the Governor General's Award was like a homecoming — as if the public were saying, 'For 24 years in the name of rehabilitation we did an awful lot of horrible things to you, and now we're even'

document by a multi-time loser is far and away the best [prison story] I have yet encountered." *Go-Boy!* hit the book stores in April, 1978, on a modest run of 4,000 copies and quickly sold out.

The book's appeal derives mainly from its straightforward, guileless narrator, who engages the reader's sympathies while making almost unimaginable brutality comprehensible. It won the country's top literary prize. "Winning the Governor General's Award was like a Canadian homecoming," Caron says. "It was as if the Canadian public were saying, 'Roger, for 24 years you did an awful lot of bad things to us, and for 24 years in the name of rehabilitation we did an awful lot of horrific things to you, and now we're even.'"

After his release to a half-way house in late 1978, Caron still "had a lot of nightmares to get rid of," and thought he could

purge them by writing an account of the brutal riot he had witnessed while he was an inmate at Kingston. For weeks during the spring of 1971 tension had been building among the prisoners over fears of being transferred to Millhaven, a new maximum-security prison rumoured to be made with inhuman, mechanized efficiency. On the evening of April 14, two days after Caron's 33rd birthday, a convict named Billy Knight punched a guard in the stomach after the guard ordered Knight to tuck in his shirt. The outburst was planned. Knight and five co-conspirators took six guards hostage and set off a riot or, in prison argot, binggo.

Over the succeeding four days, conditions in the prison deteriorated steadily as the prisoners' most primitive instincts took hold, leading to a kind of real-life playing out of *Lord of the Flies*. "Every hour on the bow," Caron writes in *Binggo!*, "the riot leaders would gather everybody up to the railings fronting our cells and the circular dome and get us to pound out a rhythmic tattoo. The eerie sound brought a chill to my spine as hundreds of grim-faced convicts beat louder and louder until the grey fortress quivered in terror." A group of psychopaths eventually wrested the leadership from Billy Knight and dragged out 14 rapists, child molesters, and informers to be tortured. "The bloody climax was so primitive that it left even the most hardened criminal gasping in awestricken horror."

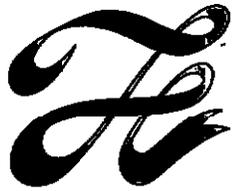
*Binggo!* presented new writing challenges to Caron. When friends broke him out of his cell the night the riot started, he immediately destroyed the electric bell that regulated the inmates' hours, then attacked a central locking mechanism to free remaining prisoners. But for much of the time, he was off trying to find coffee to feed his caffeine craving, away from the centre of the action. To present the full story, he had to do extensive research, gathering impressions from other witnesses and sifting through news clippings and government documents. He felt enormous pressure after the success of *Go-Boy!* to prove he was not just a one-shot writer.

But the worst part was facing the horror of the riot again. He thought he could knock the book off in a year; it took five. "I didn't have writer's block — I just didn't want to face it," he says. "Late at night, I would climb the stairs to my bedroom — I called it my torture chamber — then I'd turn on the light over my typewriter and sit down in the chair, and I'd become like a medium, as if I were looking into a crystal ball, and I would go right back into that hell."

*Binggo!* became a popular and critical success, a powerful story that could only have been written by an insider — an insider with Caron's straightforward story-telling ability. It lacks some of the urgency and focus of *Go-Boy!* and will never match *Go-Boy!*'s sales, but *Binggo!* was on the national best-seller lists for several weeks after its release in the fall of 1985 and continues to sell well. Both books are required reading in criminology and sociology courses across the country.

CARON KEEPS mint copies of his books, in hardcover and softcover, English and French, between hand-shaped ivory bookends on a shelf in his living-room. For him, the hands cupping the books symbolize the packaging of his past into manageable units. Writing his books was a kind of psychotherapy, his way of transforming himself from a violent criminal to a contributing member of society.

With his autobiographical writing behind him, he has turned to fiction. He now thinks of himself as a professional writer, his entire life revolving around the completion of *SoJo*. A nocturnal type, he rises around 3:00 p.m., showers, makes himself toast and coffee, and returns phone calls from his answering machine. Then he sits down with a felt pen and notepad at his dining-room table to write, pinning his trembling arm between the table and his chest. Every 10 lines or so, he runs upstairs to the typewriter, punching out what he has written with the



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lodes **finger** of his good hand. At **8:30 p.m.**, four **nights** a week, he drives to the Ottawa Athletic **Club**, lifts **barbells** fmm **9:00** to **11:00**, plays **racketball** for **half an hour**, takes a shower and **whirlpool**, **drives** home for his one **main** meal of the day, **often** steak or **eggs**, then **writes** from 1:00 a.m. until **bedtime** at 7:00 a.m., **filling** a quota of 750 words a day.

In the novel he is writing, **JoJo** is a half-breed Indian, the **product** of a rape. He and a black boy named **Wiokie** are adopted by a farmer named **Hector** in **Wichita, Kansas**, who works them to the **bone** until the boys **burn down** the farm and end up **in** the state reformatory. **After further** tragedies and a tender love affair with an **American girl**, **JoJo** makes **his** way to Ottawa to **consider** political **assassination**.

**Caron** expects to **finish** the book soon and **plans this summer** to **begin** a second novel, to be called **Dreamcaper**, "about an old-time **con** who goes **after** that one **big** score that would put him on **Easy Street** for the rest of his life." Both stories are **partially** set in the **United States** — an attempt to break into the U.S. market, **Caron** says. No U.S. **publisher** or distributor took an interest in **Go-Boy! or Bingo!** "To the Americans, I've been strictly **Canadiana**."

**Caron** signed a contract for **Dreamcaper** with **Methuen** in **March**, happy to have **another** book to look forward to. His one **outstanding regret** seems to be an inability to get close to someone. "The **thing I missed** the most **while** in prison was the **exquisite** pleasure of **holding** a woman in my **arms**," he writes in the introduction to **Bingo!** "Upon my **release** I made up for lost time, end **on** each **occasion** I felt like **falling** to my **knees** and thanking God for having created such a wonderful partner. But all my solitary years in the prison **system** have created barriers that **no one** has been able to **knock** down, sad I've stayed aloof fmm **marriage**."

But **even** in love he is **making** progress, he says. He has had a steady relationship for the past year and a half with **Janet Morris**, a **vivacious** woman originally fmm **Kent, England**, who works as a medical secretary in Ottawa. She is separated with **two** sons and, at 46, much older than the women **Caron** usually fancies.

"He did a real chat-up job, he did," **Morris** says of the moment she **met Caron**. "I couldn't believe it." They met at an autograph **signing for Bingo!** at a small shopping **plaza** in **Hazeldean**, outside Ottawa. **Morris** stood in line with 238 other people, and **when** she got to the **front** **Caron** started talking to her. "I **couldn't** believe he'd chat me up in a **queue** in front of — how many people?"

"It was really **romantic**," **Caron** says.

"He looked to see if I had a **ring** on."

"We hit it off really **well**."

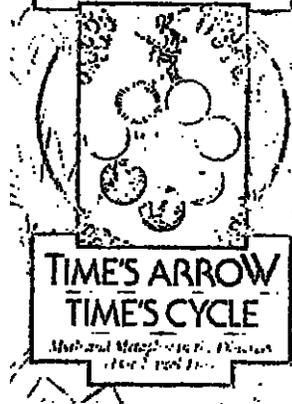
**Morris** is a body-builder too, end **goes** twice a week with **Caron** to **lift weights** and play **him** at **racketball**. She sometimes gets him out to movies and restaurants, and they go fishing together. And she helps **Caron** develop **his** story plots. "She gives **really** good advice," **Caron** says. "We **hammered out** an **outline** for **Dreamcaper** together in **five** days."

**Morris** says **Caron** will probably always need more privacy than most people, but they have talked about **sharing** a **three-storey** townhouse. **Caron** could live in a **self-contained** unit downstairs and come up to her and the boys **when** he's **feeling** **social**. The **main thing** to be sorted out, she says, is that "Roger **loves** women and women **love** Roger. I get very jealous **when** we go to a public **meeting** and the women **fall** all over **him**. They **grab** him and **kiss** him — they all want to touch him."

Women flock around **Caron** because they **have** read **Go-Boy!** and been moved by it, **Morris** says. "I cried **over** it when I read it, long before I **knew** him. After you've read it, you feel you **know** him, **even** though you don't. Then you look at **him** and **think** about **everything** that's happened to him. He seems so vulnerable and **hurt**. He's a little boy. And yet he's strong and masterful. He's everything. He touches **your heart**." □

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## Advice and dissent

Is CanLit too regional? Not regional enough? And just who are the country's best writers? Some comments from our readers on the state of the art

**W**HO ARE YOUR favourite Canadian writers? What's right — or wrong — with Canadian literature today? When we posed these questions to 25 of the country's writers, in the January-February issue of *Books in Canada*, we also asked our readers to give their comments on CanLit. Their replies, as one might have guessed, were as diverse as the cities and towns from which they mailed them.

CanLit is too regional. CanLit isn't regional enough. CanLit is too-well, too Canadian. About the only subject on which our readers seemed to agree was the federal government's apparent indifference to our culture, though even here one reader commented, "As long as you can scrape by without a microwave and an annual tropical vacation, you can tap away at your word-processor secure in the knowledge that eventually some state-funded publisher will bind your wisdom in book form."

But by far the greatest range of opinions lay among our readers' choice of favourite writers — a list of close to 100 names. No surprise that five — Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood, Timothy Findley, Robertson Davies, and Margaret Laurence tallied the most mentions. But we found it noteworthy that such other writers as Edna Stauford, Joan Barfoot, Wayne Johnston, Veronica Ross, Dennis T. Patrick Sears, Gertrude story, and Merna summers all ranked higher in popularity than,

For example. Pierre Berton, Matt Cohen, Irving Layton, and Farley Mowat.

Many readers merely listed their favourites, while others offered comments on the previous survey and the state of the arts in general. Their opinions were every bit as contradictory as the excerpts that appear below:

**WHEN I WAS** in high school, over 10 years ago, I heard nothing about Canadian literature. University was little better: I took one CanLit course because I had to, to get my degree. One survey course taught without any flair did not instil in me any appreciation for our writers, over the years, ho-. I have read Canadian fiction and poetry on my own, and have come to admire and enjoy it, not because of any cultural relevance it may have, but because it is a fine and exciting literature. Canadian writers are finally beginning to garner the international recognition they deserve. How ironic that at this point in our literature's development we once again have to defend it against the neglect and indifference of an unsupportive government!  
— Deirdre A. Laidlaw, West Hill, Ont.

CANADIAN FICTION has, over the last 10 years or so, begun to bore me. Aside from the front rank of our fiction writers — Davies, Richler, Atwood — the vast majority have nothing original to say, and express their tired ideas in pedestrian language. Who wants to read another novel about a sensitive, middle-class woman struggling with love and self-identity? Who needs another book about a witty university professor fighting with other Faculty members and bedding graduate students?

The problem, of course, is that middle-class Canadians — and middle-class Canadian writers — lead uniformly luxurious and outwardly uninteresting lives. I suppose this is a great accomplishment of 20th-century Western society, but almost anyone who wants to be a writer now can afford to call himself or herself one. As long as you can scrape by without a microwave and an annual tropical vacation, you can tap away at your word-processor secure in the knowledge that eventually some state-funded publisher will bid your wisdom in book form and that you will be recognized as a valued con-

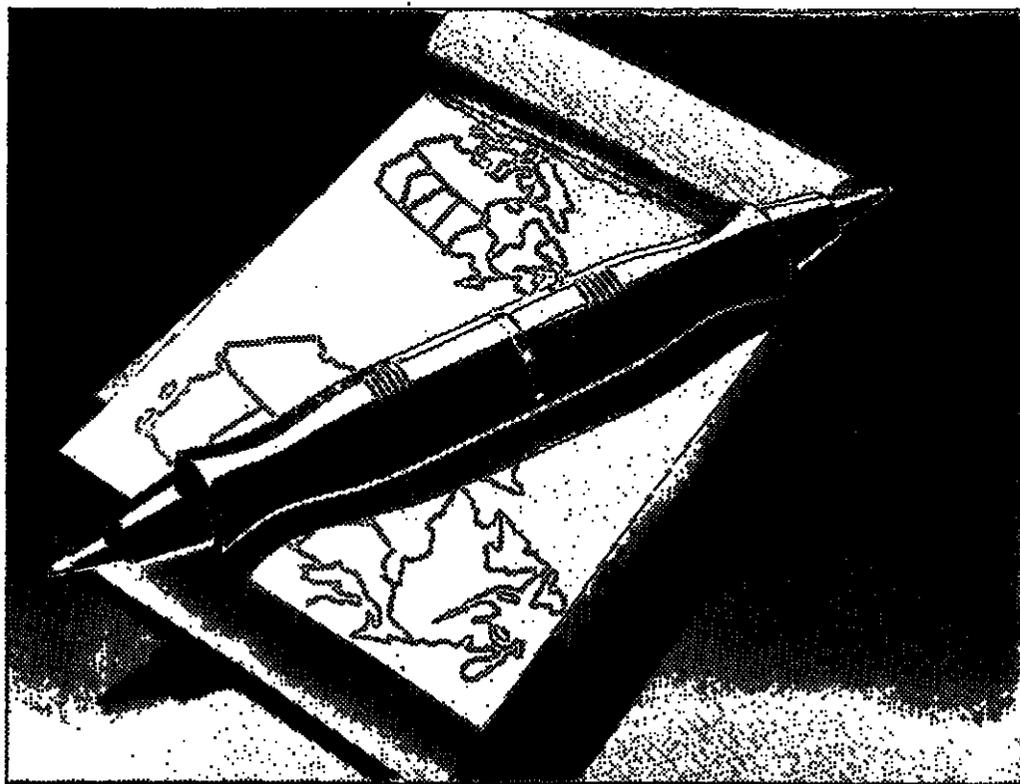


ILLUSTRATION BY RICK JACOBSEN

tributor to Canadian letters. Granted, this atmosphere encourages the flourishing of literature, some of it worthwhile, but most of it unspeakably mediocre.

— Morley Walker, Winnipeg

IN THE 15 years since I've been back in Canada. Canadian writing has undergone a revolution, at least in my awareness of it. Our present luminaries were, in 1971, just beginning to shine. In the years since, there has been a steady increase in brilliance, to the point where I see new lights in practically every field of writing — history, biography, economics, as well as fiction and drama. My impression is that, on the whole., Canadian literature is doing quite well, in spite of the tough economics of the business.

I do think that continued government support of Canadian publishing, whether it be through tax relief or outright subsidy, is necessary. Young writers should be encouraged through increased public support. Perhaps there should be more publicly sponsored competitions. Certainly there should be an expansion of writers' grants through the Canada Council. Culture costs money, but I can't help but believe that it is a sound investment.

— James B. Clark, Wallace, N.S.

## THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE

WHO ARE CANADA'S most popular writers? Though our readers listed close to 100 names — from L.M. Montgomery to W.D. Valgardson, from E. Pauline Johnson to Paulette Jiles -those they mentioned most frequently all happen to write fiction (though Margaret Atwood was also mentioned, less frequently, as a poet). According to our studiously unscientific survey, here are the top 10 choices (an asterisk indicates a tie):

- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Alice Munro       | 6. Mavis Gallant*        |
| 2. Margaret Atwood   | Janette Turner Hospital* |
| 3. Timothy Findley   | Mordecai Richler*        |
| 4. Robertson Davies* | 9. Marian Engel*         |
| Margaret Laurence*   | Audrey Thomas*           |

OUR GOVERNMENT has an appalling attitude toward the arts. This no longer depresses me because quite a few people now are aware of the fact.

— Craig Barron, Montreal

THERE IS tremendous talent in Canadian literary people.. My chief criticism is their cynicism, clouded faith in people and Canada's future. We have much for which to be grateful, much to praise. A large dose of optimism would be refreshing in a novel, some emphasis on the imperishable human spirit. Could it be that faith and optimism in our writers might just help turn these troubled times around?

— Helen Hutchison, Napanee, Ont.

MAYBE ALICE MUNRO is right. We worry too much. Do you think politicians read? I have serious doubts about that. Thank God they have removed the tariff on imported books, but what I want to know — will this bring the prices down?

— Rita Bealy, Greenfield Park, Que.

I AGREE THAT literate Canadians have a great deal to be proud of in their homegrown (or imported and naturalized) writers. but it is rather a pity that Canada-connectedness constitutes so much of the claim to fame. A lot of our literature has the strength to stand on its own and should be allowed to. The coddling of Canadian works simply because they are Canadian smacks of chauvinism. Rather, allow the literature to mix and

minge with that of the world, and garner a greater sense of pride from the accolades of readers impressed with the writing and not its geographic antecedents.

The Canadian literature I've read this winter has found shelf space with works by writers from South America, Czechoslovakia, the united states, Great Britain, Switzerland, Germany, and Africa. Granted that locale affects some of the what and how in writing, Canadian perspective is not innately interesting (nor are the other nationalities I've mentioned). It is the writer's ability that makes the work sparkle, or not.

— Yvonne Callaway, Montreal

I USUALLY PREFER reading books by Canadian authors. I prefer Canadian authors because they seem to be more relevant to me, and they appeal to me emotionally. They give me a sense of belonging to Canada as a political, territorial, and cultural entity. Even when they are exploring and dealing with non-Canadian themes. Canadian authors do so in a unique manner, which appeals to me more than, say, the writing of the majority of British and American authors.

— K.J. Cottam, Nepean, Ont.

OUR BIG PROBLEM is that our writers do not get recognized at home. So-called Canadian critics are too quick to pot down their own. Witness the recent acceptance of Canadian writers in the United States and Britain. Robertson Davies, Margaret Atwood, Hugh MacLennan, and Alice Munro have all received outstanding American and/or British recognition in the last few months.

— Michael O. Nowlan, Oromocto, N.B.

A MAJORITY OF Americans have never heard of Davies or Metcalf or Munro, and some have not heard of Atwood or Laurence. This frightens me. Canadian literature needs to transcend the snowbound dream world and the purity of prairie life and expose itself in a manner that will universally enlighten all readers. The focus of CanLit is too internal. The labyrinth of human reality needs to be recognized now, more than ever. The eyes of the literary world are upon us; our words need to be recognized and acknowledged as definitive literature and not liter&e that is seeking to define itself and its people through an open space.

— John P. DeCaro, Windsor, Ont.

IT IS A shame that more Canadian writing is not available here in the States. It seems that Canada is in its Renaissance where fiction is concerned. It is tremendously exciting for me to read the writers who have emerged since the '60s.

— Caudia Welch, Wichita, Kansas

WHAT'S WRONG with CanLit? The same as in all the arts: Canadians' inability to appreciate themselves. The national habit of self-putdown, perhaps exacerbated by the confusion as to what is truly ours, because of the large amount of culture beamed to us from the south. Our culture has to compete with a culture that seems driven by greed and therefore plays to the lowest taste.

Nor does it help that my generation (I am 53) and those not far behind me were never exposed to Canadian literature. When I went to school it was never heard of. I had to wallow around and discover it for myself. Perhaps there is hope in the younger generation, who are being exposed more and more. Canadian studies should be compulsory.

— Pat George, Toronto

I THINK WE have a vital and dynamic literary community in this country, and I include all writers -not just fiction and poetry writers. we have to give non-fiction writers equal time — especially magazine and newspaper writers. At the moment it seems everyone thinks that if you haven't written a book then you can't be a REAL writer. Want to bet?

We have to spend more energy and time getting the literary

arts to all Canadians — NOT just those who live in the cities and large towns. People in rural areas don't have book stores, don't have authors giving readings, don't get writing workshops, don't get literary-appreciation courses, don't know that CanLit exists. The challenge is to everyone — let's stop thinking up how many differences we have and start thinking about how many goals we have in common. — Sylvia Bough, Cold Lake, Alta.

I WAS DISAPPOINTED that the writers you questioned were. for the most part, the same writers who are included in every survey of this kind. Are there not any writers in the Atlantic provinces

'Canadian writers are too 'regional. As poets, novelists, and historians we desperately need to look beyond the borders of our own backyards to see, appreciate, and write about other horizons. Fences will destroy us'

whose opinions are considered valuable? I think of such people as Susan Kerslake, Ann Copeland, Veronica Boss. Robert Gibbs, Kent Thompson, Alistair MacLeod, Harold Horwood, Donna Smyth, Janice Kulyk Keefer, Lesley Choyce, Greg Cook, Paul O'Neill, Réshard Gool, Anne Hart, Al Pittman, Kevin Major, Joan Clark, Bay Guy, Wayne Johnston .... I could go on sad on.

Perhaps it's understandable that Norman Levine says "in a worldly sense there are only a dozen titers here — the rest are just filling the lower echelons. A lot of the people writing

here are local writers, who just serve a purpose in Nova Scotia or B.C. We need them, but they really jut take the place of the local weekly paper." I've always been an admirer of Norman Levine's work, but I'm very disappointed in him here. Who can blame him, though? As he says, "We need more than just publicity about new books coming out — we also need a platform. In Britain, in the course of a day the BBC will broadcast three or four short stories."

What we get in Canada is the same list of writers reviewed and interviewed over and over again. I'm not suggesting that they're not worthy of this attention, but there are many other writers who deserve attention also. I grieve to think of the fine writing all over Canada that goes unnoticed.

— Helen Porter, Mount Pearl, Nfld.

I TEND TO agree with Dorothy Livesay: "Too many good poets aren't distributed properly and are not reviewed cross-country. Every city seems to have its own clique. but that's as far as it goes." Canadian writers are too regional. As poets/novelists/historians, we're going to have to look beyond the borders of our own backyards to see, appreciate, and write about other horizons. This reaching out is desperately needed in Canada. Fences will destroy us.

— Hope Morritt, Point Edward, Ont.

THERE IS SO much published in Canada today that there should be something for everyone. The worst thing wrong is that since the cost of books is so high readers such as myself must borrow from libraries — and feel guilty that we do not pay royalties equitably to the authors whose works we enjoy.

— Obee Benjamin, Dartmouth, N.S.

I FEAR THE loss of our many good writers if steps are not taken to assure that our Canadian publishers keep solvent.

— Simon Lizée, Annaheim, Sask.

JUST AS Michael Ondaatje stated, "The real writing energy is still with the small presses, with those writers outside the main traditions of popularity." And this is a concern since distribution of books in this vast country is a problem for any press. Writers such as Edna Alford, published by Oolichan Books, don't reach the college and university students I encounter most days. Our young readers aren't meeting our "young" writers, because many book shoppers pick up their reading material at Safeway and United Cigar Stores with their Lean Cuisine and Loto tickets.

— Darlene Quaife, Calgary

I WROTE A book that was published, have a whole scrapbook full of good reviews, I even won the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. But when people try to buy my book, they can't find it. My teenage daughters love to walk into big chain book stores and ask, "Do you have any Canadian books? Oh, good! And what shelf are they on?" Imagine walking into, say, a book store in Amsterdam and having to ask where the Dutch books are kept. I like George Woodcock's suggestion: the Canada council's subsidizing bookshops that carry a complete range of Canadian books.

— Joan Fern Shaw, Toronto

WHAT'S WRONG with Canadian literature today are statements by authors like Alice Munro who, on being questioned on the state of CanLit, replied: "I never think about things like that, and consider it a waste of time for a writer to do so." Apathy for the state of one's professional milieu is pitiful. What else is wrong? New writers aren't being promoted to the public enough. I doubt that many book stores carry Wayne Johnston's *The Story Of Bobby O'Malley*, and probably no one asks for the book, either. That's what's wrong with the state of CanLit today.

— Manko Obakata, London, Ont. □

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# Yesterday's news

F.R. Scott's commentary still seems relevant because his notion of socialism was just as misleading as the version portrayed by conservatives today

By **Leo Panitch**

**A New Endeavour:** Selected Political Essays, **Letters and Add-**, by P.R. Scott, edited by Michiel Horn, University of Toronto Press. 144 pages, \$27.50 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 5672 5) and 512.95 paper (ISBN 0 8020 6603 8).

IS IT A TRIBUTE to the late Frank Scott's perspicaciousness that his political writings should often read like a commentary on the current political scene? Or is it rather that much less has changed in our society than Frank Scott himself eventually came to think? Either way, as I set aside the morning newspaper to read a book of essays and speeches by Canada's most celebrated social democratic intellectual, I was struck by their topicality — even though almost all of them were written between 1930 and 1960.

The newspaper brought the news of the growing stench of corruption in the Mulroney government. An essay by Scott first published in Queen's *Quarterly* in 1935 puts that corruption in rare perspective:

... there is much dishonesty surrounding the administration of government in Canada. No one would deny it... [But] Capitalism has shown itself to be infected with a greater degree of graft than has ever been disclosed in government undertakings... The corruption of capitalism is systematic, that is, part of its normal working, whereas that of government bodies is individual and spasmodic. It is normal for capitalist corporations to water stock so that profits are turned into dividends instead of fair wages, lower costs for articles, or improved service for the public... And capitalism is directly corrupted by bribery which takes the form of commissions on contracts and sales, the hiding of profits, and so on... Indeed, the very fact that some of these practices are not illegal is the best proof that the ethic of capitalism is inadequate... Corruption in politics to-day is mostly due to the private ownership of the economic processes. Socialism, by eliminating competition and the private appropriation of profits, strikes at the root motive of corruption, and is indeed the only method of effecting a cure.

The newspaper informed me that the Eaton's workers' attempt to unionize had ended in an ignominious decertification

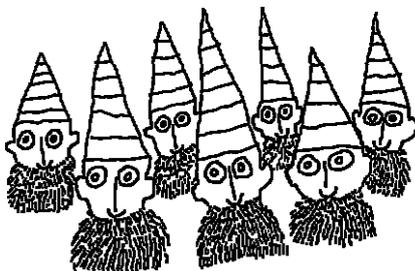
vote. A 1942 address by Scott to bank-workers trying to organize serves to put this news in perspective:

Commercial corporations enable groups of capitalists to act collectively together through agents of their own choosing. That is exactly what trade unions do for their workers. When I see all the fuss and bother that is made about unions by me who are more highly organized than any union can hope to be, I cannot help wondering at the blindness of those who are taken in by such talk... You may have to stand fast against attack; if so, remember that others have done so and have won through.

The newspaper brought the news that the government was about to renew its cruise missile testing agreement with the United States. A letter from Scott to David Lewis in 1959 also puts this news in perspective:

Surely the plain fact is that Canada is not adding to her own defence, but only to international tensions, by her present subservience to American policy... To be able to retaliate you must keep yourself in a permanent position of menace to the enemy, and this we cannot and should not attempt to do. Only by letting ourselves become a base for America short-range missiles can we be menacing... We must declare our policy to be that we take no part in preparedness for atomic war, either by way of attack or defence. Because there is no defence.

In the light of the socialist inspiration and insight that the above quotations



reveal, it might be thought surprising that Michiel Horn, in his excellent introduction to this book, insists that Scott could not be considered a "theorist of socialism." Yet Horn is certainly correct in his assessment. The writings collected

here confirm Canadian social democracy's deep dependence on British Fabianism ("even Canadian radicals have their imperialist connections," Scott himself once said), and they reflect the poverty of theory that tradition represents.

The central theme in all of Scott's political writings, including the earliest, contains the erroneous notion that the expansion of the state's management of a capitalist economy represented the gradual advance of socialism. Scott certainly played a key role in enunciating such a cramped and misleading vision of socialism for the League for Social Reconstruction and the CCP.

In this way, he may have inadvertently contributed to the popular confusion that lies at the heart of the "common sense" notion, so effectively played on by today's neo-conservatives, that the problems with the bureaucratic statism in contemporary capitalist societies have somehow to do with "too much socialism" rather than with the fact that the socialist vision of democratic control of the economy was never embodied in the welfare state.

Scott no doubt hoped that by associating socialism with wartime planning, crown corporations, and limited social reforms, the CCF would be seen as less radical and more electorally viable. As early as 1937, he wrote to David Lewis that the CCF had to make alliances with "the near right." Scott still retained in the early 1940s enough of a commitment to the social ownership of the main means of production to reveal on occasion the fallacy of his own argument, such as when he admitted that even the extensive state intervention during the war "is shot through with traditional idea of property rights derived from the laissez-faire period."

Scott therefore recognized that the "transition to a democratic planned society is going to be rendered more difficult because we have allowed wealth to accumulate to a dangerous degree, and from the owners of that wealth are bound to come most of the ideas and influence opposed to the change we must undergo." But even then he could not set

past the notion that this was simply a matter of "running two systems side by side for the moment," rather than understanding that the Canadian state as it was (and remains) structured was inherently a capitalist state. Even such planning and welfare reforms as it evolved were developed in a manner that preserved rather than undermined the concentration of wealth and power in Canada.

Scott and the CCF further tempered their socialism in the post-war period, and they fell in, moreover, with the Cold War representation of American imperialism as the embodiment of "freedom." Horn is no doubt right to say of this that "they shifted along with public opinion, and shifted independently of the merits of the case." Scott's anti-communism did not sit well with his earlier defence of Communist agitation against persecution in the early 1930s or with his growing reputation as Canada's foremost civil libertarian. Nor did this reputation sit well with his defence of Pierre Trudeau's invocation of the war Measures Act in 1970.

It is interesting to see that even in his advocacy of federalism against the separatist forces in Quebec Scott was still wont to use the argument that he had developed in the 1930s as regards the oppression of French Canada — that it was not the federal system but "the capitalist system" that was at the mot of the problem. But whereas his writings of the early 1930s invariably provided a crisp and logical analysis of the oppressive and anarchic nature of the capitalist economy, what Scott by the 1970s meant by his references to "the capitalist system" (or to socialism) was woolly and vague.

It is unfortunate that Scott did not live to see the NDP's current standing in the opinion polls in Quebec, where for many years he was the party's lone credible — sometimes the only audible — voice. Writing in 1934 against Quebec's "theo-pluto-bureaucracy," he thought a political miracle might be worked in Canada if French-Canadian socialist leaders ever emerged to show "how public ownership is the easiest method by which the French Canadian may regain control of the natural resources which English and American capitalists have stolen from him." And he promised: "If Quebec should ever adopt socialism, even of the CCF brand, Canada will be an exciting place to live in. We Anglo-Saxons are dull fellows beside the French when it comes to politics."

In 1942, with the CCF riding as high in the polls nationally as the NDP does today, Scott produced a manifesto that painted the universal march for democracy as being on the verge of "changing the world":

We no longer use the tam democracy

merely to describe our existing societies, where a limited political freedom struggles in the midst of economic dictatorship. . . we must expand our present freedom to include economic and social democracy. . . This is what is now freeing men's hearts and minds for the forward march, and is giving them a direction and a goal. . . The democratic socialist society must replace the rapacious system of monopoly capitalism. . . We have our chance now in Canada. Let us arise and take it.

Stirring stuff; but, unfortunately, not the stuff that by any stretch of the imagination can be said today to be stirring in the breasts of those who tell the pollsters they will be voting NDP in the next election. For the long travail of the NDP to its current standing in the polls, Frank Scott most he given some of the credit. For the fact that virtually no one associates this electoral standing any longer with a popular stirring for fundamental social change, he must also bear some of the blame. □

## REVIEW

# Women with a past

By Anne Denoon

*The Indigo Dress and Other Stories*, by Rona Murray, Sono Nis, 148 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 919203 57 4).

IN MOST OF the stories in this collection the protagonist is a woman in middle age, who feds herself adrift between the chaotic modern world and the remembered certainties of the past. In the first story, "Homecoming," a woman arrives at a newly purchased house in the city where she grew up, hoping to recapture the order and optimism of her youth, only to be driven into retreat by her own fears and the unruly reality of the present. In the last, "A Chota Peg or Two," the narrator searches her elderly relatives' memories of India for the link between the imperial confidence of their world and the graceless existence of her own children that might disperse her sense of being "some kind of anomaly, the in between strut on abridge, neither one thing or the other."

In other stories Murray evokes the alienation of an otherwise dutiful housewife whose dreams engulf her in fantasies of the death of her husband and child, and the cathartic obsession of another woman with the mysterious past and imminent death of a recluse. Although some of this material is familiar, Murray avoids cliché by concentrating on her protagonist's interior experience, rather than

making her the victim in a domestic morality play. In these stories the sexes are profoundly estranged, rather than at war. In the title story, one of the bat, the narrator is the son of one of two middle-aged friends whose quest for love and meaning puzzles and fascinates him. Murray's acute observation of Emily and Catherine shows them at times foolish and dogged, yet also conveys the vitality that draws the boy to their world, rather than the drab limbo to which their discarded husbands and lovers have been consigned.

If Murray's women suffer dislocation and fear, they are usually able to seek some escape or illumination, but her few male characters seem paralysed. In "New Year's Day" a teacher, marooned in an incongenial mill town, recalls his thwarted passion for a dead youth with sorrow but little understanding or hope, while in "The Firing" a woman, similarly isolated, impulsively abandons herself to a transfiguring sexual encounter. Two stories describing the same literary soiree from the separate viewpoints of a divorced couple show the man immobilized by petty rivalries and prissily repelled by his ex-wife's untidy life and person. She, on the other hand, emerges with the knowledge that she now can leave the marriage, and a temporarily consoling religious conversion, behind her.

In all her stories Murray evokes nostalgia for 8 mythically graceful past threatened by the harsh reality of the present. In "An Old Tale" an idyllic Eden is invaded by an enigmatic but potentially malevolent figure. This, and "Tbeoffluc and the Woman," which describes a philosophical exchange between victim and oppressor in a concentration camp, I found rather artificial, and the least successful of the group.

However, when dealing with the milieu and sensibility she obviously knows well, Murray writes with clarity, intelligence, and rich detail. Most important, she accepts the often inexpressible nature of feeling — for example in "Blessed," where she makes believable and moving the story of a woman, brutally rejected by her married lover, who travels to Carthage to relive the myth of Dido, and finds unexpected and inexplicable release in the smile of an unknown Tunisian woman. In "Marina Island" she tells with simplicity how a child's partial understanding of her elegant great-grandmother's youthful passion also brings her first awareness of loss and death.

Perhaps because she is a poet (this is her first collection of stories) Rona Murray knows how to enhance the truth and resonance of her work by what she leaves unsaid. □

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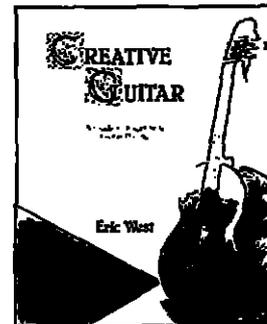


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# Charter of wrongs

As George Grant's persistent probing shows, the deceptive language that surrounds our rights and freedoms shields us from society's lethal course

By **Barry Cooper**

Technology and Justice. by **George Grant**, **House of Anansi**, 135 pages, 88.95 papa (ISBN 0 88784 152 X).

WHEN DUE WEIGHT is accorded the term political philosopher, it is no exaggeration to say that George Grant is the only one among us who deserves to be so identified. Ever since the publication of *Lament for a Nation* in 1965, the appearance of each of his books has been a major intellectual event. Their titles indicate grand themes: philosophy in the mass age, technology and empire, English-speaking justice, and now technology and justice. It takes more than brain power to write books with such titles; it takes greatness of soul as well.

Grant is not just another intellectual, not even just another scholar. He is a lover of wisdom, a philosopher, but one who speaks to his fellow citizens (and not just to other scholars, or worse, to intellectuals). To address his fellow citizens, Grant must use words they can understand, a popular or politic-rhetoric. He is a political philosopher because he seeks to think the meaning of our public life, our politics; he is a political philosopher because he philosophized in an idiom intelligible to normal human beings with ordinary capacities of common sense.

Even so, *Technology and Justice* is not an easy book to read. The first two essays in particular, "Thinking about Technology" and "Faith and the Multiversity," which constitute the philosophical and political summit of the book, require great attention in order to be understood. Accordingly, it would be a great impertinence to pretend to indicate Grant's teaching in this book. It is enough to say that his splendid discussion of Nietzsche and Heidegger and Weil will reward the attentive reader.

A" indication of Grant's status as a political philosopher is his ability to connect the summit with the base. In our demotic times, the remark of a leacher of evil, that truth is ugly, rings true. It is for this reason that newcomers to Grant would do well to begin at the end, with the reflections of George and Sheila Grant on the practices of euthanasia and abor-

tion, and their significance for justice and rights.

Living under the regime of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, we late-century citizens have learned that rights are trump. But why do we have rights? What is it about us that gives us rights in the first place? Or, what amounts to the same thing, why does the charter (at least by intention) guard individuals from the abuses of arbitrary power? The answer appears to us, after we have assimilated the historical scholarship, as a "assumption": everyone should be protected by rights because human beings are children of a common mother, as Plato taught, or are children of God, as the Bible taught.

That assumption is properly described as having once sustained rights. It doesn't any more, and Grant wonders what replaced it. What is the new assumption that grants us rights? The short answer is: we have rights because we will them, which is to say, we take them. A little reflection, however, indicates the self-cancelling nature of this response. In consequence, we have developed a language to cow up the incoherence of our will and, sustaining our deceptive and self-deceptive speech, we have committed (willed) ourselves to a kind of knowledge that makes the raising of questions about ourselves so very difficult.



For instance: the charter deals with rights and freedoms, and sometimes these conflict. The question of abortion is often posed in terms of the right to life of a fetus and the freedom of a woman to control her own body. In this instance, all the evidence indicates that freedom, or rather convenience, overrides presumptive right.

Grant wonders why. When rights are denied to individuals, we know from recent European programs of persecution, individuals are left unprotected and the state is free to be rid of them. If fetuses are unprotected, why "ot the old, the stupid, the unproductive? Perhaps fetuses are not individuals; the" what are they? Tissue? The." why distinguish (with respect to rights) fetal tissue from unproductive tissue, especially old unproductive tissue?

There may be answers to such questions, but mostly we insulate ourselves from raising them by daily employment of a euphemistic language: every child a wanted child; death with dignity: diminished quality of life; benign neglect. Such slogans have a surface meaning that "o one would deny — it is better that children be wanted than that they be unwanted, and so on. Yet at the same time these phrases disguise a thoughtlessness: does a diminished quality of life destroy its sanctity? But this returns us quickly to the question of our basic assumption: what once guaranteed the sanctity of life is now suffering from experiential atrophy.

Grant's analysis explodes our euphemisms; he dissects the sophistry by which we try to shield ourselves from what we are doing at the beginning and at the end of life with our lethal chatter about abortion and euthanasia. He shows how the two discourse.5 are connected. Eve" journalists and intellectuals ought to grasp the teleological significance of our current policies and what policies are foreshadowed by our current euphemisms. Abortion and euthanasia, Grant shows, are subordinate to cybernetics, the art of the steersman. They are, or soon will be, techniques of population management.

Grant has reflected for many years on the characteristics, the genesis, and the essence of our social and political order. In our technological society, there is no reason why abortion and euthanasia ought not to be used for population management. We know already how much technology is needed to meet the emergencies that technology has produced. Cer-

tainly one of those emergencies is connected to an increase in the population. Even if Canadians need not yet practise population management, they certainly practise population adjustment. That is, the response of human as well as non-human nature to the emergencies produced by technology can only be met with more technology.

This is what is meant by the statement that technology is the ontology of the age.

Grant begins his book with the statement that he has tried to think in terms of the Spanish proverb, "Take what you want, said God -take it and pay for it." The price for making technology what it is, which can be seen easily enough in the matters of abortion and euthanasia, is oblivion of justice, of eternity, of divinity. If a technological age, we have no reason to think that we cannot make the adjustment and become oblivious to oblivion. It is enough, perhaps, to recognize that one of the best among us cannot be so adjusted. Perhaps no thoughtful person can. □

## REVIEW

# Bred in the bark

By I.M. Owen

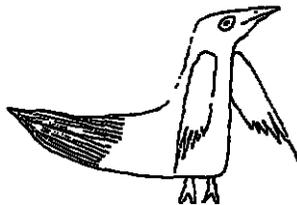
**Tranter's Tree**, by H.R. Percy, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 256 pages, \$21.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88619 154 8).

LIKE ITS PREDECESSOR, *Painted Ladies*, H.R. Percy's new novel starts in the present and tells its story in flashbacks, through the memories of its principal characters. But in *Tranter's Tree* Percy sets himself a more challenging task, since the story runs from 1724 to the present day.

Salvia Street, a tree-lined residential street in a small Nova Scotia coastal town, is about to be widened to become part of a highway, and its trees are to come down. Most of them are old, having been planted about the middle of the 19th century by a innkeeper's wife known as the Widder Kidd; but one magnificent English oak comes from an acorn planted by one Ned Tranter soon after his arrival in Nova Scotia in 1724. The foreground story of the novel is about the events of the day Tranter's tree is cut down. That serves as a frame within which we are shown memories running through the heads of various people, notably two lifelong residents of Salvia Street, Jim Jordan and Sam Olsen, and one former resident, Jed Seeley, the detestable cabinet minister who has ordered the street-

widening. They all recollect their boyhoods in the 1920s. But Jordan and Olsen go still further back.

Olsen has come into possession of the Widder Kidd's diary, so that his memory incorporates hers and includes a couple of one-night stands with Joseph Howe.



Jordan, lately retired from the editorship of the local paper, is writing a novel about Ned Tranter, his main source being his boyhood memory of Scabby Pointer, an evidently lunatic retired professor who used to wander about the village and the countryside soliloquizing loudly about Tranter. Jordan has the convenient gift of total recall, so that we get most of Tranter's story in Scabby's words: an ingenious but unconvincing device, this.

Tranter had crossed the Atlantic with 15 pigs, in the hope of becoming the principal supplier of pork in the New World. But the pigs didn't survive the journey and Tranter landed with nothing but an abundant supply of acorns, brought as their fodder. He was then seized with an ambition to plant a line of English oaks clear across the continent. He also formed a friendship and fur-trading partnership with an Acadian, Jacques Doucette, and fell in love with another Acadian, Stephanie Tillard; at the time of the dispersal of the Acadians Tranter sided with them against the English troops and was eventually hanged from his own oak.

Stephanie had a weird foster-sister, Francine la folle, and the Tranter story is supernaturally linked to the present by Francine's evident reincarnation as Carla, Sam Olsen's adoptive granddaughter, who was found in a shawl hanging from an old iron bracket projecting from Tranter's tree. It was the milkman who found her, and handed her over to Sam's daughter-in-law "along with a carton of cottage cheese and a quart of two percent." Carla has decidedly eccentric qualities and magical powers that she uses "to avenge the death of the tree."

I've mentioned only a few of the characters whose memories provide the stories that intertwine to make the novel. It could be regarded, indeed, as a collection of short stories, or perhaps two novellas and several short stories. The author keeps shifting, suddenly and without warning, from one to another of these stories, but his great ingenuity and enormous vigour sustain the forward drive of the novel. The trouble with the method is that it requires almost as much

ingenuity and vigour from the reader. Though on my first reading I was fascinated and often moved to laughter, it wasn't until the second reading, with the puzzle-solving behind me, that I could actually enjoy it.

Even at the first reading, though, this former naval person held me as firmly as that earlier story-telling ancient mariner held his audience. I struggled as hard as the Wedding-Guest to get away, but the long grey beard and glittering eye were almost as compelling as ever, and would have been quite as much so if Percy had emulated the relative simplicity of his predecessor's style. But he keeps breaking out in rashes of contorted, self-conscious mannerism.

Mr. J sees himself lurking there beneath the trees, small, indigenous, an insect in its endangered habitat. Wars and youthful wandering apart, he has parsed his whole life here. His whole, happy life. Bitter moments there have been, God knows, aplenty, but the green umbrage has secluded and assuaged them. The prevailing content has assimilated them and set them in proportion. Deaths and disappointments (like the barrenness of his balls) and tragedies like Elizabeth's legs: the rhythms of tranquillity have abraded their sharp edges and dulled their point of pain, so that they lie embalmed and somehow beautified in the serene expanse of his remembrance. All the past lies polished and smooth from long tumbling in his mind, like agates in Elizabeth's electric machine. The future, however, is something else.

And here a blind man, known as Greg the Groper, is having breakfast. He

sits like a spider at the centre of things. The web of his awareness is still, save for a few routine tremors normally ignored and a small sensation or two which he is too preoccupied to receive with his usual gusto. The sulphurous smell of his hard-boiled egg, decapitated and fast growing cold, does not this morning move him to a mild olfactory orgasm. True, before unleashing its evocative odour he for a few moments cherished its warm roundness as one might cherish the breast of one's beloved. He let the tantalizing eggness of it speak to him across their fleeting common frontier; even marginally remembering the exquisite fright of the first time. When the egg was enormous in his hand and warm not from the saucepan but from the hen's appalling and unimaginable viscera. His mother later laughed at his anguished refusal to condone the small murder, to taste the corpse of the inconceivable wee creature she said was only a chicken seed, no more averse to being bolted than a chestnut to being roasted.

He achieves many clever phrases (I like the description of the daytime moo, "pale as a watermark on the early morning sky") but they cluster so thickly on the page that the style becomes almost as wearisome as John Lyly's to *Euphues*. □

## BRIEF REVIEWS

### BIOGRAPHY

Little **Wilson** and **Big God: Being the First Part of the Confessions of Anthony Burgess, Stoddart, 460 pages, 828.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7737 2125 8).**

**WILSON** Is the novelist's family name — a middle-class but far from dull Manchester family, Burgess was his mother's name, and Anthony his confirmation name; and the polarity of Wilson and God is only one of many in this half-life, which takes us to 1959. Burgess appears to see a" affinity of sorts with his Argentine namesake, the late Jorge Luis Borges, and this is not surprising: his unfailingly offbeat relationship with the Second World War and postwar world would not be out of place in one of Borges's fantasies.

**Religion** is indeed the focus of the central polarity in his life. A Roman Catholic from the cradle, he is nevertheless an apostate. He does not suffer the religion gladly but, making efforts to become reconciled to the Church, he notes that he has found no metaphysical substitute for it. He is contemptuous of what he calls "... the eucharist in its emasculated Anglican form," and his view of converts such as Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh is equally jaundiced, though that is not perhaps a" apt word to use of a ma" who is colour-blind. This visual variation — characteristically he says it raises epistemological questions — he compensates for in different ways. One was to have his first wife dress his characters for him in his early novels. Another raises another polarity. He sees himself as a serious composer — something difficult to evaluate, since his music is very, very rarely performed — and considers the orchestral coloration of his scoring as a compensation for the visual appreciation of dour, which he cannot share with the majority. Side by side with his religious perplexities is a degree of psychic perception; he has seen revenants, one of whom (I think he says somewhere) became the central character in his series of novels about "Enderby." He has also witnessed a manifestation of Eastern mysticism in Malaysia, which one notes he used almost unchanged in his recent novel *Earthly Powers*.

**Language** — arising from his early experience with the Lancashire dialect, which he had to exchange for standard English — is a central preoccupation. He was the only child in his Manchester

group who could read, and so he had to read the titles aloud in the silent movies on Saturday afternoons. The arrangement work&l well until the day some Hebrew titles came up and his companions couldn't understand the problem.

He appears to have had an unusually active and varied sea life, now no doubt tapering off, and this too is a pole hard to reconcile with his ascetic appearance in photographs and the detachment of his writing.

The first paragraph of Burgess's confessions is well titled. He seems to be seeking absolution from his readers, and one looks forward eagerly to his next appearance in the confessional.

— BERT COWAN

### FICTION

*Afternoon Ten.* by Brad Robinson, Coach House Press, 96 pages, 98.50 ppa (ISBN 0 88910 299 6).

**FORD MADOX FORD** observed that "the death of a mouse from cancer is the whole sack of Rome by the Goths." This is the perspective adopted by Brad Robinson in his first book of short stories, which undertakes the study of the wealth of significance latent in the unassuming details and small circumstances of life..

The first three stories describe the experiences of a Canadian writer, George Terry, travelling in Southeast Asia. In the second of these, George whiles away an afternoon in a Malaysian hotel trying to read Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and concludes that, despite its flawless form, the work lacks vitality. Although George skips the preface, we hope that Robinson will not do so, as it contains James's advice to the writer of fiction to develop his subject so that it provides a foundation for the structure of meaning and interest he wishes to create. The slenderer the subject, in James's view, the more "doing" it requires.

The failure to "do" his subject is Robinson's besetting weakness. The material of these stories is too insubstantial and frequently too banal to sustain the weight of significance; emotional and "spiritual," that is assigned to it by the author. The result is bathos. I" "The Pen-and-Ink Clerk," a" account of the inner depths concealed beneath the outwardly humdrum lives of a bank clerk and his wife, the incongruity between flatness of the conception and treatment of the

material and the extravagant claims made on its behalf provides some inadvertently comic moments. *Afternoon Tea* offers us the commonplace unredeemed by art. The final scene of the title story is a notable exception, for it is wonderfully realized.

Robinson's prose style is not without descriptive power, but would be better served by a more stringent process of selection. "Kong Hee Fatt Choy" is little more than a loose assemblage of details working to very little purpose. After all this criticism of the underdone-ness of this work, it "my seem ungrateful to complain about instances of overdone-ness. Nevertheless, these stories suffer as much from the frequent outbursts of overwriting and turgid generalizations about the ineffable as they do from the inanition of the subject matter.

As Henry James remarked, a work of fiction "is of its very nature ... an ado about something" that the writer justifies by means of his craft. In *Afternoon Tea* Robinson leaves us wondering what all the "ado" is about.

— SHELAGH GARLAND

*Black Swan,* by Gertrude Story, Thistle-down Press, 127 pages, 522.00 cloth (ISBN 0 920633 20 X) and \$10.95 paper (ISBN 0 920633 21 8).

**LIKE HER PREVIOUS** work *The Need of Wanting Always*, Gertrude Story's latest offering is situated in rural Saskatchewan and chronicles the life of a strong, Teutonic woman. Gerda Beckmann is the centre, and 0" occasion the narrator, of the 13 interconnected stories of *Black Swan*. But whereas the protagonist of *The Need of Wanting Always* is concerned chiefly with husbands and children, Gerda's most significant relationship is that with her father. The collection details Gerda's hatred for the man, her years of ministering to his needs, and the peacefulness that their relationship assumes in the end..

"Papa Beckman" is a traditional patriarch, and Story paints a vivid portrait of his unenlightened ways. Violent, irresponsible, and authoritarian, he controls the family's activities while often failing to provide support. His son Murray must turn to a grandfather for badly needed eyeglasses; the women in the family can expect no help in the kitchen. "Mama always still made borscht and bara hai eve" though she worked six days

a week at Woolworth's: or if she didn't, I did." Gerda tells us in "Seeing Better." "Papa wouldn't have it any other way."

To understand more clearly her troubled family life — including the death of a brother and sister — Gerda turns to writing, an activity that clearly fascinates Story. Gerda sees herself as a medium through which various "pictures" and voices — including her father's — are expressed. The voices "made her put their words in books."

*Black Swan* suffers from repetition and — especially in the fantastic/introspective "Darkness" — a number of tedious passages. These aside, one finds much that pleases here. The familial traumas that shape a writer are impressively drawn. — GIDEON FORMAN

*Flight Against Time*, by Emily Nasrallah, translated from the Arabic by Issa J. Boullata, Ragweed Press, 208 pages, \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 920304 59 1).

WHEN CONFRONTED with television images of the war-torn Middle East, our reaction as Canadians is often one of incomprehension and disbelief. Sheltered by our own pacific reality, we wonder how people can continue to live in such a hostile environment. We mistakenly assume that most would bid farewell to their troubled homelands and emigrate to safe, sane North America at the drop of a hat.

*Flight Against Time* is the story of an elderly Lebanese couple faced with this opportunity. Radwan and his wife Um Nabeel leave their tiny village for a six-month visit to their children and grandchildren in Prince Edward Island. Although impressed by the comfort and security of Canada, Radwan rejects his children's pleas to make his new home his and returns to Lebanon. The book thus presents love of one's homeland as a powerful yet highly irrational emotion that ultimately takes priority over such concerns as personal safety and family unity.

Nasrallah succeeds in capturing the childlike wonder of a mother who, having spent 70 years in a small village, suddenly finds himself immersed in a foreign culture. She presents Radwan's vacillation between apprehension and admiration of North American society with both humour and sympathy.

However, the novel as a whole is marred by a frustrating flatness of language. Perhaps this is due to the imperfections of translation from Arabic to English. In any case, Nasrallah's prose is riddled with overworked clichés guaranteed to send even hard-core soap opera buffs into paroxysms of pal. Lines like "He was tall as a poplar tree, hand-

some like a prince, merry like a songbird chirping in the vineyards" are sprinkled through the text with annoying frequency. *Flight Against Time* sorely lacks that spark of inventive language and unusual imagery so integral to a novel's success.

— MICHELE MELADY

*Vigil*, by Roberta Morris, Williams-Wallace, 165 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88795 052 3) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88795 049 3).

IN WRITING *Vigil*, Roberta Morris has considered the unthinkable: what will life be like after they drop the big one? While not minimizing the horrors of exposure to radiation ("Lacking water to drink, there is certainly none for washing, let alone for scrubbing the floors where people have vomited or helplessly emptied their bowels") *Vigil* nevertheless suggests that nuclear war is survivable. Indeed, the residents of Kaane, a fictional Hawaiian island, hunt, fish, and farm for food within nine months of suffering a nuclear attack.

While the residents suffer shortages (running out of nail-polish remover, using the last of their wheat flour to make fried wontons), they retain their family and social structures, not lapsing into terrified chaos as the tourists do. And there are deaths: from sickness, murder, suicide, and miscarriages.

Through all the horror, the resident community keeps vigil for the first baby to be born after the attack. As each fetus spontaneously aborts or is stillborn, attention focuses on Jan Ito's pregnancy, until it becomes a sign of the Second Coming. There is even a "a" annunciation, although delivered by a madwoman. The baby is born on — you guessed it — December 25 and the novel ends with a few verses of Isaiah.

Still, although Morris's use of biblical references is at times heavy-handed, the story is compelling, suspenseful, and the characters are interesting, sympathetic. It's a good, easy read. But what the book is saying is not dear. Don't worry, nuclear war is hell, but after losing some weight and some members of your family, you'll bounce back. Or worse, that the Second Coming is dependent on a nuclear holocaust?

If the story is simply a testament to man's will to live and to make (as opposed to find) meaning from life, the references to Christian theology don't fit. After the bomb, the people of Kaane choose to see (as opposed to experiencing a revelation) that their salvation is a profoundly deformed, perhaps literally brainless infant. God's salvation seems to have no part in these new times.

— GLORIA HILDEBRANDT

## THE MIND

*Phallos: Sacred Image of the Masculine*, by Eugene Monick, Inner City Press, 144 pages, 513.00 paper (ISBN 0 919123 26 0).

EUGENE MONICK'S thesis seems simple enough: in the world of Jungian symbolism, femininity is seen as all-important, generative, and primary, whereas masculinity as a source of pride, love, and strength is more or less ignored. This hook, then, is an attempt to redress the balance and get father ensconced as co-important, co-generative, co-primary, right up there with mother. Further, Monick explains that the Jungian theorists staked out their patch of earth in opposition to centuries of male dominance and the overwhelming reality of the patriarchal culture.

Where the book runs into trouble is with the sentence "But the old patriarchal values are no longer obviously true." To me, C.G. Jung was a kindly individual who left planet Earth to range among cosmic metaphors, leaving us lesser lights behind to deal with the everyday, messy problems of mere earthbound men and women. The above quotation leads me to conclude that this follower of Jung has followed him into the stratosphere. Only in the wildest reaches of theory can one claim that patriarchal values are no longer "true."

Long lines of women shoppers at Loblaws checkout counters with babies in arms, toddlers underfoot, heavy-looking bundles of groceries to be unloaded alone at home proclaim that not much has changed in the real world. Men still use phallos as a power tool to bring woman to heel. The central issue here is and always has been the begetting of children. It's his jealousy of woman's ability to bring forth and bear fruit, mm makes her pay. She must serve him. She must raise the children alone or watch them be indoctrinated with his beliefs. And if she leaves him, she must do without his money, which he will withhold in retaliation.

It is true that many women today opt to escape this trap. They are laughed at as unfeminine, suffer heart attacks because they must work so much harder than men to prove themselves, and often suffer a sense of inner loss and despair due to feeling deprived of their inalienable right to bear children.

This is the first generation of women to make even the slightest dent in the patriarchy. And they are paying for it. I believe a book about the divine and benign nature of phallos is politically inopportune. Maybe in a thousand years.

— JOSEPHINE CRABTREE

## ON STAGE

**Albertine** in *Five Times*, by **Michel Tremblay**, translated from the **French** by **John Van Burek and Bii Glassco**, Talonbooks, 76 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88922 234 7).

**WRITERS ARE FOREVER** finding ways to break the steady flow of time, perhaps because **real life is sequential**, memory **flashes backwards** and forwards, and **writers work from memory**. This is **certainly true** in the case of **Michel Tremblay**, whose memory of Quebec's past, of a-of **Montreal in the 1930s** and '40s, is the landscape in which most of his plays are set. In *Albertine in Five Times* Tremblay has returned not only to this past but **also to the same set of characters**, and from there rescued **one, Albertine**, and lets her wander **through her own mind**.

**Albertine** is familiar to us through **glimpses in several other Tremblay works**, both plays and novels, but **this time she holds the whole stage**. Aided by her **confidante**, her ageless sister **Madeleine**, **Albertine at 70 converses with four of her former selves recalling facts, denying**

**recollections, supporting evidence, understanding, even sometimes forgiving**. The Albertines of the past hear about but do not **learn from the Albertines in the future: instead all together form curious harmonies by exploring the same themes in different chords**. Once **again Tremblay uses as dramatic structure a musical model: this time a fugue for five female voices**. Wbm aptly orchestrated, the script allows for **certain words, gestures, movements to take place in several Albertines at once, pulling together threads of meaning throughout the play**.

The language of *Albertine* (as is often the case in Tremblay's writing) wavers between **naturalism and kitsch**, but never falls into either. It has a **peculiar lyricism** of its own that allows one **Albertine** to say, "The son dropped like a **rock behind the mountains. . . .** Just before it disappeared the birds stopped **singing. Completely**. It was like **everything**, not just me, was watching the **sun go down**," and another **Albertine, further on**, to reply, "Say what you **like**, when they give us that crap about hips to the moon and the stars, I switch **channels**." On stage, the result is **one same motif** played first on the flute then on the double bass. Memory, **Tremblay** seems to say, keeps

**only a handful of events, but each one can be looked at from any number of vantage points, from any number of years, constantly surprising us with revelations about that most secret of characters, our own.**  
— ALBERTO MANGUEL

## THE PAST

When Freedom Was Lost: The **Unemployed**, the Agitator nod the State, by **Lorne Brown**, Black Rose Books. 208 pages, \$1495 paper (ISBN 0 920037 77 2).

**DESPITE THE SUFFERING** created by the Great Depression, the 1930s were a vibrant Period **during** which the **labour movement was never stronger**. A whole **culture grew up with slogans of the Wobblies**, songs of **Joe Hill**, and **tales of sit-down strikes and union organizing under impossible conditions**.

Because most of the confrontations that **captured the headlines** took place in the **United States**, Canada is oft a mere footnote in history. **Lorne Brown**, best known as **co-author of An Unauthorized History of the RCMP**, seeks to remedy the dearth of '30s **labour Canadiana** with this study of the **little-known labour camps that eventually inspired the on to Ottawa trek**.

Unfortunately his book reads like a **college outline, a skeletal summary that suffers from lack of life**. **Brown gives** readers the academic's **ivory-tower approach to history, quoting old newspaper accounts and other studies but never the words of the people who made history themselves**.

Typical of that major **problem** is the **series of photos, which includes the faces of those who went to Ottawa to mark the 50th anniversary of the trek**. Brown fails to interview **any of these survivors; instead he tacks on a crude "where-are-they-now?" summary in the last two pages of the book**.

What should have **been an insightful study of a shameful period in our history** is instead a **lacklustre report that suffers from poor editing, sloppy proofreading, and too much faith in the notion that good intentions always make for a good book**.  
— MATTHEW BEHRENS

**The Journals of Lady Aberdeen: The Okanagan Valley in the Nineties**, edited by **R. M. Middleton**, Morriss Publishing, 91 pages, 38.95 paper (ISBN 0 919203 67 1).

**THIS SLIM VOLUME** of six chapters reads **very much like a competently researched but unremarkable snippet of family history, compiled for family reference**. **R. M. Middleton, who provides the annotations to some of her ladyship's**

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journal entries, is almost family. He grew up on a ranch in Vernon that was bought by his grandparents from the Aberdeens, and like the Aberdeens Middleton has served as a governmental representative, most recently as Canadian ambassador in South Africa.

Lady Aberdeen, wife of the Earl of Aberdeen, Governor General of Canada from 1893 to 1898, is fondly described in the foreword by her grandson, the Marquess of Aberdeen, as a "battle-axe." According to Middleton, she was also a major social conscience in Canada in the 1890s — the first president of the National Council of Women, founder of the Victorian Order of Nurses, and a supporter of many other charitable organizations.

The book is adequately footnoted, with sources that include Lady Aberdeen's own biographical books, and there are several interesting archival photos, but this little book fails to capture the reader's interest in the formidable Lady Aberdeen or the beautiful Okanagan. Instead, one reads of the financial misfortunes the Aberdeens suffered, and her ladyship's journal entries are very much take up with dry details — the number of fruit trees planted, the costs per acre of harvesting, and the like.

— BARBARA MacKAY

## POETRY

**The Deepening of the Colours**, by Gail Fox, Oberon Press, 83 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 631 3) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 632 1).

THE "COLOUR" of this collection is autumnal, brown, reddish brown, rust; what fire it contains does not blaze, but seems a kind of oxidization, without heat, without intensity. The mood of the work is reflective, strangely detached yet self-absorbed at the same time:

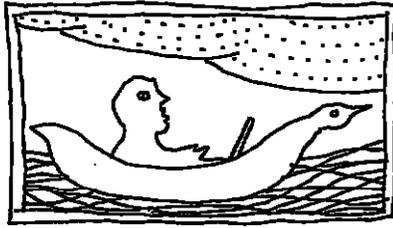
*I stand off, a quiet spectator, and watch  
the poem crumble on tk wind. That way,  
the black velvet of tk grass at night  
knows nothing, and the poem lives only  
in my head*

If the romantic poet survives suicide, madness, what becomes of her? Her sense of colour? The pitch that cannot be sustained? Survival in these poems, even the love poems, seems to have become a kind of embalming process: "and all alone the/two of us, like pickled eggs floating in a/sealed jar, sea-white, delicious and secure."

Fox refers constantly to mystery, to the unexplained "something," usually "terrible," that opens us to the muse, but she rarely fathoms those depths. So in a poem about her father — "for his/Dionysian moments when he says things/that should

be said, but often/aren't, in a family" — "Dionysian" is simply an adjective: there is no energy in the line to conjure the god.

Fox writes like Plath out of a private and obsessive psychological world-view. Plath wrote: "The blood jet is poetry,/There is no stopping it." Fox echoes with this: "The/poem streaks out



of me like blood,/Like a wound I haven't taped." But Fox's lines are curiously diffuse, lacking the compression and clarity of Plath's.

The effect is one of flattening, rather than deepening, of the thought or experience, of the colour. If this is poetry of the wound, perhaps the wound has healed, or indeed been taped. The work produced is not a poetry of wholeness but a poetry of survival, of the amputee: "But a hatred of bis crippled hand and/foot blocks the flow of divinity."

What I may be failing to appreciate in this particular collection some may call the levelling of maturity. Still, the kinds of insights Fox provides into the human condition seem obvious and uninspired: "People are basically the same./Same hungers, thirsts, emotions." She is seeking "the sacred in the every day" in an attempt to bring the psychic violence of the imagined, interior world into the practical, quotidian realm. But that attempt to fuse opposites actually subverts the dynamics of the poem so that in an elegy where she is confronting death she writes: "That what/I was thinking, was thought under/unbearable strain, and that I would/have a headache later." A deep struggle is suggested, the outcome of which is a headache?

— MARY T' MICHELE

**Names of God**, by Tim Lilburn, Oolichan Books, 100 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88982 069 4).

THE FIVE PARTS of this book are untitled (although Part III has the epigraph "Nature has been sucked into history. G.W.P. Hegel"). Spiritual Vision, Nature, History, Science in Culture, Pure Science: these are crude approximations of the five themes. And the language is enriched from correspondingly many sources — without any poem denying access because of terms like "abulia," "ectomorphic," "eschaton," since there are also many such immediacies as

"tumoured air storm" and "clover-candled," and that groundhog, "jittered earth chunk/galumphing down mullein." Rhythms too are varied, with a bucking pentameter as the bare form. Elaborated formal shaping may come later in this poet's development; here one feels that the pressure toward utterance is often in an exasperated struggle with the medium — for example (from Part IV):

*...we whose faces are clotted white with  
screams  
too terrible to release, screams that if they  
were uttered  
would mean the loss of some essential  
organ, its beating weight  
tearing from stagings of tendon...*

or, in the sixth of the "Grim Invocations":

*...Elohim, kindly yank me,  
a pulseless myth, from the language heart  
machine...*

Where thought is intense sense-experience, where vision overwhelms divisions (i.e. boundaries, categories), a dangerous undertow of emotion sometimes sweeps everything out of control; and one longs for the elegant language of mathematics instead. However, no other terms than Lilburn's could give us the poignant, necessary, permanent poetry of, for instance, the three poems on horses in Part II — & that portrait of Bernard of Clairvaux writing his letter "where accidia clubs lead windows with fists of rain."

It was a delight too to read "Blessed be all, dapper goats natty in Kentucky string tie tufts/. . . Blessed be the jubilate of jump" and be turned back to Christopher Smart ("rejoice with the purple Worm who is cloathed/ Sumptuously") and find his "A Song to David" evoked by Lilburn's "Moses Addresses the Dervish of Is."

The cover-flap cites Hopkins and Ginsberg and other "beats" as antecedents, and notes the wide background of a man born in Saskatchewan who has worked in West Africa and has farmed and studied for the last eight years as a member of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits. May there be many more books from him. — MARGARET AVISON

**The Power to Move**, by Susan Glickman, Véhicule Press, 81 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 919890 80 6).

SUSAN GLICKMAN'S second collection of poetry is meant to disillusion — not in the melancholy, negative sense in which we have come to use the word but in the spirit of its literal meaning, which is "to set free from pleasant but mistaken beliefs." Whether it's in the superb opening poem, "For My Students in English 108 Who Complain That AS Modern Literature Is

Too Depressing" — where the poet peels back the tranquil, bucolic gloss in which we've sealed the distant past — or in a sequence of poems ruefully debunking the "myth of perfect love," Glickman moves beyond convenient illusions with focused strides. Her language is crisp and direct, tinged here and there with irony but never unfeeling. I fact many of the poems explore the intricacies of attachment, from a perspective best expressed in "Mirage":

*Don't tell me the carpet can fly. I just want to see its knotted heart, the flaw that perfects what's real*

Generally the truths that Glickman wants to pare from illusion are not the darker kind. Personal relationships seem plagued less by violence or harshness than misunderstanding and private ambivalence. Only in the third section, where the poet has been transplanted to another culture (Mexican), does she touch more substantially on larger social issues:

*Further south, gunfire and at the great Cathedral in Mexico City striking teachers have starved themselves for a month*

("Nightflowers")

Here poverty and privilege make up the central paradox — here reality the leading edge of their own fields. They come fromspec-point given the contribution many Catholic women have made to Canadian society,

Glickman is well aware of being "rich in a foreign country." But illusions are a kind of privilege too; and so the collection still concludes with a poem that affirms dis-illusionment. In "The Dance" the reenactment of an Aztec ceremony is freed from the "sentimental fiction" imposed by tourists hungry for cheap spectacle, and acquires its own dignity and earthbound splendour.

Yes, there's life for the imagination after the letting go of illusion. And yes, there's some fine poetry in *The Power To Move's* familiar landscapes.

— BARBARA CAREY

## SACRED & SECULAR

Portraits of Canadian Catholicism, by M.W. Higgins and D.R. Letson, Griffin House, 1% pages, \$11.95 paper (ISBN 0 88760 111 1).

AT A TIME when Christianity in Canada seems most ecumenical, to write about prominent Roman Catholics may seem to be ghettoizing. That being said, however, this book presents a readable profile of 12 Canadian Catholics, all in many ways on the leading edge of their own fields. They come fromspec-point given the contribution many Catholic women have made to Canadian society,

son, former editor of the "aggressively *Catholic Register*, Morley Callaghan, who "ever went in for being Marie-Claire to Blais, a rebellious "Catholic outsider." None can claim blandness, and most are controversial figures both inside and outside the church.

They range from Cardinal Emmett Carter of Toronto, head of the largest English-speaking diocese in Canada, to Andy Hogan, priest and former NDP MP Breton, and J Forest in-

University Alberta a participating

specifically Letson Higgins and — such as Marc Lalonde and Larkin Kerwin, Research of the National Council — Christian humanist values into their secular careers.

The authors probably a balance between men and women in their portraits, but they might have tried harder. Only three of the 12 are women — Blais, Forest, and social critic Mary Jo Leddy. This imbalance is inexcusable. given the contribution many Catholic women have made to Canadian society,

# COMING UP IN THE JUNE/JULY ISSUE OF BOOKS IN CANADA

## CRIME PAYS

A profile of mystery novelist L.R. Wright  
By Eleanor Wachtel

## BEYOND THE WHIRLPOOL

Timothy Findley on Jane Urquhart's *Storm Glass*

## TOP CAT

Tom Marshall on Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*

Reviews of new books by Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee, Victor-Levy Beaulieu, P.K. Page, Josef Skvorecky, and much more

especially in the fields of education, health care, and the social sciences.

The mosaic that emerges from these profiles represents a Catholicism that is mainly French and Irish in background. It is likely too soon yet to analyse how the face of Canadian Catholicism is changing through the influx of immigrants from such countries as Italy, the Philippines, and Portugal.

The portraits present some surprising aspects of their subjects. For example, Cardinal Carter, a "innovative educator who in his younger years fought against spoon-feeding and rote memorization in schools, laments that "the lay advisers of the clergy have the international reputation of being 'yes-men.'" This book presents very few "yes-people." For that, the authors are to be commended.

— MARY FRANCES COADY

## SCIENCE & NATURE

The Glass Bottom Boat, by David Gilmour, NC Press, 170 pages, \$21.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920053 57 2) and \$12.92 paper (ISBN 0 920053 99 8).

THIS BOOK is much fun — and much frustration. Pan, because it's obvious David Gilmour waded up to his neck in his subject (fish management in Ontario); frustration because NC Press had done such a crummy job with the book. I had thought editorial productions as miserable as this in Canada were at last behind us.

Good things first. Gilmour's no John McPhee, but he undertook this enterprise in personal journalism with considerable and obvious pleasure. "So while I was hired to write a book about fisheries management," he says, "I ended up writing a book about learning about fisheries management." And so he learns, and shares the diminishing of his ignorance, and tells some great stories along the way. He meets, and records with skill and humour, the words of conservation officers current and retired, biologists, anglers, commercial fishermen, even a poacher.

Gilmour does a basically solid job of making sense of statistics, of transmuting a lot of institutional material (the book is sponsored by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources), into a "interesting and ultimately effective if disjointed narrative. Readers will not miss his point. It's a sad and disturbing one: the fishery everywhere in the province is in decline, sport fishermen-blame commercial fishermen, commercial fishermen blame the government (and sport fishermen), everybody blames the environment. And the fish are going, gone. But there is some slight hope; fish management "my save

as much of the day as can be saved.

The unacceptable features of the book are the whopping repetitions, the errors (both of fact and grammar), and the occasional infelicities of the prose. Too bad. Done well, this book could reach a wide audience; the potentiality is there. As it is (thanks, one assumes, to the carelessness or ineptitude of NC Press), it will quickly become extinct. — DOUGLAS HILL

## SOCIETY

British Columbia: Visions of the Promised Land, edited by Brenda Lea White, Flight Press, 115 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 919843 06 9).

WE ALL THINK we know why people live in Lotus Land: it's warm, it's got great scenery and the social climate is laid back and tolerant. British Columbia: Visions of the Promised Land, a collection of 18 essays by writers and artists on why they live in B.C., merely confirms these stereotypes and adds nothing new. What it amounts to, with a few notable exceptions, is a collection of chatty letters and reminiscences, interesting to the authors' fans, family, and friends, but not really adding up to a book.

The two pieces that stand out from the rest are George Ryga's "The Village of Melons," which looks at poverty and



community in a Mexican village and is a nice antidote to the comfortableness of the rest of the book, and W.P. Kinsella's "Nuke the Whales and Piss in the Ocean," which is a funny, bitchy attack on books like this one.

There is a way in which the cumulative effect of the collection does give some insight into the B.C. spirit—it's interesting in a low-key way, though a bit unfocused and self-indulgent; it has a jolt of '60s eccentricity and charm, but the overall impression is of a group of talented people amiably dithering away their time.

Eric Nicol once called British Columbia "... a large body of land entirely surrounded by envy," and the feeling of comfortable acceptance of good fortune, almost smugness, comes through strongly. The real question that emerges is why would anyone live anywhere else? Visions of Moncton, or of North Bay or Regina, now those would be books worth reading.

— RON PHILLIPS

## TRAVEL

Travelling in Tropical Countries, by Jacques Hébert, translated from the French by Gerald Taaffe, Hurtig, 250 pages, \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 88830 303 3).

FROM 1946 TO 1986 Senator Jacques Hébert travelled through more countries than I've had hot dinners, and he saw fit to print the fruits of his wandering experience. Travelling in Tropical Countries (countries that Hébert calls the Third World throughout his book) is a compendium of fatherly advice, tourist trivia, a few personal anecdotes, and several lists of addresses for Canadians abroad. The lists are useful, but the senator's advice wobbles between the obvious and the useless.

Hébert strongly discourages importing drugs into (or from) Third World countries, suggests that women travelling alone speak softly in a "effort to dissuade Latin rapists, recommends that travellers check their plane tickets to make sure that all flights are marked OK — which Hébert tells us, "means confirmed." The politician sometimes shows beneath the traveller's garb: "One sure thing," quoth Hébert, "is that if you made a long and fruitful trip to the Third World, you will have undergone profound change. ... With your enlarged outlook on the world you'll become sensitive to the problems of developing countries and more aware of the responsibilities incumbent on our country and each of its citizens."

I can think of no reason why a "intelligent traveller would want to use Hébert's book as a guide. Certain travel writers — Jan Morris, Ronald Wright for example — can prepare us for a country by sharing with us their acquired wisdom; others — the almost anonymous authors of Fodor's and the Blue Guides — help by providing the hard facts. Hébert's book does neither well, and his condescending tone is, for me at least, highly irksome.

— ALBERTO MANGUEL

## WORK & WORKERS

But Who Cares Now? The Tragedy of the Ocean Ranger, by Douglas House, edited by Cle Newhook, Breakwater, 95 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920911 23 4) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 920911 21 8).

AT DAYBREAK on Monday morning, February 15, 1982, I stand by my kitchen window watching the storm drive the wildest water I've ever seen against the cliffs across the harbour and thanking God my boat is safe ashore. Three hours earlier and a couple of hundred miles east of me, the huge oil rig Ocean Ranger has

capsized in these mountainous seas with the loss of all her 86 me". I hear the first guarded news on the CBC, quoting its obviously equivocating corporate press releases. at six. I listen to the disaster's echoes for days and weeks and months. Paschal O'Neill from Riverhead is lost. He belonged to our Harbour.

Now Douglas House of Memorial University has organized a book and written a text, and Cle Newhook has supervised and edited interviews with the families and friends of the victims. They aim well and hit hard; what they've done will convince any reader that this "senseless accident that never should have happened" was the fault of callous companies who cared for money not lives, and timid governments, provincial and federal, who cared for companies not lives.

But the book is much more than a political position-paper. The authors assemble the words of those who have been living with the aftermath, and what they choose to print has more force than all the psychology primers and self-help best-sellers in your book store. The wives, parents, and children of the mm who died speak of fear and foreknowledge, of grief and anger, of support (from family, community, from a half-million Newfoundlanders), of the need to start life

again and the difficulty in doing so. Their clear and moving perceptions are served well by superb organization and graceful editing. These are Newfoundlanders (mostly) speaking out of pain and loss, and they don't mince words.

But Who Cares Now? is a model of its kind. I hope it never has to be copied. Perhaps we can learn, perhaps we do care. It's hard to read this book without tears.

— DOUGLAS HILL

## REVIEW

### Art of darkness

By Edna Alford

**Inspecting the Vaults**, by Eric McCormack, Penguin, 208 pages, \$17.95 cloth, (ISBN 0 670 81687 6).

"INSPECTING THE VAULTS," the title story in Eric McCormack's first collection, presents us with two disturbing observations: first, "Inspections are necessary. Experience has shown that we cannot always trust the housekeepers"; and second, the inspector is also suspect. It is as if McCormack is instructing his readers at the entrance to the "vaults" that forewarned is forearmed.

Although *Inspecting the Vaults* will introduce many readers to McCormack's formidable talent, some may have encountered his work before. More than half of the 20 stories have appeared in publications such as *New Quarterly*, *Interstate*, *Prism International* and others. The best in the collection are characterized by an astonishing creativity, a clear, confident style and a courageous imagination.

The opening line of "The Swath," in which McCormack disturbs the surface of our perception of reality with a marvellous humorous precision, could well be applied to McCormack himself: "I am one of those not afraid to remember. . . ." This "memory" is almost invariably applied to the dark recesses of human nature and experience. "Inspecting the Vaults," "The Fragmeat," "Sad stories in Patagonia," "Eckhardt at the Window," "Festival," and "One Picture of Trotsky" are among the most impressive of these stories; they best illustrate his conceptual range and his frightening ability to shatter our complacency with our individual and collective capacity for human atrocity and with his nearly surgical examination of our motivations/rationalizations.

The story-teller himself does not escape

this scrutiny, and in "Sad Tales from Patagonia," in which members of an archeological expedition recount tales of atrocity around the evening campfire, the motivation of the story-teller and even the way in which the unbearable tales are told come into question. The chief engineer tells a story about a surgeon who has murdered his wife and inserted her dismembered parts into the abdomens of their children.

The chief engineer's story was ended. The Patagonian darkness silenced the men for a while. Then Chips, rocking smoothly on his barrel, said in his rather grating voice, that he thought the story was well enough done, but that it was disgusting rather than sad, and therefore not really suitable for the occasion.

The cook rarely liked the chief's stories. He could hardly wait, his scraggy beard bristling, to denounce this one as "another rather boring instance of the metaphysical erotic struggle for authenticity and freedom in daily life, and of the problems of coping with the dichotomy of the Word/world. its abstract and concrete dimensions in experience and language."

No one seemed enthusiastic about pursuing this particular line of analysis.

"Sad Stories in Patagonia," like many of the stories in the collection, contains stories within the story, and the fictions often turn in on themselves, leaving the reader at times amazed, at times disoriented, and sometimes confused. In "The Fugue" a vengeful lover furtively enters the home of the professor who has seduced his girl-friend. The young man, holding a knife ready to strike, stands behind the professor in his den while he reads a novel in which a detective discovers a young intruder who has broken into a house and stands, knife poised, behind a man who is reading a novel.

McCormack's use of multiple imaged reinforces both our sense of the mystery and complexity of experience and our sense of displacement and isolation when confronted by that complexity. In "The Festival" we witness an "event" in which phalanxes of insects are layered one above the other within the boundaries of an illuminated Strip on the floor of a gymnasium. "Bristletails, cockchafers, buffalo beetles, harlequins, sacred scarabs, stink bugs, dung beetles, kissing bugs, stag beetles with their enormous antlers, and walking Stick bags." When the insects have congregated, a parallel variety of birds is introduced by an announcer on a loudspeaker system, and there follows a spectacle of carnage chilling in its scale.

The find, brilliant image of "Eckhardt at a Window" differs in its construction in that the multiple image appears not as a cumulative listing hut in a form that

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more closely resembles cell division: the distorted image of the detective/inspector is multiplied and reflected in numerous identical window panes. This metastasis, if you will, follows the detective's exposure to the possibility of an indefinite "umber of brutal, enigmatic, and unsolvable murders. I" each case the weapon is a shaft of shattered glass.

Because of McCormack's considerable linguistic powers, the reader will be well advised to keep her wits about her in the vaults. The stories are riddled with word-play, puns, send-ups, and sometimes jokes of questionable taste, such as the parody of the Indian chant in "Knox Abroad." Some of McCormack's vaults depict all too familiar mythical t&tory. "A Train of Gardens, Part II: The Machine," for example, which could very well be taken as a humorous satirization of a particular sexual myth and a deconstruction of it, is nevertheless unsettling in its execution.

Ireneus Fludd, described as "a pygmy in physique," "a lump-sack," "a bone-bag," "titer macho," constructs and boards a mythical train of sexual fantasies, each of its seven cars containing variations of the archetypal female temptress. We follow him through the north woods, the river, the mountain, the ocean, the desert, the jungle, and finally into the car of rest. Variable Edens, invariably Eve.

Each of the temptresses, who wear only robes that they shed like Pavlovian automatons at the first sight of Ireneus, are well-endowed (long tresses, large breasts), and are "oiled," "burnished," "glistening." The piece is characterized by such passages as the following: "As she swings her leg over to dismount, his heart soars at the glimpse of her pink sex."

These imaginary creatures are, the", generally slippery customers and are frequently carnivorous, complete with fangs. We witness their seduction of Ireneus and their predictable transformation from beautiful/desirable to dark "maws" and/or hags covered with pustules. Ireneus in each case narrowly escapes his repetitive fate but surrenders to "the twin fangs" of "umber six, the jungle woman. Unkindest cut of all, Ireneus winds up in the seventh car bathed, oiled, and yes, nurtured by none other than "a servant girl dressed in white."

While the writer has nearly unlimited latitude in the realm of magic realism, premise and dream fiction demand strict observance of their own internal logic, and violations of that logic place the piece in danger, the spell broke". Most of the stories in *Inspecting the Vaults* are flawless in this respect. Examples of exceptions, however, occur in "Knox Abroad," where Job" Knox reflects with

anachronistic colloquialism that "he knows it doesn't cover all the bases," and in "Train of Gardens, Part I: Ireneus Fludd," where Watonobe, the primitive Oluban islander, is said to describe a Thirty-Oner (the revered sacrificial old gentleman who has had all but his most significant member removed by the high priestess) es looking "for all the world like a long-spouted teapot without a handle." It is Ireneus's observation, perhaps, or the author's, but in the imaginary construct of the island of Oluba, unsullied by the trappings of civilization, teapots do not abound, and it is unlikely that Watonobe has seen one, unless Ireneus has brought it with him.

Although readers, upon turning the last page of *Inspecting the Vaults*, may identify most closely with the former world champion whaler, da Costa, in "Lusawort's Meditation," ("He kept his eyes lidded as much es he could and wore dark glasses to blunt the sharpness of the images: 'Seem, Iiohn Hulus, the light harpoons my eyes'"), they will undoubtedly acknowledge the power of the images and respect the writer able to confront them without flinching. I" fact, precisely because of McCormack's ability to convey the energy generated in the dark, the question arises: can we afford not to inspect the vaults? □

## REVIEW

### The plot thickens

By Jack Batten

*Equinox*, by Kurt Maxwell. Random House, 286 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 394 22004 8).

THIS BOOK IS ONE of those thrillers that has a plot with twists and turns and other spins that defy eve" brief description. But, what the heck, let me try to offer a condensed version of what goes 0" in *Equinox*.

For starters, there's this fellow named Helm who's a kind of senior guru to the Green Party in Germany, which is where all the action takes place. Helm gets kidnapped by a bunch of terrorists headed up by a fiendish Lebanese. Various collections of good and bad guys set out to find and rescue Helm. One of them is Fontana. He lives in Montreal and does piece work for the CIA under some sort of blackmail, but years earlier he served with Helm in the German army during the Second World War. Fontana and Helm were nice Germans who didn't like Hitler.

What Fontana doesn't know is that his teenage granddaughter, Gaby, is one of the terrorists. She joined their lot because her father, Schott, who is Fontana's son-in-law, is the chief of the Green Party, a circumstance that's kept him too busy to give his daughter enough loving. What about Gaby's mother? She's apparently dead, but "ever mind that for now.

Anyway, another guy on the Helm case is Wolfe, who's a ruthless CIA boss. He's particularly antsy because he knows that the kidnapped Helm has in his possession documents showing all the U.S. missile bases in Germany. Helm got them from Stolz, who's a big-shot civil servant and another pal from the old days in the German army. Wolfe knows about the documents, but the fiendish Lebanese and the other terrorists aren't yet aware of them. Neither is Stark. He's the local police sleuth who's busy tracking Helm and the terrorists and trying to figure out Fontana's role in everything and wishing that Wolfe would go away.

Wolfe won't. The" Stolz turns up murdered. He's the civil servant, you remember, the one who passed on the secret missile documents to Helm. Who killed Stolz? Who knows? And then Wolfe breaks the news to Fontana that Gaby's mother who is Fontana's daughter isn't dead after all. She's in an East German prison. This is good news to Fontana because he's never laid eyes on his own daughter. The reason is that, years earlier . . . well, forget that. Too confusing.

Schott is also murdered. He's Gaby's father and Fontana's son-in-law and the husband of the woman who he doesn't know is alive in the East German prison. He's done in by the fiendish Lebanese. No, wait a sec, it's Rossi who bumps off Schott. Rossi is Gaby's lover. Make that pretend lover. He wooed Gaby just to get her in the terrorist outfit. Fontana spotted Rossi for a fishy customer from the start. But he thought Rossi was probably a Wolfe operative.

Anyway, once Stolz and Schott are out of the way and Stark gets his hands on Gaby . . . but I'm getting ahead of things. Let's go back to the terrorists when they're hiding out with Helm in this rotten old barge. What happens is . . .

On second thought, I don't think I'll bother trying to explain the plot. I can't deal with it. But I can deal with Kurt Maxwell's prose style. It's terrible. He writes sentences like this: "He moved into the bathroom and performed his morning toilet in a hurry." What does that mean? The guy had a quick slash and a quicker shower? Maxwell writes as badly es Robert Ludlum and all the other popular thriller authors, and like them he has a secret of success. It is that, for all his and their awful prose, they keep their stories barrelling along. And once you

pick up *Equinox*, you'll want to finish it just to find out what happens in the end to Fontana and Stark and Wolfe and the woman over in the East German prison.

Still, there's one item for which Kurt Maxwell cannot be excused. He has given one of his characters, a particularly oafish CIA agent, the name of Jack Teagarden. Don't Maxwell and his editors know who the real Jack Teagarden was? Don't they realize they have insulted thousands of music lovers by naming an unsavoury fictional person after perhaps the most marvellous trombone player who ever lived? Unforgivable. □

## REVIEW

### Through a lens darkly

By Douglas Malcolm

*Contact Prints*, by Philip Kreiner, Doubleday, 233 pages, \$19.93 cloth (ISBN 0 385 2.5102 5).

AFTER READING *contact Prints I had no trouble understanding why the recent conference on aboriginal self-government collapsed. "You'd have to stay forever before I'd believe you," a native character warns the white narrator, "and even then I wouldn't trust you." Contact Prints is based on Philip Kreiner's four years of teaching in Fort George (in the novel it's renamed Port Henrietta-Maria), a Cree village on the Quebec side of James Bay. As a report on the two solitudes of the Canadian north, it succeeds admirably, but its impact is diminished by Kreiner's puzzling method of narration.*

Joe, the book's hero, is a sort of hyperborean version of Isherwood's famous "I am a camera" narrator. All the reader learns of his past is that he has just returned to Canada in desperate need of work after spending several years in Jamaica. When a job teaching English, grades nine to 11, in Fort Henrietta-Maria comes open, Joe leaps at it. What he didn't realize is that "it meant going abroad again. And in my own country at that." The foreign land he describes is one in which the native people have been reduced to a state of near servitude by white technology. The nature of the relationship is symbolized throughout the novel by the imminent relocation of the village to make way for the HM2 dam, part of the James Bay Iiydm Project, which is about to go into operation.

Despite white domination, most of Joe's fellow teachers live as though

they're prisoners in a Canadian gulag. Apart from teaching, they hold endless rounds of dinner parties, browse dally through the limited wares of the Hudson's Bay Company and sleep to help pass the time. It's not surprising, then, that isolation has distorted the personalities of most of them. The cast of eccentrics includes Joe's room-mate, Lucien, who breaks into his bedroom and watches him sleep for companionship, and Iris Biic, who as the India princess Wii Beaver has supplemented her income by creating ersatz Indian masks for collectors of native art. Her hoodwinking of two German journalists from *Stem* magazine is one of the book's highlights.

The native people in *Contact Prints* are completely at home in the northern world of ice and snow, but the white man's inexplicable society has left them bewildered and embittered. Carrying little cultural baggage of his own, Joe readily makes friends with Pauloesie, a Inuit who is as much a "outsider in the Cree village as himself, and Simon Blueboy, a clerk at the Bay. As a result of the latter friendship, Joe is allowed the rare privilege of going into the bush with Simon and his family. Kreiner skillfully sketches the rough-house camaraderie that develops between Joe and Simon, but there will always be a barrier between them — a point that is driven home when they are denied entry to the dam compound because Simon is an Indian.

Although *Contact Prints* is founded on Kreiner's own experience, there is scant evidence of it. He has unwisely decided to make Joe a *tabula rasa* upon whom supposedly fresh images of the north are recorded. The role is represented, a little heavily-handedly, by his hobby of photography. The novel's title refers to photos marred by the unexpected intrusion of reality that Joe leaves in the contact print stage, and the chapters are arranged like a series of contact prints documenting Joe's surroundings.

The novel that evolves through this curious narrative mode is very much like a snapshot crisply in focus on the periphery but badly blurred at the centre where its main subject is. Why Joe is so obsessed with taking pictures is "ever revealed. His lack of motivation ruins the



climactic scene in which he endangers Pauloesie and himself for no other reason than to take a photo. The neutrality of his personality also trivializes moments of supposed profundity, such as his embarrassment over the dam incident.

*Contact Prints* is Kreiner's third book. *People Like Us in a Place Like This* also

deals with cultural battles in the Canadian north and *Heartlands* pursues a similar theme in Jamaica. One can't help feeling that Kreiner's fiction would benefit if he lowered his sights a little and allowed "lore of himself to emerge. There is no doubt he is a talented writer. His descriptions of Joe's separate hunting expeditions with Simon and Pauloesie are especially memorable. Perhaps it will just be a matter of time before he finds his true voice. □

## REVIEW

### Bad trip

By Greg Gormick

*Whistlestop: A Journey Across Canada*, by George Galt, Methuen, 240 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0438 80510 6).

SINCE THE FEDERAL government killed off a fifth of Canada's passenger trains in 1981, writers have hovered over the rail passenger system like buzzards circling an old, dying steer. With *Whistlestop*, George Galt becomes the latest addition to the flock.

Like those writers who have ghoulishly gone before him, Galt seems intent on picking the bones of the passenger train before it fades into memory, as if that's a foregone conclusion. As well, he assumes that every Canadian religiously adheres to the idea that this country was built around the railways. It happens to be so, but some illustration of the fact would be nice. Neither *Whistlestop* nor those books that preceded it have really done this. Why are those trains still running? Why do Canadians have such a "affection for them? What does the functioning of the railways tell us about Canada's past and its future? No answers are given.

In truth, I came away from *Whistlestop* with more questions than answers. Is it a travel book? Is it a historical or reference work? Is it intended for the consumption of railway buffs? I still don't know.

It's hardly a travel book. Galt does meander by train from Cape Breton to Vancouver Island, but his fascination with trivial details fails to present a well-rounded portrait of any of the regions or communities through which he passes. Instead, we get a seemingly endless list of fleabag motels and greasy restaurants that will certainly not make this book a favourite of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada.

Sydney, N.S., is notable for its "shabby sidewalks" and he can find no reason to spend time there. Someone he

meets in Halifax tells him, "You don't want to go to Yarmouth," so he doesn't. Winnipeg is memorable for its Chinatown — "an agglomeration of low, run-down buildings" — and the plethora of "poorly dressed Indians." Regina he had imagined would be "a morally neater place. . . . But the neatness I had imagined was a" abstraction gleaned from reading. . . ."

New Brunswick's Reversing Falls is dismissed as "a dubious tourist attraction, it reminded me of a backed-up toilet." And cities such as Timmins, Edmonton, and Prince Rupert fare just as poorly in Galt's opinion. His descriptions are not just depressing but frequently condescending and tainted with the faint aroma of central-Canadian superiority. He records a conversation overheard on the Sydney-Halifax train, in which a child asks her mother the purpose of the causeway across the Strait of Canso: "It joins Nova Scotia and Cape Breton," answered her mother. . . . "Galt then miraculously deduces that the woman was apparently of the belief that "the mainland had been done a favour."

What's more. Galt seems to have derived little or no pleasure from his fellow passengers. If we are to believe him, the average Canadian passenger train conveys inebriated Newfoundlanders, bitter senior citizens, failed businessmen and women who have consumed too much VIA beer and are ready to make a pass at the author.

Nor can *Whistlestop* be described as a reference or historical work. Fragments of history pop up occasionally, but they are usually tempered by Galt's cynical and erratic view of Canada's past. He makes note of the unfair expulsion of the Acadians by the British — who wanted their rich agricultural land — but then ventures that a Jewish politician he once knew "didn't look Jewish." Comments such as this, peppered throughout, the book, don't forge any sense of camaraderie between the author and this reader. These also make many of his views, historical or otherwise, much harder to take.

In fairness, Galt has demonstrated himself to be a writer with a sincere interest in Canada's history in his many articles for magazines such as *Saturday Night* and *Canadian Geographic*. It's a pity that his previously demonstrated affection for history doesn't surface in *Whistlestop*.

There are inaccuracies, too. He calls the Dominion Atlantic Railway the "Dominion and Atlantic" and he notes that Windsor Station's arrival and departure boards are gone — they were there when I visited Montreal last week. Minor points, perhaps, but enough to cause one to wonder about other statements.

Obviously this is not a book for railway

buffs. There is precious little detail about the trains that convey Galt across the country. A few quotes from a 1937 Canadian Pacific brochure is his apparent nod to the vast treasure trove of historical and technical information in repositories such as the Canadian Pacific Corporate Archives, which he acknowledges he visited. And though no one would honestly suggest that VIA is anyone's idea of a perfect public transportation system, Galt's distaste for current passenger trains has been allowed to overshadow the spectacular scenes that are laid out before rail passengers, even on the most decrepit train. The rugged beauty of the north shore of Lake Superior completely escapes him, and the Rockies get a quick once-over.

I can only assume that *Whistlestop* is intended to be a Canadian equivalent of Paul Theroux's *The Great Railway Bazaar* or *The Old Patagonian Express*. Unfortunately, none of the wit, charm, and adventure in the recollections of Theroux's wanderings are to be found here.

Galt asks rhetorically, "Was Canada really so -t and dull?" If I had only *Whistlestop* as a reference, I'd be compelled to say yea. Thankfully, 20 years of transcontinental train trips allow me to think differently. □

## REVIEW

### Style and substance

By Gary Draper

The *Family Romance*, by Eli Mandel, Turnstone Press, 259 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88801 103 2).

LIKE THE CRITICAL essays that follow it, the preface to this book engages the reader at once, and makes him want to read on. Eli Mandel is known, of course, as a critic, a teacher, and a poet; it is surely a teacher's ploy to lead the reader on with a series of apparently contradictory claims and disclaimers for the work that is to come. *The Family Romance*, he says, "proposes a" account of tradition in Canadian history." It offers a "theory of literary history." Large claims, one might suppose, for a collection of book reviews, conference papers, and critical essays. But the disclaimers are even larger. The method, their author says, "suffers from randomness and incoherence." Certain arguments, passages, and authors are "returned to with a" almost maddening insistence." Mandel apologizes for the evident colonialism of a" approach that

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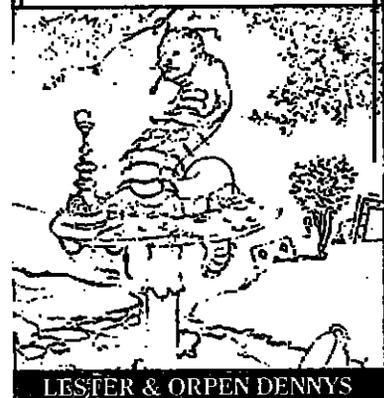
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"finds its origins in non-Canadian sources; and for proposing a literary theory "unequivocally male in its bias."

Virtually everything in this book has appeared elsewhere, from the *New Delhi Literary Half Yearly* to the book-review pages of the *Globe and Mail*. Some of its strengths, and its most obvious weakness, come from the diversity of sources and purposes knocking against each other. But its strengths are many and various, some of them, in fact, are the very weaknesses for which Mandel apologizes. Besides, the book is in some ways more coherent than Mandel's modesty allows. It is organized in three parts. "Origins," "Writers," and "Writing." In practice there is a good deal of interrelationship among the three, though the central section consists largely of essays concentrating on individual writers. But more than this structure, the book is held together by the obsessions to which Mandel alludes in his preface.

It is held together, in other words, by his concern for such matters as the Holocaust, the Canadian long poem, the verbal paradoxes he calls "strange loops," by the writers he returns to, Robert Kroetsch and Christopher Dewdney and Michael Ondaatje among them, and perhaps above all by the idea of the family romance, the notion that he borrows from Freud that as children we all retell our family history, making ourselves out to be the descendants of royalty, and not of the everyday people who are posing as our parents. The idea is more broadly put in a quotation Mandel borrows from Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*: "You can only read history backwards, you start from last things first."

The book is built, in part, on oppositions: academic vs. popular. U.S. "West" vs. Canadian "Region." As I said, in the preface Mandel speaks somewhat anxiously about his dependence on non-Canadian sources. His critical context includes, among much more, Aristotle, Freud, Harold Bloom, Elie Wiesel, and George Steiner. The final essay in the collection, unlikely as it may seem, is an essay on Van Gogh entitled "Modernism and Impossibility: What are the options? Canadian literature may be put in its own little corner for its own special supper, or it may come to the table with the rest of the world. Mandel's approach depends on the belief that Canadian culture is of sufficient interest and variety that the strong sunshine of Van Gogh's canvas is capable of shedding light on it without causing it to wither away. This is not colonialism. The real danger to Canadian culture lies in the failure to bring the world's best lights to bear on it. The real danger is provincialism: not too much light but too little air.

The quality of Mandel's criticism is uniformly high. He reads with insight and sympathy, and he writes clearly and vividly. He grinds no particular literary axe, speaks for no school but the school of intelligent inquiry. The range of his reading and his sympathy is admirable. This is not to say that he indiscriminately praises all he surveys. While he remarks on "the



subtlety and power of [George] Grant's argument" in *Lament for a Nation*, he goes on to point out the philosopher's inflexibility and his "harsh, unyielding, uncharitable judgements," and dismisses one of Grant's comments as "not worthy of serious intellectual discourse." A sympathetic critic, perhaps, but no Pollyanna.

One major benefit of reading Mandel is that the reader feels so frequently the desire to return to familiar writers and to turn to those who are new and unknown, or overlooked. Another is that the writer actively engages the reader in critical discourse. Mandel's opinions are almost invariably interesting, and they often encourage response. This is as it should be in the familiar essay. The case is put, and the reader is free to agree or not. Mandel stimulates; he never insists or bullies.

These essays are personal in two ways. First, the voice itself in this collection is sometimes distinctively first-person, though never obtrusively or obnoxiously so. This is most apparent, naturally, in a paper such as "Academic and Popular," which was initially delivered before an audience:

Not that I haven't spoken to conferences of this sort before. It has become, unfortunately I suppose, a kind of habit, a nervous tic: there I am once again telling the same old stories about Cohen. Atwood, Ondaatje, Layton. Canadian writing and the disastrous state of modern culture.

Those essays that were first published in scholarly journals are less personal in tone, but the voice is no less distinctive, and it no less plainly embodies the characteristic habits of mind and expression of the author.

The other reason that the author's very human self shines so clearly in this collection is that Mandel explores his own past and his own writing in several key essays. In the book's opening essay, "Auschwitz and Poetry," he gives an account of his own confrontation with the Holocaust, and recounts the writing of his poem "On the 25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz Memorial Services, Toronto, January 25, 1970." The book's penultimate essay, "The Long Poem: Journal and Origin," combines notes on a 1984 conference on the Cana-

dian long poem, notes on a 1985 trip to the Soviet Union, and Mandel's own poetry. It is not the sort of essay you expect in such a collection. Let me take that back. It is not the sort of essay you expect in most collections of critical essays. It is essays like this one that make this such an exceptional collection.

The major weakness of *The Family Romance* is that too often a book review included here remains just a book review. One of the essays that first appeared as the preface to a book is still just the preface to that book. These pieces don't pick up the resonance of the entire collection, and the reader finds himself asking what they're doing here. But these are the exceptions. Most of the essays benefit from their mutual proximity.

Taken as a whole, does the collection provide, as Mandel suggests, a theory of literary history for Canada? I think the answer is a qualified yes. The *Family Romance* is an important book. Its approach is fragmentary and partial and biased and personal. But it is also extremely persuasive, and it opens up the territory in a new and useful way. □

## REVIEW

# Minding their q's and a's

By Alan Twigg

Speaking for Myself: Canadian Writers in Interview, by Andrew Garrod, Breakwater, 297 pages, \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 920911 10 2).

THIS WELCOME BOOK contains interviews about fiction writing with eight writers associated with the Maritimes — Elizabeth Brewster, Robert Gibbs, Susan Kerslake, Alistair MacLeod, Kevin Major, Al Pittman, David Adams Richards, and Kent Thompson — as well as six others: Trinidad-born Neil Bissoondath, Métis author and publisher Beatrice Culleton, Joy Kogawa, Carol Shields, Guy Vanderhaeghe, and Sandra Birdsell. "Factors in their selection," writes Andrew Garrod, "were my personal admiration for their achievements, and the authors' relative lack of exposure in the media." Tea of the 14 have published three or fewer works of adult fiction. Garrod hoped largely unheralded authors would be "genuinely open and less prone to already rehearsed responses."

This premise did not preclude the interviewer from asking already rehearsed questions. AU but two of the interviews open the same way (What are your career

highlights?) and numerous other questions are consistently used. With the remarkable exception of Joy Kogawa's discussion of philosophy, these interviews primarily dissect narrative technicalities and characterizations. (If one has not read the particular novels or stories being discussed, one frequently cannot appreciate the finer points of the conversations.)

Humour, intimate revelations, and frictions are rare. As an academic rather than a journalist, Garrod seems disinclined to invade privacy to expose personality. Clearly "the work" is what's important to bl. bow and why it's done. (Only David Adams Richards's interview isn't prefaced by a sample reproduction of a manuscript page.) This mature approach will be most useful for would-be writers.

As the book's highlight, Garrod's talk with Kogawa captures the intellectual synchronization and creativity of a superior interview. Both are "preacher's kids" and their mutual concerns shine. "As a very small child," says Kogawa, "I prayed every night to know the truth. By 'truth' I think I meant 'suffering.' I desperately wanted to know about suffering. It seemed so awful. Knowing about it would have been a way of controlling it in some way. Not knowing seemed very dangerous. ... Somehow the way to a better world seems to require joining with suffering, not cutting oneself off from it."

Also particularly impressive are Alistair MacLeod, Kent Thompson, and David Adams Richards. Perhaps the book's nicest moment comes from Thompson's recalling his career highlight: a kiss from Alice Munro after a reading of his short story. "Shotgun." "I was deeply touched. In Canada it's rare for anybody to make any money, so the respect of people you admire is what you want most of all, and for Alice to do that was tremendous. I thought, 'Well, I peaked. What else is there to do?'"

One of this book's less obvious strengths is the author's ability to summarize each writer's chief concerns in succinct introductions. Of Carol Shields, for instance, we're told:

Marriage-its imitations, compromises, secrets and rewards — is her focus. Shields probes into the intellectual as well as domestic life of women with keen insight. she has a fine eye for detail, an excellent ear for authentic dialogue and captures convincingly the dynamics of social gatherings — the genuine connections and numerous hypocrisies.

Speaking for Myself also contains a bibliography of the writers' works and pen-and-ink drawings of seven authors by Clemente Orozco.

Interviewing is a craft requiring practice. The same can be said for being inter-

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viewed. With few tricks of the trade up his professor's sleeve beyond the occasional use of flattery, Garrod's sober approach, to so many novice interviewees, has produced a worthwhile collection of interviews built upon research, sincerity, and intelligence. Nobody falls in love. Nobody finds God. But we're much the wiser for it, particularly those of us west of the Maritimes. □

## REVIEW

# Beyond survival

By Jack MacLeod

The *Solitary Outlaw*, by B.W. Powe, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 208 pages, \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88619 141 6).

WHAT A PLEASURE it is when a "promising" writer breaks through and fulfils that promise, in spades. This is a breakthrough book. Timothy Findley once said that conversation with some people is "dangerous" because you don't know what you or he might say next; there may be flying leaps into the unknown. B.W. Powe is a dangerous thinker. He writes like a lion tamer working the animals with chair and whip. He pushes the reader into new and startling spaces in exciting and disturbing ways.

In 1984 Powe published *A Climate Charged*, a collection of essays on literary criticism that drew raves from the critics. With spare, compressed prose and a biting edge of intelligence, he grappled with Layton, Cohen, Laurence, Atwood, Davies, Richler and CanLit in general, as well as Frye (whom he seems to be reacting against excessively) and McLuhan (whom he is crusading to resurrect). It was a powerful book. Many wondered what he could do for an encore. *The Solitary Outlaw* is that encore, and it is dazzling.

Here he addresses P. Wyndham Lewis, Marshall McLuhan, Pierre Trudeau, Glenn Gould, and Bliss Canetti, five men who stand outside the laws of conventional mass culture. All are Canadian except Canetti, author of *The Blind and Crowds and Power*. All are "the children of electricity," "liters of the post-literate age. Each "wanted to deal urgently with the implication of mass society for books, music, politics, culture, and the individual thinking itself." The underlying theme is language.

In *A Climate Charged*, Powe wrote: "We are in a real sense losing our minds. For when we lose words, we begin to lose

our minds." *The Solitary Outlaw* returns to "the power, passion and accountability of words."

If it is easy and tempting to dismiss a concern with electronic media as egghead paranoia, consider the din of advertisia, the seductive Muzak in the supermarket, the tribal acoustic field of the political convention; walk into your teenager's bedroom and estimate the comparative hours and dollars spent on records vs. books.

Powe insists that we encounter the "post-literate" when

... there is a decline in the sense of a reader, a public becomes a market to be guided and sold; patronage for publishing is necessary through government, university, and corporate sponsorship; intellectual salons become faculty clubs; a text becomes furniture ("the coffee-table book") or a floppy disk; post-literacy is the condition of publishers, editors and even writers themselves; and serious writing seems to become an underground manuscript culture. Distribution, high printing costs, the lack of comprehensive education: these control what a writer can say or do. In North America, an author who pursues the market can publish almost anything and his message will be trivialized by the sensationalist media, the TV twist. This is the signal of the message: "You may say what you want, but nothing means anything."

The result is the Childish-mass, the Peter Pans who "ever think, struggle or grow up. doctrinaire dilettantism, the romance of extremism, the diminishing of the word. Powe quotes Lewis as declaiming that what every artist should try to prevent is "... the exhibitionist extremist promoter driving the whole bag of tricks [civilization] into a nihilistic nothingness or zero."

Paced with "the death of the human enlightenment and the triumph of Mass Man," Powe exhorts us to cherish the outlaws, to follow the example of Glenn Gould who wrote of "the men who makes richer his own time by not being of it, who speaks for all generations by being of none. It is the ultimate argument of individuality - an argument that man can create his own synthesis of time without being bound by the conformities that time exposes." (Italics Powe's). We are urged to share the concern of McLuhan and Canetti with "present configurations of power, mass society, language, and change. Both considered what to do with the literate power at their command: how to find an audience. 'Literature as a profession is destructive,' Canetti says, 'one should fear words more.'"

Powe, Pow. Goad us to resist mass culture, he writes like a shrill burglar alarm in defence of The Word, prodding us to "intellectual combat" to protect "a dream of reason." *The Solitary Outlaw*

swoops and darts. probes, makes remarkable connections. The message is McLuhanesque, but Powe is such a tough, wised, incisive writer that, like a major political leader or a star baseball player, he does not remind you of anyone else; he stakes out his own turf with a confident and commanding presence. These pages crackle with anger, brilliance, energy, authority, and a sweeping range of vision. For Powe, the question is not the survival of the national culture but the survival of culture at all. This is a wild and haunting book, probably the most important of the year, and certain to establish Powe as the most controversial and compelling figure among young Canadian writers. □

## REVIEW

# As for us and our houses

By Larry Pfaff

*The Buildings of Samuel Maclure: In Search of Appropriate Form*, by Martin Segger, Sono Nis, illustrated, 274 pages, \$39.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919203 76 0).

*Robson Square*, by Ann Rosenberg. *Capilano Review*, Number 40, 1986, 128 pages, \$7.00 paper (ISSN 0315 3754).

*Toronto Observed: Its Architecture, Patrons, and History*, by William Dendy and William Kilbourn, Oxford, illustrated, 327 pages, \$85.00 cloth (ISBN 0 19 54058 0).

*Victorian Architecture in London and Southwestern Ontario: Symbols of Aspiration*, by Nancy Z. Tausky and Lynne D. DiStefano, University of Toronto Press, illustrated, \$84.95 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 5698 9).

SAMUEL MACLURE, the most prominent domestic architect in British Columbia during the first quarter of this century, popularized large Tudor-revival houses to such an extent that they became the hallmark of Victoria. As a watercolourist who enjoyed painting the landscape, Maclure sought to design his houses so that they were compatible with the B.C. terrain and to site them to take maximum advantage of its superb views of mountain and sea. The marvellous two-storey halls (dubbed the "Maclure hall") of these great houses with their massive staircases and elaborate detailing in native woods were open living areas and often formed the setting for elegant entertaining.

Many of Maclure's buildings survive and from the wealth of illustrations in

Martin Segger's monograph *The Buildings of Samuel Maclure* they are extraordinarily well documented. The photographs (many of them of interiors) are generally of good quality; those by Dane Campbell are, without exception,

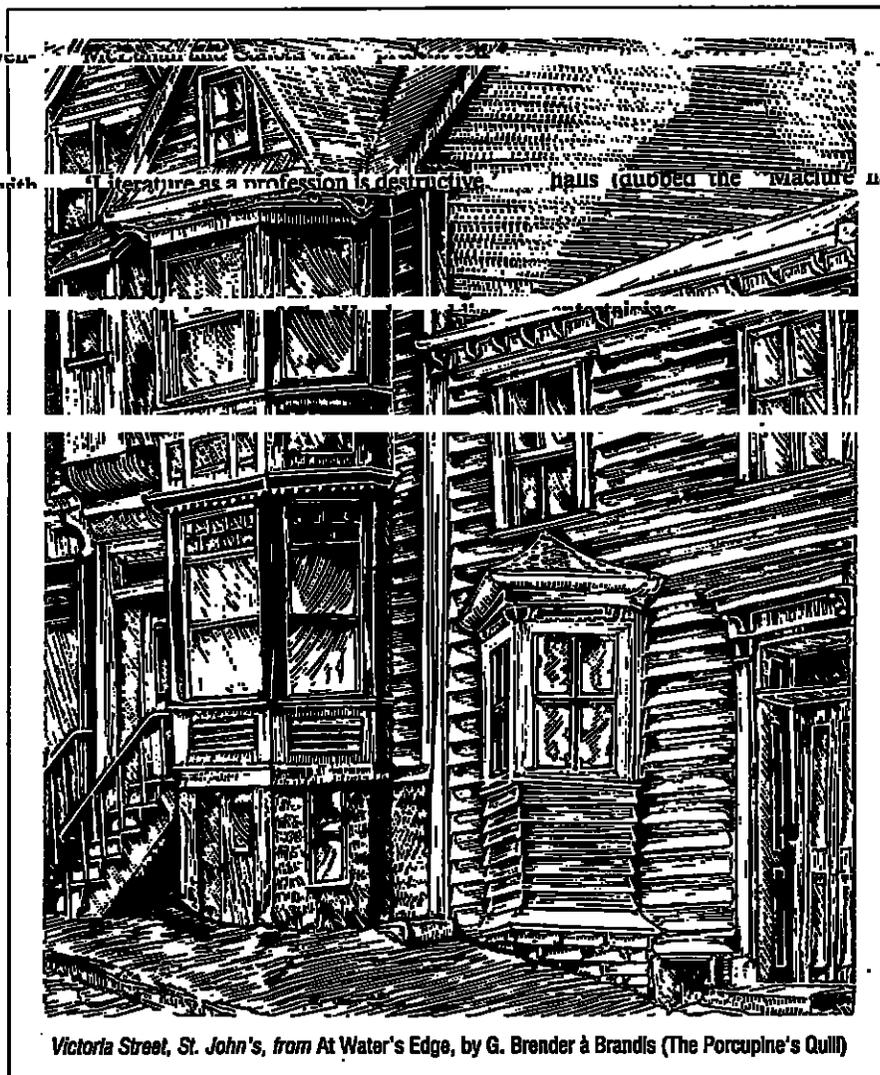
numbered and consequently "float" without specific links to the text. Moreover if the date of the photograph had appeared in the caption along with the date of construction, the illustrations would have been even more telling.

Maclure was a major artist, and Segger's monograph, complete with detailed descriptions of most of his works to which is appended a complete list of the architect's designs and commissions, is a definitive study.

Just as important to Canada's architectural history as monographs on individual architects and cities are studies of smaller, cohesive architectural units like Robson Square in Vancouver, the subject of an entire issue of the *Capilano Review* written by Ann Rosenberg. Unfortunately neither the author nor the editor seems to have clearly determined the readership for which the book is aimed, and the publication is confusingly organized. It is not until page 87 that the purpose is stated, that is, to describe three building schemes that were carried out in two major structures in Robson Square. The building history of the Old Courthouse (designed by Francis Rattenbury), the new law courts (Arthur Erickson), and the conversion of the Old Courthouse into the Vancouver Art Gallery (Arthur Erickson) is described with special emphasis on a significant structural aspect of each (dome, glass roof, rotunda respectively).

However, the technical detail — for example, in the description of the glass for the magnificent glass roof — is so specialized as to be meaningless to the general reader. More serious, although the source of the photographic images is identified, the subject of the image is not. Since the text does not refer to specific photographs, it is not always possible to see the relationship between the words and illustrations. This makes the essay in which the reader is taken "visually and verbally on a walk through the square" even more confusing. Despite a wealth of detail, this text needed editing and a better design in order to be worthy of its spectacular subject.

It is a commonplace that heritage legislation in Ontario is woefully inadequate. William Dendy's first book *Lost Toronto* (Oxford, 1978) is a history of architectural treasures that have been lost. Unfortunately the 77 buildings of architectural and historic significance described eight years later in the complementary volume *Toronto Observed* are no safer



Victoria Street, St. John's, from *At Water's Edge*, by G. Brender à Brandis (The Porcupine's Quill)

from alteration or demolition. Dendy and his co-author, William Kilbourn, are convinced of the humanizing influence and shaping power of fine buildings and streetscapes, and they hope that *Toronto Observed* will be both "comfort and weaponry" to those who wish to preserve or enhance elements of the city's past.

The bulk of the book — relieved by Kilbourn's introductory essays for the individual periods of Toronto's history — consists of Dendy's excellent but densely written accounts of each building. He describes exteriors and interiors (his account of the internal decoration scheme of St. Anne's Church under the supervision of J.E.H. MacDonald is the best that I know), the relationship of a structure to its street, patrons (Vincent Massey becomes a sympathetic figure), and architects, and particularly the interchange between the two (he describes the celebrated exchange between Head and Cumberland over the style of University College). His verdicts on the qualities of the buildings he admires most are enthusiastic, on unworthy additions devastating; in short, his entries are rich,

absorbing, and a delight to read.

The frontal shots of buildings, probably a necessity in a constricted urban space, do not seem very satisfying, although they do provide for easy viewing of details of façades. The one photograph that is unsatisfactory is that of Holy Trinity Church, in which the façade is largely obscured by shadow. Good architectural photography, however, is notoriously difficult and these are minor flaws in what is otherwise an excellent book.

One of the jewels of the remarkable regional collection of the University of Western Ontario library is a collection of hundreds of drawings, specifications, and daybooks of a succession of architectural partnerships founded by William Robinson in London, Ont., in 1857. Most of the important public buildings, churches, and domestic residences in London (and many in the surrounding area) were designed by Robinson and his successors, Thomas H. Tracy and George F. Durrand, and John M. Moore. Descriptions of some of the finest of these still extant are given in a leisurely and lively manner

in the second half of Nancy Tausky and Lynne DiStefano's remarkable book, *Victorian Architecture in London and Southwestern Ontario*.

The first half contains a notable discussion of the role of architect in Victorian Canada: in the 1850s civil engineers and land surveyors — to say nothing of builders — functioned as architects; as the century advanced architects became professionals in their own right. In addition, the authors examine in detail the personal libraries of these London architects as a source for their designs. Anyone interested in the history of building in the area will also be grateful for their discussion of the principal local suppliers of building materials, especially new ones like wrought iron and plate glass.

The photographs by Ian MacEachern are matchless: particularly memorable are his depiction of the desolate Palmyra Baptist Church in a winter landscape and of the bell-tote of the Guthrie Presbyterian Church in Melbourne. His contemporary photographs of buildings are juxtaposed with corresponding plans — to mention just one of many aspects of the book's excellent design. MacEachern is a worthy descendant of John Kyle O'Connor, a photographer flourishing in the 1870s, three of whose photographs are also included. One has only to see his view of Richmond Street to know, quite simply and sadly, that Londoners of a century ago had a more beautiful city in which to live than those of today. □

## REVIEW

### Oral dilemmas

By Matthew Behrens

Ted Trindell, *Métis Witness* to the North, by Jean Morisset and Rose-Marie Pelletier, Pulp Press. 168 pages, \$10.95 paper (ISBN 0 88978 177 X).

The *Immigrant Years: From Europe to Canada, 1945-1967*, by Barry Broadfoot, Douglas & McIntyre, 255 pages, \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88894 519 1).

WRITING AN ORAL history is deceptively easy. Anyone with a tape recorder and the patience to transcribe could be an oral historian. But even for those who are acknowledged masters at it, there is nonetheless a drawback to the genre. In a traditional sense, an oral history is meant to be heard: a fair portion of the language, the nuance of the spoken word, is often lost when placed on paper.

Native peoples have always recognized

the value of oral history, and as a result stories and the traditional ways were always passed on through conversation. But in the case of the Morisset/Pelletier work, most disappointing is the lost potential in securing what could have been a truly historic document. Given the background of the late Métis wanderer Ted Trindell, whose odyssey in the Canadian North recalls the anecdotes of Little Big Man, this should have been a compelling study.

Instead, Trindell's taped recollections are best summed up by one of the chapter headings: "My Life: It's a Routine Affair." This work feels like a lengthy article stretched far too thin in an attempt to justify itself as a book. Though being in the presence of such a human being was no doubt inspiring, none of that wonder rubs off on the final product.

The production values here also reflect



a great lack of care. Stray sentences suddenly appear and Trindell's name is misspelled on the back cover.

Barry Broadfoot fares a bit better but, as he should know from experience, certain oral histories belong anywhere but in book form. Broadfoot's *Ten Lost Years*, a document on the Canadian experience of the Depression, did quite well when it was translated to the stage. Perhaps his latest hook, a recounting of post-Second-World-War immigrant experiences, would be more interesting in another medium as well.

The book is divided into eight sections dealing with various post-war phenomena, including war brides, language barriers, job problems, and discrimination. Some of the accounts dance with the qualities that make for good short stories and others would make for good articles, but too many of the tales suffer from pointless rambling. In face-to-face conversation, such diversions can prove annoying; on paper, they are simply boring.

Broadfoot also proves himself terribly clumsy in his attempts to make pithy pronouncements at the beginning of each new section. Given the current hostility toward refugees and Canada's closed-door policy, I wondered where he came up with the assertion that Canada "was not the nation we know now (*vis-à-vis* racism) and "the blatant discrimination that had plagued the first arrivals was ending."

The material in both of these books forms only the skeletal outlines for what could have been far more engaging and important works. Their broad claims to reflect the unique Canadian experience fall far too short. □

## REVIEW

### Tainted victory

By Laurel Boone

Legacy of Valour: The Canadians at Passchendaele, by Daniel Dancocks, Hurlig, illustrated, 289 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88830 305 X).

IT IS A truism today that during the First World War hundreds of thousands of soldiers were sent to certain death by commanding officers who neither knew nor cared about the situation at the front. Daniel Dancocks's analysis of just one part of that war, the Second Battle of Passchendaele, shows that this belief arises not from what actually happened but from a propaganda campaign designed by Prime Minister David Lloyd George to enhance his own image in the eyes of the British public. Dancocks also disproves the myth recycled each Remembrance Day that the Canadian soldiers who fell at Passchendaele, their heroism notwithstanding, wasted their lives in a gruesome battle for a useless ridge that the British promptly abandoned.

Second Passchendaele was actually the hideous finale of the Third Battle of Ypres, a series of eight engagements fought in Flanders between July 31 and November 14, 1917. It was clear to Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, the commander of the British expeditionary force, that the war had to be fought and won in Flanders, where the German forces were concentrated. Dancocks forcefully articulates simple truths obvious to Haig but eluding Lloyd George: in war soldiers die, and the larger the armies, the more men who die on both sides. In Flanders the armies tearing at each other were gigantic, and so were the casualty lists reaching England. Politically, Lloyd George could not tolerate such losses. Knowing nothing about war and ignoring those who tried to advise him, he insisted that the Flanders campaign should be abandoned in favour of attacks on the fringes of the Kaiser's sphere of influence, where, military strategists knew, little damage could be inflicted on the Germans.

Lloyd George further endangered and demoralized the country by declaring that the long casualty lists proved Haig's incompetence, and he manipulated the war cabinet into sabotaging Haig's requests for replacement troops, guns, ammunition, and supplies. To make matters worse, Haig himself was uncommunicative and politically naïve.

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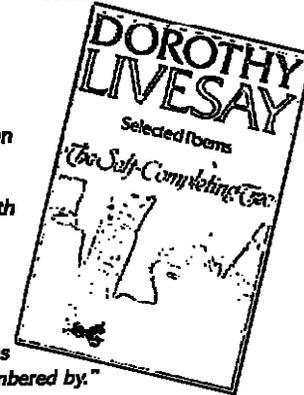
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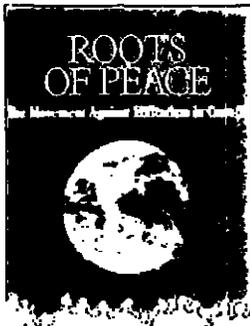
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Chronically unable to say what he meant, he made public statements so terse and garbled that his aides constantly had to interpret them. The prime minister did not hide his search for a more compatible commander.

Dancocks sets Second Passchendaele into this context. He shows how vital the capture of the area was to the final victory — and how accurately Haig, relying on reports by subordinates and, above all, on his own observation, had assessed the situation. He explains how and why the Canadians, commended by Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie, came to be in the forefront at Second Passchendaele, and he narrates the battle itself, in all its stages. His maps and descriptions make clear what the goals of each phase of the battle were and why; how Currie and his subordinates planned to reach those goals; the disposition of troops and their attempts to carry out Currie's plans; the outcome of each engagement; and the consequences for that battle and the war. This unvarnished review of the records acts as an emotional counterbalance to the pity and horror evoked by the survivors' descriptions of the hellish battles and the romantic patriotism aroused by the accounts of the Canadians' matter-of-fact heroism.

When the Canadian troops finally fought their way through the loathsome quagmire and captured the almost-imperceptibly higher ground near Passchendaele, they saw its value — the land on the German side of it sloped toward the English Channel, enabling its holders to oversee their own and the enemy's ports. Furthermore, German records show how decisively their losses depleted the strength and morale of the German troops.

But, six months later, knowing that the Germans were about to throw all their remaining strength into a huge retaliatory attack, Haig commanded the troops to hold Passchendaele to retreat because of their exposed position in a "bulge." By straightening out the battle-line at that point, he thought, he could mount the best defence possible with the forces left to him after Lloyd George had drained troops away to Italy, Palestine, and other remote theatres. Haig's strategy worked, but his reputation was so badly tarnished that even Sir Arthur Currie, astute general that he was, felt betrayed.

To justify Haig's conduct of the Third Battle of Ypres and explain how Currie and his Canadian troops contributed to the eventual victory, Dancocks calls on primary sources such as private papers, letters, diaries, and official documents, on contemporary and modern histories, biographies, and analyses, and on written and oral eyewitness accounts. He is a masterful writer, too — *Legacy of*

*Valour* makes the issues end the campaigns understandable even for armchair generals who don't "know more of tactics than a novice in a nunnery." However, a reader who can't already "tell at sight a Mauser rifle from a javelin" will have some difficulty interpreting Dancocks's descriptions of artillery movements and barrages. The battlefield pictures are not very helpful — mud does not photograph well itself and it tends to obscure the details of anything stuck in it. Clearer photos of the war machinery, along with a large map of Flanders and a comprehensive map of the battleground, would have contributed enormously to the pleasure of reading this exciting book. □

## REVIEW

### Fallen idylls

By Rupert Schieder

*Love Unknown*, by A.N. Wilson, Hamish Hamilton (Penguin), 208 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 241 11 0227).

ALTHOUGH THE RESPECTED British critic John Sutherland regards hb as "a writer who must be considered foremost in his generation," A.N. Wilson is not well known on this continent. I' terms of production there is no denying his pre-eminence. For one whose birth date is 1950 — this puts him in an age bracket with Canadian writers such as Susan Musgrave, Guy Vanderhaeghe, and David Adams Richards — his accomplishment is phenomenal. In addition to being a teacher, literary editor of the important *Spectator*, and a constant reviewer, he has produced in less than 10 years 14 books, including critical biographies of Scott, Milton, and Hilaire Belloc, the major section of a "examination of the Church of England today, a set of essays, and most pertinent for this review, no fewer than nine novels, whose quality has been recognized by such important prizes as the W.H. Smith Literary Award.

About six years ago, having stumbled on Wilson's work, I romped through his first three novels, *The Sweets of Pimlico* (1977), *Unguarded Hours* (1978), and *Kindly Light* (1979), with mounting enjoyment and admiration. It was with *The Healing Art* (1980) and *Who Was Oswald Fish?* (1981) that, it seems to me, Wilson came into his own as an accomplished writer of serious comedy. None of the next three, *Wise Virgin* (1982), *Scandal* (1983) — to me, Wilson's least interesting

work — end *Gentlemen in England* (1986), set in High Victoria" England in 1880, achieved a balance between the serious and the farcical elements. Wilson seemed to be experimenting, with varying degrees of success, working out variations on the themes that he had embodied with such mastery and simplicity in *The Healing Art*.

I' his newest fiction, *Love Unknown*, Wilson seems to be continuing to experiment. To be honest, I am not sore just what he is trying to do. He seems to be presenting the relation between romance and reality, and also between two levels of reality, all in terms of love-or LOVE, for the pages are splattered with capital letters.

The "Prehistory" sets up the romance on the first page: "Once upon a time, some twenty years ago, there were three nice young women, who lived together" in London. The "pretty one," Richeldis — Wilson is fond of naming his characters after obscure female saints — meets and marries "the Ma" of her Dreams," Simon. "Everyone else, somehow, made a mess of life or failed to have a life at all. But Silo" and Richeldis had done what we all feel we are supposed to do, what we all dream of doing, what the modern world makes so nearly impossible, Simon and Richeldis had lived happily every after."

The "idyll" established the novel proper soon move\* to reality. The other two "ice girls" surprise Simon with his secretary at Fontainebleau. Soon one of them, in tom, finds TRUE LOVE with Simon. Soon TRUE LOVE dwindles to an affair, while Richeldis gets mired in sordid domestic duties, all oblivious. I' the end, however, Simon eventually realizes that "he was trying to dismiss actual life in favour of a" idealised version of life," and returns to Richeldis, his family, and his prospering business.

So much for idealized romance and TRUE LOVE.

To provide a counter-movement for this decline from romance to reality in earthly love, Wilson produces Simon's brother, Bartle, a "hopeless" priest in a North London suburb, deserted and divorced by his wife. During a cataclysmic storm — also watched by Richeldis at home with her children and by the adulterous Simon experiencing TRUE LOVE with her best friend in a London hotel — Bartle discovers God as a "Loving Being" and begins his "journey leading up to the only Love who was folly good and true." Later Bartle takes up a hymn:

*My song is LOW Unknown,  
My Saviour's Love for Me.*

On the final page Bartle's wife-to-be finds that "she was entering a fairy-tale, and that she and Bartle were going to live hap-

pily every after." The scene takes place, once more, at Fontainebleau. They now are observed by the (former) "three nice girls," who, ironically, take for granted another illicit weekend. Neat.

Too neat. The device underlines what are, to me, the shortcomings of Low

*Unknown*. In establishing a formal pattern that will embody what appears to be his central theme, the relation between two kinds of reality and two kinds of love/LOVE, Wilson has sacrificed the humanity and the compassion that made *The Healing Art* and *Who Was Oswald*

*Fish?* and parts of *Gentlemen in England* such satisfying comic works.

If I were to try to justify John Sutherland's claim that A.N. Wilson is "foremost in his generation." I should base my case not on his latest, but on those earlier novels. □

## FIRST NOVELS

# World of wonders

Among four new novels, one stands out for its extraordinary language and the magical, timeless world that it creates

By Janice Kulyk Keefer

**S**OMEWHERE INSIDE Dorothy Wingrove's novel there's an action-packed movie trying to get out. *Run, Madrina, Run* (Sono Nis, 309 pages, \$9.95 paper), as the tide suggests, is an extended chase sequence. Though Wingrove's editor might be accused of dozing — allowing superfluous sections to clutter the narrative — the reader is, for the most part, kept wide awake by the story line: the efforts of an astonishingly resourceful, slightly batty middle-aged lady to rescue her foster child from the death-squad horrors of El Salvador. Our heroine succeeds thanks to a peculiarly captivating *deus ex machina* — an impeccably well-trained German shepherd with the less than evocative name of Johnny.

The subtext of Wingrove's novel is pure wish-fulfilment: a Platonic love affair with Johnny is transmogrified into requited love with the dog's human semblable — Jon, a gratifyingly wealthy, charming, and Christian doctor, eager to take on not only the unhappily married Kay, but her irresistibly charming foster child, Jonatan. They all end up happily ever after on a New Zealand sheep ranch.

This should be a terrible book, but it is saved by the sheer conviction and artless brio of the narrative: the text has many of the delights of naive or folk painting, and enough of the clichés of action-suspense writing have been, if not avoided, then stood on their heads for the reader to succumb to what might be called mimetic enchantment — the desire to linger in the fictive world created by the novelist.

Ven Begamudré's *Sacrifices* (Porcupine's Quill, \$7.95 paper) — the story of a wealthy Brahmin family's excessively protracted process of emigration from India to North America — is the utter opposite of *Run, Madrina, Run*. At 109 rather elliptical pages, it's a novella rather

than a novel, and where Wingrove's text is pure narrative to the exclusion of symbolic structure, language play, and character development, Begamudré's is a kind of narrative *manqué*: we are given huge dollops of descriptive detail — names, places, plans, procedures — but there is a deliberate eschewal of development. We are made to sham the perspective of outsiders and eavesdroppers and finally of the child who casually becomes the fiction's hero, but all these characters possess inadequate information about what is happening to whom, and why.

The obliquity and dislocations are, for me at least, ultimately more frustrating than intriguing — one can't be brought to care about the sacrifices Begamudré's characters make, because one knows too little about them. There's also little sense of any narratorial perspective the reader can share — we are made to see everything in close-up, and the details revealed are less than illuminating. The resulting confusion, Begamudré might retort, is the whole point. Then why, & might & k, are we given a traditional narrative and gratuitous revelation in the novel's final pages — Dr. Singh's explanation of his disillusionment with India?

*Sacrifices* is decidedly not *The Raj Quartet* but a totally different mode of fiction: thus Singh's vignette of the atrocities following Partition in 1947 cannot serve the narrative purpose or possess the terrifying effect of the analogous scene with which Paul Scott so masterfully concludes both *A Division of the Spoils* and his entire quartet of novels. The "sacrifices" in Begamudré's text are not all a function of plot: narrative development and the in- or unfolding of meaning seem also to have been sacrificed to haste and to a curiously detached kind of evasion. There are fine things in *Sacrifices*, but the effect of the whole is neither very engaging nor compelling.

Leslie Hall Pinder's *Under the House*

(Talonbooks, 183 pages, \$9.95 paper), the story of a mysterious, wealthy, and in-grown Saskatchewan family, is like a keg of explosives that dampens somewhere along the narrative line and refuses to ignite. The dark secrets embedded in this Prairie Gothic have to do with Incest, as most readers will immediately guess: the red herring Pinder tosses into the narrative to sustain suspense isn't scarlet or strong-smelling enough. I had guessed who really did what with whom by page 30, and the other elements of the novel weren't strong enough to sustain the admiration and interest with which I'd begun reading.

Though Pinder does an admirable job in detailing the consciousness of the disaffected girl, Evelyn, and in charting her progress from *anomie* to empowerment, she doesn't successfully integrate this character into the surrounding narrative: the roles and interrelationship of Evelyn and another major character, Maude, fail to connect effectively or convince. *Under the House* is an ambitious novel, and some of the narrative techniques and symbolic structures work exceptionally well, but one has a disappointing sense, as the novel progresses, that the mystery and eventual revelation add up to far less than the reader has been led to anticipate.

W.D. Barcus's *Squatters' Island* (Oberon Press, 207 pages, \$23.95 cloth, \$12.95 paper), stands out among the books under review because of the uniqueness and power of the fictive world it creates. It is a magical world — though we are given the date 1947 for the novel's main events. Barcus's is as timeless a world as it is primitive. The main characters — the boy Andrew who grows to manhood in the course of the novel; May, the vacuous, sensuous Newfoundland girl he mania; Andrew's curiously distant father; and the old Portuguese fisherman, Joe Ramos, with whom Andrew becomes obsessed — seem

to conduct their lives entirely through sense-perception and intuition, rather than any rational consciousness. As with Begamudré's teat, there is a lack of perspective, of narrative overview that would allow us to place and judge these characters according to a shared system of values. Yet somehow this foregrounding succeeds in *Squatters' Island* — we are drawn into the story and succumb to its enchantment because of the

richness, strangeness, fullness of the atmosphere it conjures.

Perhaps the feature that distinguishes Barcus's novel from the others is its extraordinary use of words. Because of the strange beauty and intensity of its language, *Squatters' Island* is not an easy read. There are problems, too, with its sheer solidity of structure — the relentlessness with which Barcus details his fictive world — and with the final sec-

tion of the novel, in which the reader is asked to move from the welter of sensory phenomena to a perception of larger structures of meanings to an understanding of what the island means not only within Andrew's limited experience but also in metaphysical terms. Yet *Squatters Island* remains a remarkable achievement, one first novel that does not merely promise but also delivers a great deal to its readers. □

## INTERVIEW

### Brian Fawcett

'Whatever I'm going to do is going to be a formal invention of my own. I'm committed to that, even if I land smack up against a brick wall'

By James Dennis Corcoran

**B**ORN IN Prince George, B.C., in 1944, and educated at Simon Fraser University, Brian Fawcett worked as an English teacher and city planner in Vancouver before turning to full-time writing. His books include *Creatures of State* (Talonbooks, 1977), *My Career with the Leafs and Other Stories* (1982), and *The Secret Journal of Alexander Mackenzie* (1986). His most recent book is *Cambodia: A Book for People Who Find Television Too Slow*, which he discussed with James Dennis Corcoran:

**Books in Canada:** Let's begin with the title of your latest book, *Cambodia: A Book for People Who Find Television Too Slow*. What's being said here?  
**Brian Fawcett:** Well, the "Cambodia" is

self-explanatory — it's got a better assemblage of facts about what happened in Cambodia than any other book I know about. "A Book for People Who Find Television Too Slow" is a comment on the lack of dense information that television provides. Television pumps enormous quantities of information through very narrow conduits and turns them all into the equivalent of informational alphabet soup. What I tried to do was write a book that had a degree of density that simply isn't available either in television or in most fiction today.

**BiC:** Were you familiar with the recent history of Cambodia at the outset or did you have a naïve version of these events?  
**Fawcett:** One of the criticisms of the book is its naïve quality, and I think that's a real issue. "How can you do this? How can you say this?" My response is to say

Brian Fawcett

yes, in fact the conception and execution of the book is in a naïve form. I began by asking myself a deliberately naïve question: What is the most difficult subject matter I can take on as a writer? I fairly quickly established that Cambodia would be the most difficult. I didn't know anything about Cambodia. I knew there had been a bloodbath, and I didn't know anything more than that, so the research for the first six or eight months was pretty slow. Along the way, I began to understand what it was that the Khmer Rouge had done — they had attempted to exterminate individual memory and exterminate individual imagination. I began to notice there were some pretty scary parallels between what they had done and the whole momentum of the communications revolution that we're all in the midst of — all the way from television to mass data systems to micro-computers and so forth. So the result couldn't have come from a book that wasn't in fact conceived in naïvety. When people accuse the book of being naïve, I'm delighted. Yes, of course it is!

**BiC:** Who is voicing these criticisms?

**Fawcett:** The reviews are coming from people who are accustomed to dealing with literature as if the subject matter of literature were literature itself. They are all formalists, in the sense that they are unaccustomed to dealing with a book that is content-driven. All the formal attributes of that book are driven by the subject matter. In fact, the dual teat was absolutely dictated by the complexity of the subject matter.

**BE:** You didn't have that in mind to begin with?

**Fawcett:** I had no notion of how the book was going to be formed. I said, let this book take whatever form it takes; let's see what form the content will produce or

dictate. A long time ago, someone pointed out to me that first-rate literature comes from first-rate subject matter. Out of formalist subject matter, I just don't think you get first-rate literature. One of the things I've noticed is that by the time these people actually get into the text, they're determined to talk about my style, the way I speak about things, but they're equally determined to ignore what I'm saying.

I don't think this will be a popular book with the CanLit people. Canadian literature has declared its subject area to be Canada in a very narrow sense and essentially Canadian writing. I call it the Alice Munro fan club. Now, Alice Munro is a wonderful writer, we all know that. She is not a religious figure. She is not the greatest writer in the world. There are ways of writing that are at least equally acceptable — that ultimately are capable of producing greater literature. But if you're not in the Alice Munro fan club, if you're not trying to do things in that way, well... I mean, I think there are several writers in this country who are better than Alice Munro, at what Alice Munro does. Guy Vanderhaeghe or Sandra Birdsell, for example. Keath Fraser is a very good writer.

**BiC:** These preferences are for a group of writers, one could possibly call a "new wave" within Canadian writing. How does this crop of writers fit into conceptions of CanLit?

**Fawcett:** Well, CanLit is already representative of a" era. One begins to feel as though you were pressed against the far edge of a very full balloon, and there really is no more room for anyone else. You've got all the people in the CanLit departments of our universities and they're writing about the writers who are already accepted within these terms. There really is no way to break into that phalanx, and I'm not sure that should be one's aspiration anyway. The balloon is defined. I suspect the whole enterprise is probably just going to come to rest within the next five to 10 years.

**BiC:** Who is your reading public? You're not writing drug-store books.

**Fawcett:** At the moment, I have no idea who's reading me. But I don't see any reason why Cambodia couldn't have been put out in a paperback format and mass-produced. I think it's much more interesting to the ordinary, fairly well-educated guy in the street, of whom there are several million in this country, than to the audience that formal literature defines — which is what, around 1,500? And they're all people who don't read books anyway. So in a way, I'm not getting to my audience.

**BiC:** Why aren't you trying to reach an audience through the broadly accepted terms of mass market, "generic" fiction?

**Fawcett:** Probably because I'm not capable of it. No. I'm probably technically capable of it, but not neurally capable.. If somebody were to give me an outline of something I was supposed to write, I'd probably be able to do it without any difficulty. But in the absence of that, I've kept my mind relatively free of these forms of interference. There's a sort of Zen, to put this in the most positive possible light, of not falling for all the traps. I didn't fall for the CanLit trap because I wasn't capable of it. I figured out somewhere along the line that I could perhaps write half as well as Alice Munro, if I really worked my ass off at it, which is half as good as a pretty good writer. I guess what I'm saying is that whatever I'm going to do is going to be a formal invention of my own. I'm committed to that track even if it means I land smack up against a brick wall.

One of the things I've been doing in my writing is challenging the whole enterprise of fiction. I don't want to write a "owl" because I'm interested in challenging that whole enterprise, and historically I believe I'll be proven right. Sooner or later somebody's going to wake up to the fact that the news on television is fiction, and that fiction is universal in that it is humanely toxic to us now. We live in a world in which there is more fiction in an average month than there used to be in an entire century. We are assailed, overwhelmed by the fictional. One of the reasons written literature is dying is that fiction is universal. If somebody wants to be a fiction writer, the" it's a minor intellectual task — and if you want to write fiction and get famous, go and write for the movies and television, but don't write a book. I want to get away from fiction and create some form that I don't understand or know how to describe as yet.

**BiC:** This gets us to the relationship between news reports and Miami Vice.

**Fawcett:** Well, I don't believe in puritanical postures. I don't think you should say because television is toxic that you simply turn away. I think what we have to do is learn how to watch t&v much more critically than we do now. I recommend the sequential method of watching television — by which I mean that you shouldn't get up when the commercials come on because the commercials are part of the fiction, whether it's the news or dramatic programming. There is always a collusion between the two.

**BiC:** If certain elements of reality can be discerned more readily in Miami Vice than the edited version of reality that is passing for news reports, then can't the same thing be applied to generic fiction?

**Fawcett:** Sure, I think the same thing is happening there.. That's why Stephen King is under a fair amount of scrutiny

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in Cambodia. As an entertainment writer, John LeCarré occasionally veers into the realm of education. because in fact he does know how all those security systems work. If you want to read those things for information. why not? For people who want sheer information, I think Arthur Hailey should be read. His method for writing Hotel was to send a bunch of students into the hotel with tape-recorders. He went back and listened to the tapes, to get it down how people act in hotels. Popular literature does have a good side and a bad side. Arthur Halley is a very useful popular writer.

**BIC:** We were talking recently about Dante. Is your identification with him, as a municipal bureaucrat in Florence, lied closely to your own position as a city planner in Vancouver?

**Fawcett:** I went into city planning because I wanted to find out how cities work. After being there for six months, I realized I'd hit the jackpot, that I was learning the most important things an artist in my own time can learn. I turned around and looked at my fellow artists and wondered why they weren't doing similar kinds of things. That's what artists all across history have done. Chaucer, Plato — all the big ones are up there. They've got as close to the heart of human relations, in terms of civic activity, as they could. By definition this is what an artist is supposed to do. We're not supposed to be sitting around colleges in our smoking jackets telling people how Heart of Darkness is about the secret heart of evil in all of us. That's crap!

**BIC:** How do you combine your occupation with your writing?

**Fawcett:** I don't have a full-time job now. I was in a job where I was making a whole lot of money. I just sort of said to myself, there are a million reasons why I don't write, why I can't write what I'm supposed to write. There's only one way to do it and that was to cut back on the commitments that didn't allow me to write. Also, I had a life-threatening illness, which has a tendency to prioritize things in your mind. I had a stomach ulcer that blew up, after 15 years of threatening to. I bled 10 pints of blood into my stomach and nearly died. I didn't have a religious experience about it — I just thought after that die. all and lot going live

bought a word-processor and discovered I liked writing better than anything else I'd ever done in my life.

**BIC:** What authors have

**Fawcett:** rightread Marvin Harris because he can give me unconventional information that I can't get

other places. I read V.S. Naipaul for sentence structure.. I think I value Naipaul because to a certain extent he is pissing up-wind constantly, which I think is a good intellectual method. He went into all those strange places and came out more skeptical than he went in because he refuses to believe. He's not a believer. I read Raymond Carver and I would love to be able to write stories like he does. I recognize the landscapes and social situations he writes about, but I would never be able to write like him because I don't have a demonic side like he does.

I read a fair amount of science fiction — not for pleasure and certainly not for sentence structure, but because there's always something to be learned from it. I still think of science fiction as the leading edge of the imagination. I read a lot of science

20-year program classical— I ' now some

very obscure sections of the Ten of Architecture Petruvius. That's foundation of the world we're in — they're first have examined a lot of things like that so it's very informative. I read a — a unconventional

as I can find. Like Josephus. I used this as one of the sources for Cambodia. He wrote t h Jewish Judea, e whole struggle in time wrote in

under very a read Dewdney, Bowering, because e play baseball with him and I like him. And I think he could be a lot better writer

□

## LETTERS

### None of the above

DOES BRIAN FAWCETT (Field Notes, March), classify Al Purdy, Sid Marty, and Dennis Lee as teachers, independently wealthy, or idiots?

Anna Porter  
President and Publisher  
Key Porter Books  
Toronto

### TELLING TALES

WE THOUGHT that your readers would be interested to know that Oxford is in the process of preparing three books of anecdotes. The Oxford Book of Canadian Political Anecdotes is being edited by Jack MacLeod, the well-known author and professor of political science, and is to be published in the fall of 1988. The Oxford Book of Canadian Military Anec-

dotes is to be edited by historian Victor Suthern, curator of the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa; it is due in 1989. And finally, The Oxford Book of Canadian Literary Anecdotes has for its editor novelist Graeme Gibson and will appear in 1990.

All three editors are collecting anecdotes from across the country, so if you have favourite stories connected with Canadian politics and politicians, military life, or Canadian literary figures, they are anxious to hear from you. Please submit material to each of them care of Oxford University Press, 70 Wynford Drive, Don Mills, Ont. M3C1J9.

Sarah MacLachlan  
Marketing Department  
Oxford University Press  
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

Farewell Tour. by Virgil Burnett, The Porcupine's Quill. Burnett's seven short stories are freighted with curiously dated and ornate continental conceits. but his portrayal of the human comedy is entertaining, extraordinary, and unique.

### NON-FICTION

Years of Choice: 1960-1968, by Gérard Pelletier, translated from the French by Alan Brown. Methuen. Less comprehensive than other historians of the period. Pelletier confines himself to personal experience in this second volume of his memoirs. His recollection sometimes conflicts with the others — notably the selective memory of René Lévesque — but is always more convincing.

### POETRY

The Self-Completing Tree: Selected Poems, by Dorothy Livesay, Press Porcépic. When Livesay's first Selected Poems was published in 1957. Desmond Pacey called her one of the best poets of the "generation that came to maturity between the two World Wars." Thirty years later she has compiled a collection that secures her place among the best poets of the century.

## 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:

Aboriginal Self Government in Canada: A Bibliography, by Evelyn J. Peters, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University.  
Arms Canada, by Ernie Regehr, Lorimer.  
Building Libraries: Guidelines for the Planning and Design

of Public Libraries, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.  
 Building Survey of Ontario Public Libraries, 1930-1985, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.  
 Canada Learns to Play, by Alan Metcalfe, M & S. Canada's Comics, edited by John Bell, Matrix Books.  
 Canada's Library Design Competition Winners 1985, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.  
 The Collected Poems of George Wainley, edited by George Johnston, Quarry.  
 The Complete Toronto Handbook Series: Food, Drink/Getting Around, Accommodation, by Robert Kasher, Mosaic Press.  
 The Dreamers, by Thomas H. Raddall, Pottersfield Press.  
 Easy Halloween Costumes for Children, by Lella Albala, ALPEL.  
 Emotions, by Jane Callwood, Doubleday.

Flicker and Hawk, by Patrick Friesen, Turnstone.  
 Future Issues of Jurisdiction and Coordination Between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Governments, by Ian B. Cowie, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University.  
 The Great Economic Debate, by Cy Gouick, Lorimer.  
 Hard Choices: A Life of Tom Berger, by Carolyn Swayze, Douglas & McIntyre.  
 I Have to Go, by Robert Munsch, illustrated by Michael Martchenko, Annick.  
 Indian Education in Canada, Vol. 2: The Challenge, edited by Jean Barman et al., UBC Press.  
 Inside a Mosquito Net, by Vernon Mooers, Dollarpoems.  
 Into the Night Life: Canadian Writers and Artists at Work, edited by Maureen Cochrane and David Lee, Nightwood Editions.  
 Islands, by Ken Norris, Quarry.

Jenny's Neighbours, by Richard Thompson, illustrated by Kathryn E. Shoemaker, Annick.  
 Lady of My House and Other Poems, by Gary Botting, Harden House.  
 Land of Promise, by Ion Longin Popescu, The Romania Association.  
 The Last Enlightenment Anthology, Volume II, edited by Bill Bissett, Nightwood Editions.  
 Life Begins at 65, by Hans Blumenfeld, Harvest House.  
 Leg Jam, by Monica Hughes, Irwin.  
 Looking at Insects, by David Suzuki, Stoddart.  
 Looking at Plants, by David Suzuki, Stoddart.  
 Looking at Seuses, by David Suzuki, Stoddart.  
 Making It: The Business of Films and Television Production in Canada, edited by Barbara Hehner, Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television/Doubleday.  
 Matthew and the Midnight Money Van, by Allen Morgan, illustrated by Michael Martchenko, Annick.  
 The Modern Crisis, by Murray Bookchin, Black Rose.  
 More Advice from the Beach Doctor, by Hamilton Hall, M & S.  
 My Dad Takes Care of Me, by Patricia Quinlan, illustrated by Vista van Kampen, Annick.  
 My First French-English Word Book, by Lesley Fairfield, Kids Can.  
 The Next Best Thing, by John Ralston Saul, Totem.  
 The No-Bull Guide to Getting Published and Making It as a Writer, by Michelle West, Winslow Publishing.  
 Nobody Said It Would Be Easy, by Marilyn Halvorson, Irwin.  
 The Nootka: Scenes and Studies of Savage Life, by Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, Sono Nis.  
 North of Intention, by Steve McCaffery, Nightwood Editions.  
 The Ordering of Oceans, by Clyde Sanger, U of T Press.  
 The Political and Legal Inequalities Among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, by Della Opekokew, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University.  
 Portrait of an Artist in the Making, by Andrew Kwong, published by the author.  
 Public Administration Questions Relating to Aboriginal Self-Government, by C.E.S. Franks, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University.  
 Profiles in Canadian Literature 5, series editor Jeffrey M. Heath, Dundurn.  
 Profiles in Canadian Literature 6, series editor Jeffrey M. Heath, Dundurn.  
 Rainy Day Mingle, by Marie-Louise Gay, Stoddart.  
 Shadow in Hawthorn Bay, by Janet Luna, Lester & Orpen Dennys.  
 The Sky's No Limit, by Raymond Z. Munro, Totem.  
 South Africa: A World Challenged, by Angus M. Gunn, Legacy Press.  
 A Stand of Jackpines, by Milton Acorn and James Deahl, Unfinished Monument Press.  
 The United States and Canada: The Quest for Free Trade, by Paul Wonnacott, Institute for International Economics.  
 Water Sky, by Jean Craighead George, Irwin.  
 The West Coasters, by David Corcoran, Totem.  
 The Woman Who Is the Midnight Wind, by Terence M. Green, Pottersfield Press.  
 Words of War, by Jack Cahill, Dencau.

## CANWIT NO. 120

*A madam from coastal B.C.  
 Warns girls about catching VD:  
 "Watch out, working maids,  
 For symptoms of AIDS  
 In tricks who go AC-DC.."*

THE VERSE above is not just a limerick — it is also a **lipogram**, a composition that intentionally rejects one or more letters of the alphabet. For instance, in 1939 a California musician, Ernest Vincent Wright, published a 50,000-word novel in which the letter **e** does not appear. We consider that a little excessive. Instead, contestants are invited to compose limericks in which, as in the example above, the letter **e** is not to be found. The prize is \$25. Deadline: August 1. Address: CanWit No. 120, Books in Canada, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto MA 3X9.

Results of CanWit No. 118  
 NOT EVERYONE who contributed nonets on well-known Canadians stack to the strict demands of the verse-form, but those who did provided a wealth of sly wit. The winner is Donald Winkler of Montreal for the following lines:

Now William Lyon Mackenzie King  
 Loved his mother but had a fling  
 Or two with naughty ladies  
 (Perish the thought) but these  
 Can be forgiven.  
 Not the living  
 Touched him, just  
 Cherished  
 Dust.

Robertson Davies tugs at his bard.  
 Mugs for the camera, looks sincere,  
 Puts at ease his w/bred bones,  
 Clears his throat and intones:  
 "Indubitably  
 I'm prized today

*But Nobel  
 Knells for  
 Me."*

### Honourable mentions:

*Richard Hatfield, political cat,  
 Has nine lives, maybe more than that.  
 Survivor par excellence —  
 Now what could de-ensconce  
 This crafty party,  
 Folksy, arty,  
 Who orbits  
 When it's  
 At?*

*Allan Fotheringham writes with zest  
 Of foibles north, south, east, and  
 west;  
 Skewers targets high and low,  
 Spares neither friend nor foe.  
 Dr. Foth, good work,  
 Dispel the murk  
 With ever  
 Clever  
 Jest.*

*Mr. Stevens, as a minister  
 Did you see nothing sinister  
 Mixing business with your job?  
 Like Tricky Dick you sob;  
 "I am not a crook."  
 I saw that look —  
 Did you wink  
 Or blink.  
 Sine?*

— Marvin Goody, Toronto

*O, where has Margaret Trudeau  
 gone?  
 Her escapades were such great fun!  
 aswagger  
 TosportwithMickJagger  
 shag*

*Our firstlady,  
 (Thoughtshady)  
 From  
 C.*

— Barry Baldwin, Calgary

## SOLUTION TO CANLIT ACROSTIC N 05.

theythatfarmUkrainianname, "Kitka"—

the cat. William remembered her playingroundwas stoye  
 wasinallthesevenyears littarshe lived  
 — seven is a ripe old age for a farm cat.

— William Kurelek, Prairie Boy's Summer (Tundra Books)

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# CanLit acrostic no. 6

By Mary D. Trainer

1	Q	2	H	X	4	DD	5	J	6	G	7	I	B	AA	9	S	10	D	11	L	12	T	13	P	14	A	15	CC	16	G	17	EE	18	I					
19	E	20	V	21	Z	22	J	23	F	24	H	25	I	26	Y	27	M	28	Q	29	N	30	AA	31	Y	32	R	33	U	34	D	35	X	36	K				
37	DD	38	O	39	A	40	CC	41	J	42	D	43	W	44	Z	45	V	46	T	47	H	48	L	49	D	50	Y	51	G	52	B	53	CC	54	AA				
55	S	56	K	57	EE	58	H	59	C	60	D	61	I	62	U	63	F	64	M	65	J	66	A	67	D	68	CC	69	Z	70	CC	71	Q	72	E				
73	L	74	K	75	S	76	V	77	DD	78	D	79	AA	80	M	81	BB	82	X	83	J	84	W	85	N	86	U	87	BB	88	G	89	S						
90	P	91	D	92	F	93	R	94	CC	95	EE	96	BB	97	D	98	AA	99	N	100	B	101	K	102	D	103	C	104	U	105	L	106	CC	107	J				
108	Q	109	W	110	F	111	D	112	B	113	A	114	R	115	U	116	K	117	H	118	S	119	H	120	M	121	F	122	CC	123	N	124	R						
125	V	126	P	127	A	128	U	129	U	130	T	131	Q	132	R	133	O	134	AA	135	D	136	Z	137	I	138	B	139	EE	140	L	141	W						
142	Q	143	O	144	J	145	J	146	G	147	Q	148	T	149	D	150	S	151	J	152	B	153	D	154	H	155	E	156	F	157	T	158	E	159	Y	160	A		
161	M	162	DD	163	X	164	N	165	H	166	F	167	G	168	Q	169	B	170	M	171	P	172	S	173	E	174	EE	175	L	176	M	177	R	178	S	179	K		
180	J	181	Y	182	Z	183	T	184	C	185	M	186	D	187	N	188	V	189	P	190	Z	191	BB	192	AA	193	R	194	G	195	S	196	Z	197	H				
198	K	199	B	200	E	201	U	202	K	203	CC	204	L	205	O	206	X	207	R	208	BB	209	I	210	D	211	DD	212	A	213	F	214	W	215	Q	216	I	217	M

When properly filled in, the letters in the box form a quotation from a Canadian book. Find the letters by solving the clues below and writing the answers in the numbered spaces provided. Then transfer the letters from the spaces to the appropriate squares in the box. The first letters of each answered clue form the name of the author and the title of the book. (Solution next month.)

The solution to Acrostic No. 5 appears on page 41.

- A. *Saturday Night* editor  
113 160 127 68 14 212 39
- B. Pianist  
112 169 100 199 138 162 52
- c. Nipple  
59 103 1 184
- D. Foster Hewitt phrase: 4 wds.  
102 149 10 49 210 153 60 42 135  
186 91 78 67 34 97 111
- E. Tropical Pacific Ocean wind: 2 wds.  
155 19 173 200 158 72
- F. Type of cart: 2 wds.  
165 110 218 121 23 156 63 92
- G. Robert Service's famous cocktail: hyph. wd.  
88 148 8 51 167 194 18
- I-I. Lumpy  
24 197 118 165 47
- I. Liberal pollster  
25 216 117 137 18 61 7 209
- J. Prairie colonists  
5 41 145 83 107 65 144 22 180  
151
- K. Slaughterhouse  
38 198 202 101 179 56 74 116
- L. Newfoundland performers  
175 11 140 73 105 204 48

- M. New Brunswick beer  
217 80 176 27 120 185 170 161 64
- N. Distaste  
123 2 99 58 167 65 154 29 164
- O. Hawaiian feast  
205 143 38 133
- P. Fool  
126 171 90 169 18
- Q. Figure skater  
131 71 147 103 142 28 215 168
- R. —Water Milfoil; weed plaguing some Canadian lakes  
93 177 132 32 193 124 114 207
- S. Travel from place to place  
118 75 150 178 9 55 172 89 185
- T. Acquitted nurse  
163 180 12 46 157 148
- U. New Brunswick manufactured car  
129 104 33 201 62 128 115 86
- V. Ambassador to U.N.  
45 183 125 20 76
- W. Exorbitant rate of interest  
43 84 109 214 141
- x. Vancouver humorist  
82 208 35 3 163
- Y. As before or aforesaid  
181 28 159 31 50
- Z. Inscription on a tomb  
136 186 182 21 44 150 69
- AA. once common sight at train stations  
8 192 88 79 30 54 134
- BB. Site of huge oil field tap, 1947  
191 203 87 81 96
- CC. Sworn statement  
40 70 15 203 84 53 106 122 68
- DD. Associated with me's birth  
37 211 4 77 162
- EE. Political reporter  
174 95 57 139 17

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