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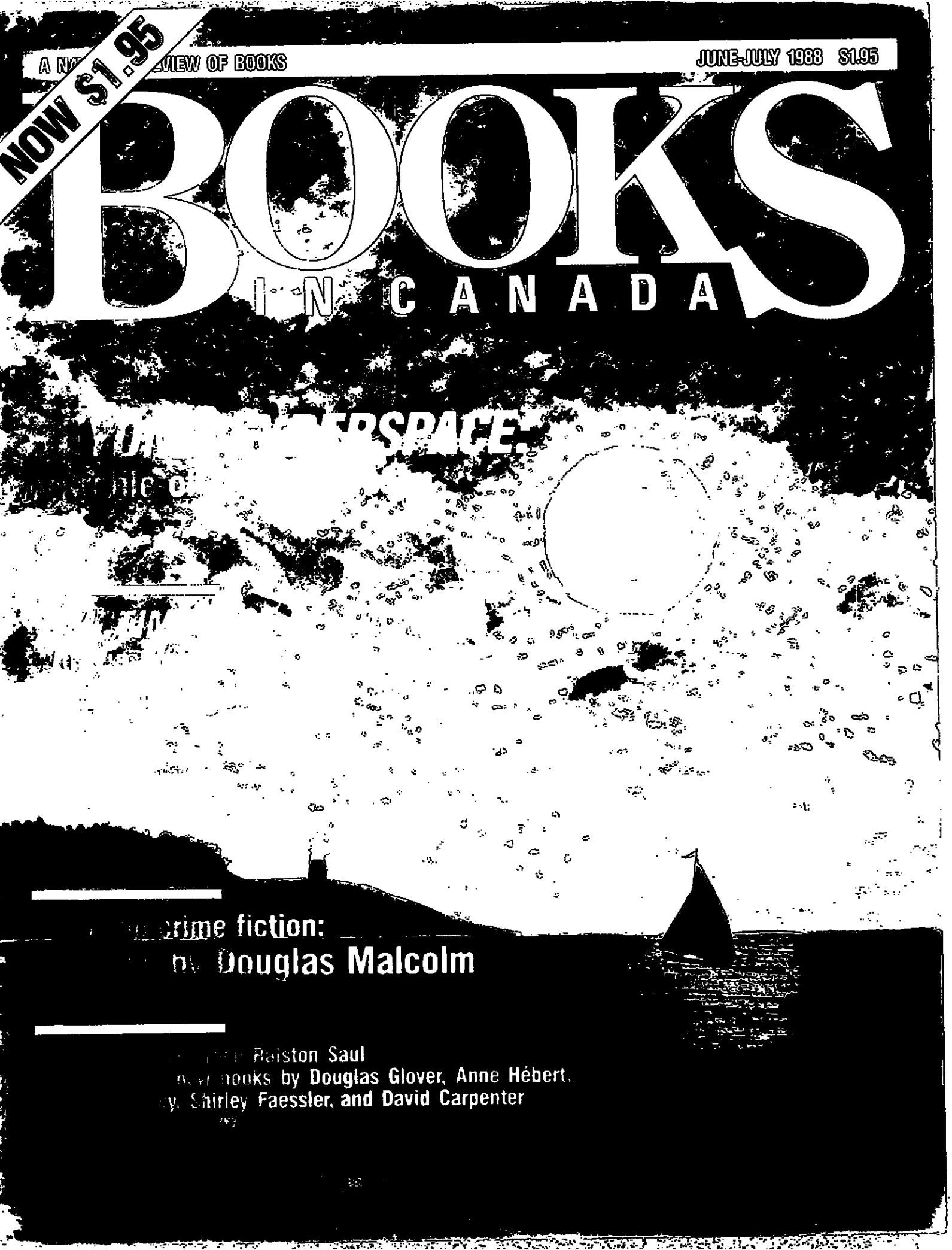
BOOKS IN CANADA



[illegible]rime fiction:
[illegible] Douglas Malcolm

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[illegible] books by Douglas Glover, Anne Hébert,
[illegible]y, Shirley Faessler, and David Carpenter

BOOKS IN CANADA

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COVER ART BY David Bolduc

THE WRITTEN WORD

House style

Now that there's compulsory retirement for senators, do they remain Honourable, or do they lose their honour at 75? A new book on Canadian usage tells us how to write to Eugene Forsey

By I. M. Owen

WHEN I WAS active in publishing politics I actually enjoyed being on committees and believed that they were often useful. When unbelievers trotted out the stock joke — "A camel is a horse designed by a committee" — I had a stock reply: "True; and when the Arabs bred the best horses in the world they always used camels for the long haul." The seven-woman committee of the Freelance Editors' Association that has produced *Editing Canadian English* (Douglas & McIntyre, 217 pages, $29.95 cloth) had a long haul indeed — about eight years.

The result is a handy, fairly brief compendium of points that are likely to come up in editing, and would come up less often if writers equipped themselves with this book. Not that it's rigidly prescriptive; the authors generally spell out the possible alternatives and leave it to us to choose. "Our research," they say, "dispelled the illusion that there is only one Canadian style." I respectfully beg leave to doubt that any of these experienced editors had any such illusion. You can't compare two newspapers, or a newspaper with a book, or books from two different publishers, without being struck by their differences. This is true in all English-speaking countries, though probably least so in the United States, where *Webster's* for spelling and the Chicago *Manual* for things like punctuation command wide obedience.

In fact there is a book called, firmly, *The Canadian Style*, prepared by the Translation Bureau of the Secretary of State's Department and copublished by the government and Dundurn Press in 1985. It's really intended as a set of directives for government publications — though when I did some editing for a government department in 1986 nobody told me to follow it, or even that it existed. It's well organized and highly prescriptive, and those who want to have all the decisions made for them could do worse than follow it.

The authors of *Editing Canadian English* don't, then, seek to establish a standard Canadian style. But for someone seeking to establish either a personal or a house style this book would be a good starting point, since it raises the right questions. Anyone doing so would be well advised to select from the British and American usages set forth here, not according to their own cultural biases, but according to common sense; though few, probably would do so in the matter of *-our/-or*. The *-our* spelling is etymologically indefensible. But, even though it isn't used in the newspapers we read every day, it has become such a symbol of our difference that most of us will elect to retain it. I wonder, though, about the orthographically indefensible doubling of the *l* in unstressed syllables — *equalled*, *traveller*. There doesn't seem to be any point in this. However, it too is probably a patriotic icon. Spellings like *centre*, on the other hand, are clearly preferable, since they mostly come from words so spelled in medieval French.

The established American spellings *analyze* and *paralyze* are simply wrong, because the last syllable comes from the Greek noun *lusis* through the French verbs *analyser* and *paralyser*. The *-ize* endings, in contrast, come from the Greek ending *-izein*; the *z* should be retained, even though in French it's always changed to *s*.

The usual British spelling *programme* is an affectation that started to creep in early in the 19th century, and should be rejected as firmly as we'd reject any attempt to introduce *diagramme* or *telegramme*. The *OED* itself prefetred *program*, and the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* used to recommend it; I don't know why the current edition of the *COD* reverts to *programme* except for the computer sense.

Certain British spellings are clearly absurd, like *kerb* (from French *courbe*) and *tyre* (which was *tire* in Middle English). But then there's the question of *aeroplane*. It started life as *aëroplane* — four syllables — but the first two letters soon merged into one in speech, and *airplane* quickly followed — not just as an Americanism, by the way: John Buchan used it in his history of the war in 1916, and it actually appeared in King's Regulations in 1918. We all said *aeroplane* in my youth, though, and I still hear it occasionally from people interviewed on the CBC. But I think *airplane* is the clear winner.

A British spelling I'd unhesitatingly reject is *sceptic*. It's true that most Greek words with *k*, coming to us through Latin, use the equivalent Latin letter, *c*. But in this word we have to use the *k* pronunciation so that we don't confuse the doubtful wth the poisonous. So let's spell it that way.

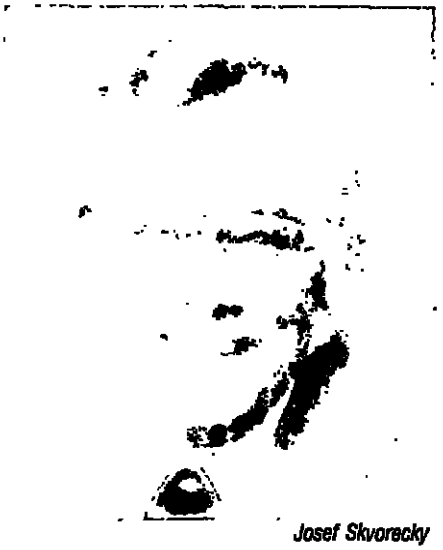
Two matters in which *Editing Canadian English* makes definite recommendations concern quotation marks; I disagree with both. The authors prefer double quotation marks, as used in this magazine; I greatly prefer single — not because they are "British," but because to my eye they make for a cleaner, more elegant page. (In fact, though single quotes probably now predominate in the U.K., some major publishers, such as Hodder & Stoughton and Secker & Warburg still cling to double.) The other recommendation is to do what I did aboye only because it's this magazine's style; put the comma after "British" inside the quotation marks. I recall that Blackburn complained about this some time ago, and I join him wholeheartedly. Punctuation marks should go inside the quotation marks only when they belong to the quotations. Everybody does this with colons, semicolons, question marks, and exclamation marks without thinking about it. The special treatment of commas and periods is all the more absurd, in these days of offset printing, when you consider the original reason for it: typesetters working with metal type felt that small punctuation marks, if put outside quotation marks, were too vulnerable to breakage in transit from typesetters to printers. It was never a very good reason, and nowadays it's no reason at all.

The latter part of the book contains mostly peculiarly Canadian usages. For instance, a question I have never found answered in a reference book until now is: now that there's compulsory retirement for senators, do they remain Honourable thereafter, or do they lose their honour at 75? Answer: they keep the designation. So now you know how to write to Eugene Forsey. Also in this part of the book is sensible advice on dealing with *he or she*, *she/he*, or *s/he*: rewrite where possible to avoid frequent repetitions of these awkward locutions; or, how to stay out of the clutches of the thought police without wrecking your prose style.

There are many more subjects in *Editing Canadian English* than I have mentioned, but I'll probably have occasion to comment on most of them in future issues. This column has perhaps been more interesting to editors than to real writers, but as I suggested at the beginning more consciousness of these matters among writers would save everyone a lot of trouble. □

In celebration

Twenty years ago, Josef Skvorecky and Zdena Salivarova founded Sixty-Eight Publishers in Toronto. Today the press sends books to Czech émigrés all over the world



PHOTOGRAPH BY PATRICIA CLELAND, NEW YORK

Josef Skvorecky

THE ETHICAL CULTURE THEATRE on West 64th Street is a rotunda with a vaulted ceiling, Corinthian columns, a balcony, and pewlike benches. While the 500 or so New Yorkers prescient enough to have bought their seats in advance mingled inside, a line-up of the hopeful waited for the release of extra tickets. The band on stage, a mix of Czechs and Americans, played the rough and exuberant jazz that seems typical of Eastern Europe.

The atmosphere was celebratory; after all, it could have been a wake. "Twenty Years after the Prague Spring: a Celebration of Czech Literature" was also marking the anniversary of the end of that brief flowering, when the Soviet tanks rolled in. Czech could be heard here and there, but most of the audience was American and many were young. They came out of passion for books or history or a chance to see some American literary celebrities. What almost none who had paid their 10 dollars seemed to know was that the money would aid the remarkable publishing program of a small Toronto house, Sixty-Eight Publishers.

"No one has done more for the Czechs than these two." The words were Milan Kundera's, quoted by the evening's host, Joseph Papp, producer of the New York Shakespeare Festival. Kundera was referring to Zdena Salivarova and her husband, Josef Skvorecky, who arrived in Toronto in 1968, and shortly thereafter (at Salivarova's insistence — Skvorecky thought the enterprise would go bust) founded Sixty-Eight to publish Czech and Slovak writers forbidden in Czechoslovakia, in their original languages. More than 90 books later, the press sends its fiction, poetry, memoirs, and social and political history to émigrés all over the world.

The applause for Salivarova, a short woman with large round glasses, was polite; the crowd, holding back for the big names, didn't seem to grasp who she was. The American writer Jane Smiley read from Salivarova's novel, *Summer in Prague*. Like many of the works read on this evening, Salivarova's was humorous; a secret file on a woman accuses her of only pretending to have "positive values." It seems that Czechs prefer to laugh at their misfortunes.

Paul Wilson read the work of Bohumil Hrabal, best known (because of a celebrated film version) for *A Close Watch on the Trains*. Wilson, who spent 10 years in Czechoslovakia before his expulsion in 1977 and now lives in Toronto, also went unrecognized by the audience for his role in the literature they had come to witness. He has translated the works of Skvorecky, Hrabal, and Vaclav Havel and rendered into English much of the work read during the evening.

At last a celebrity appeared: Arthur Miller, looking fit and dignified as he read from playwright Vaclav Havel's *Letters to Olga*. Havel spent several years in prison for membership in the human rights group Charter 77 (this spring he was again arrested briefly), and his new work consists of the letters he sent to his wife from prison. Miller's chosen passage, a discourse on loss sprinkled with suggestions for CARE packages, was the most challenging of the evening. Unfortunately, Miller's pedestrian reading did little to illuminate the dense prose.

The most moving presentation of the night was the poetry of the late Jaroslav Seifert, notably "Merry-Go-Round with White Swans" and "Lost Paradise," in the magnificent tones of American poet Galway Kinnell. Kinnell told of a recent visit to Prague when, after a reading, he asked about 20 listeners if any could recite a Seifert poem by heart. Almost all volunteered.

A neat and (but for a rather loud plaid tie) conservative-looking Josef Skvorecky chose to enliven history by reading not from a published work but from a squib written in the '60s and intended for friends at a private gathering. Skvorecky's heavily accented voice is a touch hard to understand and the audience strained to hear the account of a father who at first opposes his son's marriage to a girl who was fathered by a black American soldier from North Carolina, but then considers the advantages such an alliance would bring to the family's class profile. It was logical and absurd and the audience roared.

That put them in the mood for the evening's final reader, Kurt Vonnegut. Bushy-haired and aging, Vonnegut looked ever more like Mark Twain as he read from Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Vonnegut sounded as if he had marbles in his mouth and interrupted himself with chuckles at the farcical portrait of a funeral during which the narrator's hat, taken by the wind, falls into the open grave. It was that sort of evening — a funeral with laughter rather than tears.

— CARY FAGAN

A memory

The Cuala Press, established in 1903 by W. B. Yeats's sisters, Elizabeth and Lily, published almost all the great Irish writers of the 20th century

WHEN THE Cuala Press closed in 1987 and its effects passed into the keeping of Trinity College in Dublin, the world of books lost a direct link with one of the greatest periods of literary history. For me, however, the loss felt more personal. I had spent an idyllic afternoon at the press in 1978; it had featured extensively in my doctoral thesis on poetry and the private presses; and its productions, both modern and historical, had frequently come to my attention in my work as a freelance writer concerned with fine printing and the book arts.

In 1902, W. B. Yeats's sisters, Elizabeth and Lily, established Dun Emer Industries as an Irish expression of the Arts and Crafts Movement, which had so fired their imagination and enthusiasm during a stay in London. Among the weavers, tapestry makers, knitters, and dyers to whom they gave employment, they also established a press with the intention of publishing the finest Irish writing in handsome editions. That they succeeded is history — all the great Irish writers of the 20th century with the exception of James Joyce were published in Cuala Press editions — and that history was recorded with fidelity by the late Liam Miller in his authoritative book *The Dun Emer Press later the Cuala Press* (The Dolmen Press, Dublin 1973).

My memory of the press goes back to a summer afternoon in 1978 when I was holidaying with my Irish in-laws and received an invitation to drive out to Dalkey to make a journalist's visit to Anne Yeats and explore the press.

Dalkey is a pretty village perched on the cliffs above the Irish Sea between the city of Dublin and the port of Dun Laoghaire. Small, rural, and sleepy, Dalkey has literary connections that nevertheless encompass Yeats, Joyce, Beckett, and J. P. Donleavy, and if you do not know of it through Flann O'Brien's comic masterpiece of magic and invention, *The Dalkey Archive*, then I suggest you correct the omission immediately.

It was at Dalkey that the Cuala Press saw out its last years. It had been lodged in Baggot Street in Dublin for more than 30 years, during which time it had published some of the great works of Irish contemporary prose and poetry — work by Yeats, Gogarty, Frank O'Connor, Patrick Kavanagh, Louis MacNeice and Thomas Kinsella, among others — but in 1975 the huge Albion press, the racks of type, the paper, the books, and the archives of three-quarters of a century of publishing were moved out into the country, coming to rest in a beautiful house overlooking the sea.

The house in Leslie Avenue to which I was directed was originally an artist's home, and his studio, bathed in the afternoon's golden sunlight as I arrived, had been turned over to the press. Two walls of shelves held hundreds of neatly labelled line blocks, used in the illustration of books, broadsheets, pamphlets, and ballad sheets over the course of 70 years.

Other shelves were stacked with paper specially made for Cuala by Swiftbrook Mills at Saggart in the county of Dublin. Only a blind man could have missed the demy Albion hand press, built in 1853 and bought for a few pounds from an Irish provincial newspaper in 1903, on which most of the printing at the press was carried out. There was another Albion, smaller and more compact, which handled the ephemeral printing, and rack upon rack of Caslon type, the traditional typeface used almost exclusively in the press's inception in 1903 until its closure in 1987. The sisters had had good advice from Emery Walker in setting for Caslon, for though fashions have come and gone, Caslon remains what it always was, a classic book face that one never tires of reading.

When I visited the press it had recently been revived after falling silent for several years. In 1978 it was largely under the hand of W. B. Yeats's daughter Anne and his son Michael, although most of the work was done by Anne in time taken out from her own work as an artist of considerable reputation. By her own admission, the great years of the press were in the past by this time, the marvellous books, the Broadside Ballads, the correspondence and the *belles lettres*, but Anne Yeats was kept busy printing illustrated broadsides, poems, pamphlets, and other ephemera for collectors and for the huge tourist trade that descends on Ireland each year.

Over afternoon tea I was given books to look at that illustrated not only the history of the press but, in the sweep of their importance, the literary history of modern Ireland as well. Here was the first book of the press, W. B. Yeats's own poems, *In the Seven Woods (1904)*, about which he wrote in a letter to John Quinn

> This is the first book of mine that it is a pleasure to look at whether open or shut.

And then *Poems and Translations* by J. M. Synge (1909), and his *Deirdre of the Sorrows* a year later; *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1917), which gave the first showing to Robert Gregory's charging-unicorn device; several other books of Yeats's poetry, published regularly from the beginning to the closure of the press; *Poems* by Thomas Parnell (1926); a signed copy of Louis MacNeice's *The Last Ditch* (1940); and Thomas Kinsella's important collection *Notes from the Land of the Dead* (1972). There were examples of the famous "Broadsides" series dating from 1908, all with illustrations by Jack B. Yeats, many hand-coloured pamphlets, announcements, prospectuses, greeting cards, and even a child's toy cottage, printed on card, hand-coloured by Elizabeth Yeats, and entered for the Irish Arts and Crafts Society's 1917 exhibition.

The greatest flowering of Irish literature was spread out on the coffee table, on the rugs, over chair seats and on the floor as I left the house, and the sun was setting through the trees at the end of the kind of afternoon a bibliophile prays to enjoy once in a bookish life. It was the kind of metaphor a careful novelist would eschew as trite, but one that the natural world throws up from time to time to remind us of our mortality.

— ROGER BURFORD MASON

BRIEF REVIEWS

FICTION

SOUVENIRS: NEW ENGLISH FICTION FROM QUEBEC

by P. Scott Lawrence,
Cormorant Books, 139 pages, unpriced (ISBN 0 920593 16 6).

THE BEST STORY in this collection is "The Hand of Fatima" by Sandy Wing, a richly woven narrative about the sudden, rampant explosions of desire that can turn the straight line of our days into cluttered knots of fantasy and obsession.

By invoking the fantasia of a pregnant woman in a junkyard and her son's shy and desirous teacher, Wing enters dangerous territory. But she has the fine touch and powerful vision to tease mystery out of the quotidian without resorting to grand schemes and spectres. I don't understand why "The Hand of Fatima" was buried at the back of the book while "The Stepmother" by Roma Gelblum Bross, a moderately interesting story with a cheap moral whiplash at the end, opens the volume.

Cheap devices, especially announcing death or disease in the first paragraph and explaining it in the last, are *de rigueur* with many of the writers in this collection. Brian Bartlett's "October Home" is interesting, despite its falling prey to this device. His inner voice of a woman driving a bookmobile through New Brunswick, mourning her dead son and remembering the husband she left behind, is convincing and compelling. Bartlett wants to meditate on loss and catharsis, and he is one of the few writers in *Souvenirs* willing to experiment with narrative form and style. But for all that, he still builds to an archaic and unnecessary climax and works his images too hard (we are hammered again and again with the satellite dishes, signs of memory and distance). With more control and less frantic emphasis, Bartlett could be very good.

In several of the stories in the collection the writing is flat and the material is boring. "Limbo" by Ann Diamond wanders around, going nowhere, and "Whispers" by Miriam Packer is a mysterious-illness tale that is tedious and awkward to read. Packer's beautiful closing image may indicate that the writer will have something to offer in the future, but these stories are practice runs. In fact, most of the collection is not interesting. The "voice" that the editor claims to have found in all the stories was hard to find, buried beneath stultifying narrators who write like journalists and narrative devices that stand in for ideas. But finding a gem like "The Hand of Fatima" is worth the price of admission. — JOHN KNECHTEL

POLAND UNDER BLACK LIGHT

by Janusz Anderman,
Readers International (584 10th St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215), 155 pages, U.S. $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 9305 23 148).

BAD NEWS from Poland means good news for literature. *Poland Under Black Light* is a collection of stories by Janusz Anderman from the Polish underground. After 1981, "the post-war years," Anderman served as a liaison between the Union of Polish Writers and Solidarity, and co-founded the Committee of Aid for Internees. He was arrested for his activities and spent six months in the "notorious" Bialoleka jail. These tales uncurtain the black-clouds-and-tear-gas gloom of Warsaw under martial law.

Anderman belongs to the "Generation of 68" that grew up with student protests and workers' riots. He minimizes bathos with short "freeze frames": a nonsequential hopscotch of vignettes and mood pieces reminiscent of John Dos Passos's "Newsreels" — only with greater dispatch. Page after page runs by like a *film noir* script. Political strategies are referred to as "scenarios." And one irate cab driver, meter kept running by a missing passenger who disappears into a police interrogation centre, curses: ". . . it's like a movie, dammit, like a movie . . . ."

Anderman deliberately writes in the vernacular as an expression of national consciousness. In translation, however, the English often sounds like Cockney with Polish names: "And brother-in-law Wysocki's a decent bloke, 'cos he's a good drunk."

But Anderman's leakspeak also carries lyrical touches, as in his description of a prison cell: "The window grating is overgrown with a thick mesh that guards the inside and suppresses sounds. The loathsome Alsatian can't be heard — it thrashes about between the fence of thorn and the sky-high wall, which is daubed over with white paint to the height of a prisoner's upraised arms. The paint flakes off, baring previous layers of the Gomulka and Gierek eras; it is a young prison."

As if peeking through a spyhole or a camera aperture, the reader observes creeping things through the fog of Warsaw, wheelchair victims rounded up in a van by soldiers in battle dress, or necrophilia among pigeons.

In contrast to the steel netting, rolling tanks, and terminal depression, there is also the odd scene of hope.

> People pray silently in the side aisle by the Easter Tomb; a helpless body of Christ on a prison bed, and by him, on a bundle of straw, white paper hearts like snow; children have written the best of their Easter good deeds: I gave up my seat in the tram, I got a good mark at school, I helped a blind man cross the road . . . .

As for salvation through sexual politics:

> . . . inevitably the first time you feel the fist of your drunken husband in your face; those women would eat the carpet for a wee bit of love, but usually they do not know the word: this exotic word, which nobody will ever explain to them, because this word has been obliterated from our language, killed in cold blood, this word lov . . .

Freedom of expression under a totalitarian regime is a pain-intensive industry. Janusz Anderman successfully manifests the struggle of being both captive and capturer. Dark and illuminating, *Poland Under Black Light* clicks.

— RAY FILIP

LOST CAUSES

by José Leandro Urbina, translated by Christina Shantz,
Cormorant Books, 91 pages, unpriced, paper (ISBN 0 920953 26 3).

I REMEMBER that the first news item I ever saw about the 1973 Chilean coup was a brief, single-column story under the headline Marxist Government Overthrown, in which it was reported that the army had taken control because of the chaotic economic situation and that the elected president, Salvador Allende, had died in the fighting. There might have been mention of other casualties and of arrests, but if so, it didn't make a lasting impression, since numbers have a way of leaving out the lives they represent.

Lost Causes, a collection of short fiction by Chilean refugee José Leandro Urbina, is an act of historical redress. It gives us the lives behind the statistics, taking us into neighbourhood bars and cafés, into streets and households

and prisons. These fictions, often as brief as one page or a single vignette, are simply told, but their spareness and restraint offer a powerfully moving depiction of the coup's aftermath. What makes them so compelling is their characters' ordinariness in the face of an extraordinary situation. In "Last Date," a group of students, nervously waiting for instructions on resisting the military takeover, begins telling jokes to break the tension:

> Everyone doubles over with laughter. That's what always happens with this group, once they start laughing they can't stop. It's as if an electric current were running through their bodies. My ribs and my stomach ache and I shout at them to stop, but they can't. It's like they're going to die laughing. Exhausted, I look at them. I watch them laugh beautifully, stupidly, desperately, and suddenly, who knows why, I have a feeling this will be the last time we'll see each other. I decide to go out to smoke a cigarette and stretch my legs.

Despite the pessimism suggested by its title, and the brutality, bloodshed, and grief it contains, this is not a depressing book, perhaps because there is an essential dignity to the ordinary lives it depicts. Their stories will stay with you.

— BARBARA CAREY

FIGHTING THE UPSTREAM

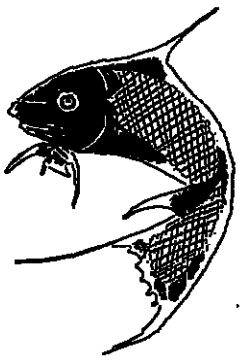
by Don Dickinson,
Oberon, 125 pages, $12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 697 6).

ALTHOUGH Don Dickinson's short stories have been appearing in the literary magazines since 1973, *Fighting the Upstream* is his first collection. He writes about characters who are obsessed with death or bloodless abstractions, and must be educated into life.

The narrator of "The Other War," for example, describes how he tried as a young boy to emulate his father, a war veteran. But Mr. Belaney teaches both his sons a lesson about the value of life and the senselessness of killing, even if the victims are only the rats infesting their cellar. Arthur, of "The Part He Sees His Country," is a tour guide who has cut himself off from any real human contact; it takes Mr. Pervis, one of the people on his tour, to show him how necessary, and even unavoidable, that contact is. The narrator learns that although he has seen much of the world he has no true place in it. The title character of "Kozicki and the Living Dog" lives in a fantasy world until his rebirth in a classic epiphany scene. Jimmie, the narrator of "Fighting the Upstream," is a prisoner who finds nothing in life that excites him or gives him purpose — until he joins the prison rowing team.

The best piece, "The Mythical Kid," portrays Tom Remchuk's painful and ultimately damaging certainty that his mother's current illness will be her last. His loss of hope proves to be a kind of betrayal with which he must come to terms. The "mythical kid" — the fictional child whose fatal exploits are frequently used by adults to frighten children into obedience — aptly symbolizes the denial of living reality in the story.

Don Dickinson is a fine writer, but so far, unfortunately, not a very prolific one. I look forward to seeing much more of his work in the future. — ALLAN WEISS



SCIENCE

THE LIVING ARCTIC

by Hugh Brody,
Douglas & McIntyre, 192 pages, $14.95 cloth (ISBN 888 94585 X).

DANGEROUS RIVALRIES aside, says author Hugh Brody, Americans and Soviets have more in common with each other than either of them has with northern hunting peoples. Both superpowers evolved from agricultural, peasant societies. They share certain ideas about land, marriage, law enforcement, and how to raise children — ideas that are deeply alien to hunting societies. *The Living Arctic* is part of Brody's continuing effort to help settled, urban peoples understand their northern contemporaries better, to everyone's benefit.

Brody is one of northern Canada's foremost anthropologists. He was born in England in 1943, studied at Trinity College, Oxford, and lived for much of the early 1970s in the Canadian high Arctic, earning respect for his contributions to studies such as the Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project, which stands as an important reference work.

His first solo book on the Arctic appeared in 1975. Entitled *The People's Land: White and the Eastern Arctic*, it is an angry young man's incisive and catty exposé of all that is wrong with the white people who live in Inuit settlements. Next he wrote the acclaimed *Maps and Dreams*, published in 1981, a finely crafted work whose odd-numbered chapters chronicle the daily life of a group of Beaver Indians in northeastern British Columbia, and whose even-numbered chapters explore the difficult social and political issues they face.

In his latest book, he draws from his long experience and knowledge of both the Inuit and northern Indians to show how differently northern hunting societies are oriented from the rest of humanity, and how easily misunderstandings can arise. The book is called *The Living Arctic*, but it draws equally from arctic and subarctic peoples across the Canadian north, and its observations apply to the northern parts of the provinces.

Brody details the importance of mobility among hunting peoples, showing how constant movement shapes social structure and attitudes to land. He shows how hunters profit from the cold, and how warm weather can hinder travel and invite unwelcome insects. He handles native mysticism with sensitivity, and in consistently clear, deft prose he explains the importance of community harmony, the status of elders, and the learning process involved in a hunter's long apprenticeship.

Trying to help others understand why northern natives think and act as they do must sometimes strike Brody as a losing battle. Several years ago, animal-rights campaigners killed the seal market in Europe, hurting not only Newfoundland sealers but also crippling Inuit economies across the Arctic. Bending again to animal-rights groups in February, the British government disclosed a plan to warn customers about fur products that might have been caught with a "steel-jaw leghold trap."

The growing success of urban activists in undermining hunting-and-trapping peoples living in harmony with nature is a worrisome trend — one that can likely be reversed only if writers like Brody find their audience.

— JOHN GODDARD

ARCTIC IMPERATIVE: IS CANADA LOSING THE NORTH?

by John Honderich,
University of Toronto Press, 258 pages, $24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 5763 2).

IF SOVEREIGNTY requires knowing what is happening in a territory and being able to do something about it, Canada's claim to the high Arctic is a bluff. So argues John Honderich, Toronto editor and lawyer, in this troubling book.

We have claimed a region we have almost no means to patrol. We have enacted antipollution laws we have no means to enforce. We have largely left the defence of the Arctic to the country that most directly challenges the sovereignty we claim.

For generations, we got away with neglect of the Arctic because it was almost impenetrable and of little value to anyone except its few residents. This is changing quickly, but attitudes and policies are not. Our foreign policy, our defence commitments, and the apparatus of our government ignore the reality that Canada is an Arctic nation. Honderich calculates, for example, that we spend 500 times more in keeping troops and fighter squadrons in Europe than we do in defence of the north. He devotes more than half of this closely reasoned work to the role of the Arctic in strategic planning. He believes that Canada should stay in NATO and NORAD but firmly refuse any involvement in Star Wars. We

must cultivate much closer ties with our circumpolar neighbours and work with them to bar nuclear weapons from the Arctic.

Most Canadians are uneasy in our ignorance of the north — when we think of it at all. This solemn but provocative book confirms that our uneasiness is well founded. — LAWRENCE JACKSON

THE PAST

THREE DOLLAR DREAMS

by Lynne Bowen

Oolichan Books, 408 pages, $29.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88982 065 1).

THIS IS the sort of book that gives popular history a good name. It's Bowen's second effort in the field. A former public health nurse from Alberta, she's now settled in Nanaimo, B.C., and has an M.A. in Western Canadian history from the University of Victoria. Her first book, *Boss Whistle* (Oolichan, 1982) was an oral history of coal mining on Vancouver Island and won the 1983 Eaton's B.C. Book Award. *Three Dollar Dreams* reaches further back in time to contemporary letters, diaries, newspapers, court transcripts, and so on. The result is an immensely detailed collection of colourful facts, organized and presented with a watchful concern for maximum readability.

Three Dollar Dreams traces the development and decline of Vancouver Island's coal industry between 1835 and 1900. Labour strife was inevitable, given the authoritarian views of coal baron Robert Dunsmuir and the expectations of the miners, who had belonged to trade unions back home in England. They came, writes Bowen, because they shared a dream: "The dream is all that matters. . . . The coal will make the dream come true." In the end they had to settle for the reality of working for three dollars a day, at best.

Except for the occasional moment of colloquial overkill, Bowen's enthusiasm for her subject translates into vigorous, clean-cut prose. Her book is not only a useful contribution to the history of B.C., but also a revealing backdrop to the sometimes mystifying *mores* of British Columbians today.

— PAT BARCLAY

METAGAMA: A JOURNEY FROM LEWIS TO THE NEW WORLD

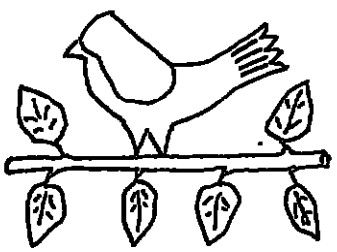
by Jim Wilkie

Doubleday Canada, 208 pages, $24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 385 25149 1).

"THERE WAS never a time when the Gael was a stranger to emigration," writes Jim Wilkie in *Metagama: A Journey from Lewis to the New World*. The Highland clearances of old had nothing on the period following the First World War: 300,000 Scots emigrated to Canada and the U.S. during the 1920s alone. Returned servicemen, expecting their government to make good on promises of land, were persuaded to emigrate to Canada instead. Meanwhile, Canadian farm labour was disappearing at a steady clip into the car factories of the United States. Between them, Canada and Britain worked out an assisted-passage scheme for Hebridean emigrants, and on April 21, 1923, 315 passengers, including 260 from the Isle of Lewis, left Stornoway aboard the CPR steamship *Metagama*, bound for Montreal.

Newspaper photos showed a sea of tweed caps surging around Stornoway dock. "Perhaps, in a way, the day the *Metagama* sailed was about the saddest day of my life. . . I knew. . . I'd never come back" recalled 85-year-old Donald MacLeod in 1986. It is one of 14 first-person accounts (including three in Gaelic) that follow author Jim Wilkie's description of the event and its historical context.

To Wilkie, the *Metagama* voyage was significant for two reasons: it was a milestone in the lives of many Lewis people, and it was the island's first "mass media" event. *Metagama: A Journey from Lewis to the New World* adds one more poignant drop in the very large bucket of historical minutiae so beloved by the Scots. — PAT BARCLAY



ODD MAN OUT: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ERIC KIERANS

by Jamie Swift,
Douglas & McIntyre, 352 pages, $26.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88894 559 0).

NOT AN EASY MAN to write about, Kierans. He has been a gadfly, professor, self-made millionaire, Liberal, liberal, champion of Quebec's Quiet Revolution, cabinet minister, broadcaster, nationalist, scrapper. Jamie Swift has given us a biography of Kierans that is vivid, scholarly, and briskly readable; that is a fine accomplishment.

Throughout his remarkable career Kierans loved ". . . tilting against established windmills — while all the time remaining inside the establishment himself." He was often in trouble, but usually for the right reasons. Swift sensibly concentrates on the battles, giving the first 45 years of the life only a terse 40 pages, which take Kierans to the Commerce Department at McGill and the presidency of the Montreal Stock Exchange. Snappy little insights are provided to the peculiar world of Anglo Montreal under Duplessis before Swift begins to unfold the story of Kierans entering the Liberal government of Jean Lesage in 1963 and joining hands with René Lévesque to promote social and economic reform. Although he was very close to René in terms of both friendship and policy, Kierans was instrumental in pushing Lévesque out of the Quebec Liberal party when the issue of separatism came to the fore. This part of the tale is told with considerable skill.

Having been one of the most vociferous early critics of Walter Gordon, Kierans by 1966 switched to the economic nationlist position and fought against American domination of Canada with the zeal of a convert. He carried the fight into the race for the national leadership of the Liberal party in 1968 but ran last in a field of eight. Three years in the Ottawa cabinet convinced him that Trudeau was ignoring unemployment, control of our natural resources, and economic policy in general. He resigned from the government in 1971, but not before crossing swords with the Ottawa mandarins and most of his cabinet colleagues. On returning to McGill as a professor of economics, Kierans continued to be an outspoken critic of Trudeau's administration, particularly the tipping of the tax system in favour of the rich and the giant corporations.

This fast-paced book is not just a good political biography but also a valuable document in Canadian intellectual history, providing useful insider accounts of the Quiet Revolution, Liberalism, nationalism, and the making of Canadian economic policy. Like Kierans himself, it's strongly opinionated, lively, and certain to be controversial.

— JACK MACLEOD

MUSIC

BOOGIE, PETE & THE SENATOR: CANADIAN MUSICIANS IN JAZZ: THE EIGHTIES

by Mark Miller,
Nightwood, 312 pages, $16.95 paper (ISBN 0 88971 112 7).

MARK MILLER'S book is built on a series of portraits of Canadian jazz musicians. By presenting a wide range of personalities and interviews, the book forms a substantial survey of the jazz scene in Canada. Some, if they require it, will be reminded and others will be informed of the wealth and depth of Canada's jazz community. Though clearly not designed as an encyclopedia, it gives an impression of gently biased thoroughness.

The emphasis is on those who have paid their dues and have sustained — or resumed — vital careers through the '80s. It is inappropriate to complain of omissions, but Miller leaves me wishing for a similar look at some of the more obscure yet dynamic musicians who have excitement and innovation to offer.

There is no attempt at cohesive interpretation, assessment, or history of the music. The connections are drawn incidentally. No links are deliberately forged. There are few attempts to demonstrate the music's place within a broader social and cultural movement. In a sense that is too bad. One is convinced that Miller has listened to enough music and analysed it with sufficient guile that he could — or should try to — provide us with such a picture.

Miller writes like a journalist, and when he writes about the music itself he achieves his most vigorous descriptions. Actually, that these accounts of playing are the most compelling in the book gives the lie to his claim that the book is about the careers of his subjects rather than the manner of their music. Miller would have done well to break up the repetitious rhythm, which consists of beginning each section with an overture, always shyly and tangentially pulling back the curtain on his character's life, and to have launched instead into a direct and inventive celebration of his or her work, establishing the truly essential concern of the book. One is, indeed, reminded again and again to go and listen.

— DAVID ROSEMAN

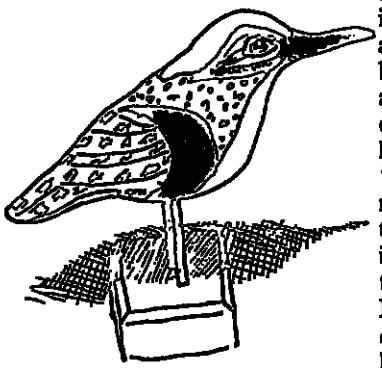
BELLES - LETTRES

THE MEMOIRS OF A LITERARY BLOCKHEAD

by Robin Skelton,
Macmillan, illustrated, 318 pages, $27.95 cloth (ISBN 0-7715-9284-1)

ROBIN SKELTON is perhaps our busiest poet and literary guru, as the bulging bibliography at the back of this book testifies. Scoffed at by some as a cultural gadfly, Skelton uses his *Memoirs of a Literary Blockhead* to put his considerably rich and varied life in perspective.

He recalls vividly an English boyhood, his bumbling wartime service in India, and his postwar education at the University of Leeds. Even then he was a maverick poet who dabbled eclectically in the arts and was at odds with the narrow tidiness of the academy. In the '50s, the fledgling man of letters earned a bob or two as university instructor, editor, and critic. The homage to Johnson — "no man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money" — does fit, if ironically. This tale is often a literary pub crawl, jammed with vignettes of the postwar literary scene. Stalled in the literary life of provincial England, Skelton left for the cultural frontiers of British Columbia to teach at the new University of Victoria. He provides a controversial portrait of university and literary life there, which only other participants can correct and challenge. And his battles over the *Malahat Review* say much about the drift of cultural policy in the 1970s: Skelton's defense of a more flexible approach to Canadian nationalism makes eminent sense.



Overall, these memoirs are good-humoured, self-deprecating and honest. A few well-placed bricks are hurled at the mean-spirited and pigheaded. But regrettably not nearly enough is said about how this poet writes and creates. A final chapter dwells on Skelton's witchcraft; the reader departs with the awkward feeling that more space has been given to the exorcism of spirits than to the writing of poems.

— B. K. ADAMS

POETRY

THE LYRIC PARAGRAPH: A COLLECTION OF CANADIAN PROSE POEMS

edited by Robert Allen,
DC Books, 155 pages, $11.95 (ISBN 0 919688 12 8).

THE AIM of this collection, according to editor Robert Allen, is to offer a sampling of the range and diversity of prose poetry being written in Canada. Allen is a bit shifty about pinning down a definition of this relatively new literary animal, but argues that "the prose poem has capabilities no other form has." Having read the work of the 32 writers included in this anthology, I'm not totally convinced of Allen's claim. Lorna Crozier's pieces, for example, are polished and crisply humorous — but so is much of

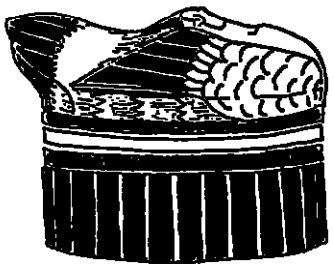
her poetry. These prose poems don't seem qualitatively distinct. However, it *is* evident from Allen's selections that the form is very open-ended; it is this wide variation in structure, style, and temperament that makes this anthology appealing.

In it, established names such as Margaret Atwood and Louis Dudek rub shoulders with newcomers Lori Weber and Bill Furey. A number of contributors offer compressed, narrative pieces loyal to the tenets of traditional prose while others, such as Roo Borson, achieve an eerily poetic effect. Daphne Marlatt's work represents a radical break from either conventional fiction or poetry. And enthusiasts of surrealistic or allegorical styles can sample the work of Michael Bullock, among others. If there is a dominant trend in this anthology at all, it is toward writing that is technically accomplished but sometimes a little too solemn and cerebral for my taste. Libby Scheier bucks this trend, with her exuberance and incisive black humour; Douglas Smith's low-key warmth is also a welcome departure. Overall, *The Lyric Paragraph* is a lively batch (it could hardly be called a blend) of writing, stimulating if not strictly innovative. — BARBARA CAREY

FOLKWAYS

RED ROVER, RED ROVER: CHILDREN'S GAMES PLAYED IN CANADA

by Edith Fowke,
Doubleday Canada, 159 pages, $12.95 paper, (ISBN 0 385 25172 6).



"RED ROVER, Red Rover, let Edith come over! Come on, Edith, get up some speed. Crash through that line and get back to our side." The country's most popular game? That's the claim made by Canada's folklorist Edith Fowke in this collection of child's-play activities. Best known for her compilations of Canadian folk songs, Fowke now records and describes 195 games played by English-speaking children during this century. The book is well organized in 15 game categories with ample source information, bibliography, and index. It makes for nostalgic fun in rediscovering the games of childhood.

What *Jake-and-the-Kid* Canadian can forget those first muddy days of spring when the marbles came out and the serious high-stakes "rebounders" games began? The basic games are covered here, although one might quibble that most of the experiences in this section are reported by 1970s York University students. At Queen Victoria Public School in 1947 we had large "alleys" called "bonkers," steel ball bearings were called "steelies" (not bonkers), and the most popular game was called "closies," not covered here. But that's the game. *Red Rover* provides the first organized framework for the recording of *all* Canadian children's games. Fowke is quick to point out that the work is far from complete — Francophone games need to be separately defined in a similar volume and native people's games are regrettably left for others to record.

Red Rover, Red Rover is an affordable paperback that should provide hours of nostalgic fun in any home, come late "conkers" season: a marvellous source book for primary school teachers and a must-purchase on every children's librarian's list.

— F. D. WARDLE

SACRED & SECULAR

WATER INTO WINE? AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CONCEPT OF MIRACLES

by Robert A. H. Larmer,
McGill-Queen's University Press, 155 pages, $22.50 cloth (ISBN 0 7735 0615 2).

MIRACLES lie close to the heart of Western religions. Christianity grows out of the Resurrection, Judaism out of the Exodus and the Revelation at Sinai. For skeptics, though, the miraculous has long been a favourite point of attack. The mind that believes in virgin births, the polemic goes, is the same mind that believes the nonsense retailed in supermarket tabloids.

In *Water into Wine?* Robert A. H. Larmer makes an aggressive entry into this centuries-old debate. Arguing against the sceptic, Larmer claims that miracles constitute empirical evidence of God's existence; and arguing against all other faiths Larmer claims that, whereas Christianity can explain miracles in the context of other religions, other religions cannot explain Christian miracles. Judaism, for example, is not able to account for the Resurrection, says Larmer.

But since 1748 when David Hume published his celebrated "Of Miracles," philosophers have widely rejected this line of argument. Unlike natural events, they assert, supernatural events cannot be established as fact and, consequently, cannot be used to prove anything.

The new wrinkle Larmer brings to the debate is to argue that miracles don't necessarily violate natural law, and that if universal natural law and supernatural events are compatible, then naturalistic or scientific explanations have no right to precedence over supernatural or Christian explanations.

Larmer argues cleverly and writes clearly, lapsing into the technical language of academic philosophers only occasionally, but his arguments fail to convince.

Indeed, in terms of establishing far-removed events such as the Resurrection as both historical and miraculous, Larmer's arguments seem puny; they don't begin to roll away the stone of secular criticism. — BRIAN HENRY

FREE TRADE, FREE CANADA

The book that explains why the free trade agreement offers the only chance for a viable future for Canada. Edited by Earle Gray. Published by Canadian Speeches. 174 pages. Softcover. ISBN 0-9693400-0-1

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CANADIAN SPEECHES

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Beyond cyberspace

William Gibson's hard-edged style in Neuromancer *impressed a lot of critics. But now, he says, he's working with 'classical prose — the full range of organ stops and not just a Panasonic sampler'*

By Candas Jane Dorsey

WILLIAM GIBSON once thought he'd end up as "a third-rate North American J. G. Ballard . . . . I expected to spend the rest of my life going to SF conventions, getting shunned as an artsy-fartsy weirdo. They'd do that, and I'd sneer at them. That was my fantasy: to be loathed and despised in North America."

Gibson's fantasy didn't pan out. What happened instead is that his short stories, sold to *Omni* magazine, became cult favourites; his novel, *Neuromancer*, won the Hugo, Nebula, and Phillip K. Dick awards all in the same year; all Gibson's books sell like hotcakes, and the movie rights to *Neuromancer* sold for $100,000 about two years ago.

The number of works is small: two novels (*Neuromancer* and *Count Zero*) and one book of short stories (*Burning Chrome*), three of which are collaborations (with John Shirley, Bruce Sterling, and Michael Swanwick). All are published in paperback by Ace. His third novel, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, completes a trilogy and is to come out in October. It seems a modest output.

But the effect of the work is immense. Gibson's high-tech future world revolutionized the language and visions of science fiction. Cyberspace, the environment he created for his computer wizards to work in, turns out to be the hottest thing since the microchip — and as real. (It's actually called *iconics* and computer wizards in the real world have been studying it lately as the greatest New Thing of the computer world — but Gibson didn't know that when he invented it. In fact, he didn't even have a computer; he wrote *Neuromancer* on a 1927 Hermes typewriter with a broken key.) Gibson's greatly in demand to write screenplays now, and when you call his Vancouver telephone number and he's not there, the answering machine gives you his fax number — just in case. So much for obscurity.

So who is this guy who's been called the King of Cyberpunk (a title he hates and disavows), and what is he doing for the SF world in particular and the literary world in general?

To start with, he's one hell of a good writer. His writing has been called "Isaac Asimov meets Mickey Spillane," "kaleidoscopic, flashy and decadent," "the future taken from its sterilized wrapper and left out in the acid rain for a few years to ripen," and has been

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEX WATERHOUSE-HAYWARD

given more raves than can easily be quoted. The *Washington Post* said Gibson "transmutes category fiction into fine art." Want some more? *Rolling Stone*: "With his swift colorful dialogue and his flair for creating a believably gritty future, he has . . . yanked science fiction down from its recent Arcadian heights and forced it to wander mean, futuristic streets, where flesh is cheap and dreams are lethal." The *Wall Street Journal* (the *Wall Street Journal*?): "As modern fiction retreats into small rooms built of present-day neuroses, a few visionaries in the ghetto of science fiction are crafting a literature for the 1980s. They write hard-edged macrofiction that is ripe with ideas, gracefully written and appropriate to this age of instantaneous global communication and babies whelped in Petri dishes. And Mr. Gibson . . . is the movement's fiercest flame."

He's been compared physically to Huck Finn and Clark Kent; he calls himself "middle-aged and boring." What he is: tall, thin, intense with a veneer of laid-back. He was born in Virginia 40 years ago, came to Canada in 1971 and has lived here ever since. He married Deborah in Toronto, and in 1972 they moved to Vancouver where they live in a big old house with their two children (Graeme, 10, and Claire, five). Deborah teaches English as a second language, Gibson walks the kids to school and then comes home to write, the dog barks when the mail's delivered, and everything seems pretty quiet despite the odd weekend whale-watching expedition.

Quiet, that is, except for the flying around the world — L.A. to script conferences, to Japan because the Japanese love and voraciously translate Gibson's work; to London to research the new book, and so on — but that's what happens when someone who wanted to be obscure isn't.

I asked him about his original ambition to be "a third-rate North American J. G. Ballard"; he just laughed. "That may well be what I am! Yeah, it's really true: the whole thing, success, sort of baffles me. As time goes on it makes a bit more sense, but initially I just thought 'This is crazy; what's going on?' because I felt that *what* I was *doing flew so much in* the face of what science fiction seemed to want to be about. And since none of the sort of Art People I knew about ever read science fiction or cared about it in the least, I wasn't expecting attention from that quarter — which oddly enough is where I get the most gratification: stuff tends to come in from painters and filmmakers and literary people — and that always makes me very happy. But I thought I'd be addressing a very small audience. Writing science fiction seemed self-destructive, a wilfully obscure thing to take up."

So has success spoiled him? "I think it would have been more stressful not to have the recognition. When I look around at writers I know who seem to be really suffering, it's people who have been writing for 10 years and nobody's even heard of them and it's hard for them to publish and they don't get any money and they can't make a living. I think that's incredibly hard. I think *that* spoils people.

'I used to show early drafts to people whose opinion I felt I could trust. I've gradually quit doing that. Nobody can help. You're stuck with it. What you're being paid to do is be out there by yourself making the stuff up'

"It's hard to make a living as a writer. I've been lucky for a while — but most of my income now comes from screenplays, which is a different thing, like commercial art."

Although Gibson modestly denies that "cyberpunk" and by implication his own books represent a "genuine literary movement," he is a serious, focused writer and the work is powerful and demanding. Where did it begin? Gibson's been quoted as saying that he wrote what he'd always wanted to read but couldn't get. "A certain amount," he says, "was irritation with commercial SF, irritation with the existing state of the art. I think I did a lot of things I might not otherwise have had the nerve to go for, out of a sense of 'This'll shake 'em up; they'll really hate this.'"

Gibson is quick to point out that the only best-seller list he's ever been on was in *Locus*, the magazine of SF publishing in the U.S., and that its poll is of a small number of dedicated SF fans. But while he's far from a household word in any country, he's very well known in the SF field. Gibson's books have sold multiple thousands, and the sales remain steady years after their release.

The three novels have been called "the *Neuromancer* trilogy," and they certainly are related but, unlike the nasty sort of trilogy — common in SF and fantasy — that's written as a whole and then broken up into three books for marketing reasons, they show a definite evolution in both style and content.

Neuromancer is hard-edged, desperate, and bleak in its world view. *Count Zero*, which starts from an initial disillusionment, ends with a humane and almost gentle hopefulness. And *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, which Victor Gollancz of London will publish this summer and which will be released in Canada in October 1988, is, though adventure-filled and fast-moving, also intense, almost introspective, and relatively generous of spirit.

"I see it mainly as a stylistic evolution. What I would hope it looks like is that the characterization improves. The characterization in *Neuromancer* is on a Hollywood level, not in a bad way; I think of *Neuromancer* as being very high-quality cardboard, glossy. It was as serious a piece of work as I was capable of doing at the time, but its commercial success aside, I didn't think it went very far as far as being a good novel. The changes over the next two novels are the result of my trying to write what I think of as a good novel. For me it's not happening yet, but it's fun trying.

"I'm not going to do any more cyberspace stories. There aren't going to be four more volumes of the *Neuromancer* saga; I'm never going to get back into that particular imaginary world. It was pretty devious to write the second and third book, but to my mind they're so different in terms of what they try to do that it didn't really matter. By the same token, if you look at the prose, if you look at the first chapter of *Neuromancer* and the first chapter of *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, they're very different stuff."

The third book of the series is, from a reader's point of view, a year late. The industry billed it for an October 1987 release. Listening to Gibson talk about his attitude to writing, one understands why.

"I used to show early drafts to people whose opinion I felt I could trust. I've gradually quit doing that. You get so far into it you realize nobody can help. You're stuck with it. What you're being paid to do is to be out there by yourself making the stuff up. I do a lot of revision. It makes up about 70 per cent of the process for me. What happens finally is that they come and take it away from me; they say, 'You've got to quit; it's

done! It's done; we want it now!' I never did give it to them until the last minute and then with a real feeling of 'Oh, shit, now it's kind of stuck; it's frozen in amber.'

"With *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, if I'd taken another year I'd have got something closer to what I wanted, but it would have been so different that it wouldn't have fit with the others at all — I'd have written myself out of that particular fantasy entirely, and the characters would be sitting around worrying about their relationship with their families instead of having adventures. In a sense that's what happens in the book: the adventure framework gets more and more tenuous while the interior lives of the characters become more lush and at the same time more defined. When I saw that happening I was pleased because I think it's healthy, but I thought, 'Oh-oh, it's bad for genre entertainment; I'd better try and balance this one out, and afterwards go and do something else.'"

The something else at the moment is a collaboration with Bruce Sterling on a novel set in 19th-century England and involving, among others, Charles Babbage, the original inventor of the computer. "It's a monumental and quite serious undertaking," says Gibson of this alternative-history novel, one in which the British develop steam-driven computers as part of the early Industrial Revolution. "We're working here with prose that allows a full classical range — our models are like Jane Austen — with the full range of organ stops instead of just a Panasonic sampler. What people think of as cyberpunk prose I think of as playing with one of those Casio portable electronic keyboards or something."

Gibson is impatient with the category "cyberpunk." He doesn't think the word means anything, for a start, and further, he's been quoted as saying that when he heard the label he thought: "Oh, well, whatever it is, it's over now." But for better or worse, cyberpunk is the tag the critics have settled on to describe the slick, fast, hard-edged style that Gibson tried for in early stories and novels, and for a certain effect, and is now leaving behind.

"I really don't think there *is* such a style — I know it's a theological discussion at this point; it's a very academic thing and other people who are called cyberpunk disagree with me completely, which complicates it totally — but you start looking at what is being written and it's very diverse.

"I get tired of reading reviews which describe my 'terse, jerky prose.' I try all day to write a sentence a page and a half long with 800 billion subjunctive clauses and somebody says 'Oh, yes, his terse Chandleresque prose . . .'"

"One of the things I did in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* was to write in ways in which I can say 'Raymond Chandler couldn't write this sentence' — because I don't write like Raymond Chandler. I've hardly even *read* Raymond Chandler. Any Chandler influences I have are by cultural osmosis; for instance I think there is a fair bit of Chandler in William Burroughs."

But not — one clearly gets the point — in William Gibson.

Screenplays make most of his income these days. He's due to do another draft of *Aliens III*, which he says will be "scary like the first one." Other screenwriting projects are stacked behind these.

As for films based on his own books, Ed Pressman, the "groovy independent producer" of *Wall Street* and *Walker* has bought the option on the short story "New Rose Hotel" and Gibson is contracted to co-write the screenplay with John Shirley; "Burning Chrome," another short story, has been bought by Carolco ("the Rambo money," as Gibson calls it) and he's retained to write that screenplay too. "The *Neuromancer* movie isn't going anywhere at the moment — but I rebuilt my kitchen with the rights money."

What's next for William Gibson? "At some point I'll quit," he says, "and say I'm not available for a couple of years." Does he have prose projects waiting after the completion of the collaboration with Sterling? "No, and I'm really happy not to. It's all potential, which is a really nice feeling. I've been under some kind of contract for something all the time since 1981. When I got the first one it made me nervous — I kind of got used to it, but now I would like not to do books to order.

"That's something convenient but kind of sleazy about genre writing: you get the money up front but you have to write the book in a specific period and it can't change much from the initial concept. I don't think it's a very good way to work and I'm looking forward to not having to do that, but just working on stuff and when it's finished selling it to whoever's willing to publish it. I think that would be much better."

Finally, I asked Gibson if, when he looks back at his life from the age of 70, he will be satisfied with what he's been doing. "I'm 40 and already when I look back I'm really happy," he said. "Of course, you never write the book you really wanted to write — but probably that's good." □

A victim must be found

'Right now an honest private investigator has a hard time not reading the want ads. It's the nearest thing to being unemployed in the whole Niagara Peninsula'

By Howard Engel

IT IS ONLY a couple of days from the 28th of March to the beginning of April, yet there seems to be a lost month in there this year that I'm only starting to account for. I'm sure that there is no perceptible difference in the temperature today and what it was last Monday, but Monday appears to be already backing into the clouds of history. Last week I heard that the United Cigar Store on St. Andrew Street is closing down, that Ella Beames, my friend at the library, is being retired, and ten years I've had to leave my room at the City House. Everything is in flux with a vengeance. It's all I can do to keep my head above water.

It would be easier if change could be blamed on someone. Maybe municipalities should elect an ombudsman on the understanding that on leaving office he'll become the public whipping boy for a year, the person to blame for everything from ingrown toenails to the untimely death of a good friend. Life would be simpler that way. All you have to do is find the right person.

Of course I wasn't thinking of any of this last Monday. On Monday, last week and a thousand years ago, I had other things on my mind.

I was surrounded by boxes. They rose around me like ungainly towers of cardboard. In one of them were my cuff links and my toothbrush. In another I had a list of all my belongings and a key for finding each object in its numbered box. "If I had this to do again . . ." was the half-formed thought that kept kicking me

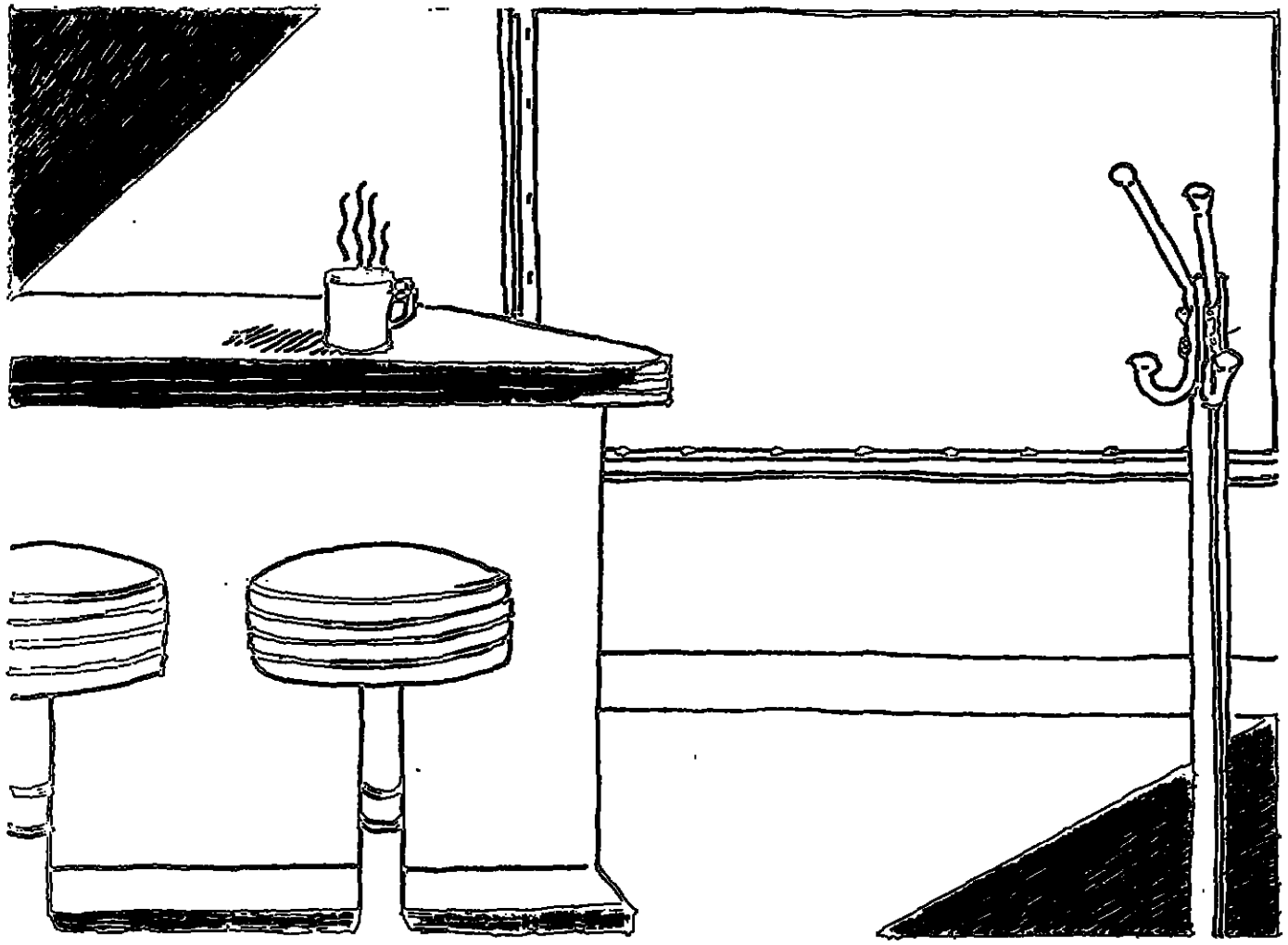


ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID SHANTZ

in the ear. But moving again was out. I was sure of that much. I had given up the simplicity and familiarity of my old room at the City House on King Street. If I had to do it all over again I would keep the master list on my person and put the numbers on the sides of the boxes and not the top. As it was, I couldn't see a single number, they were all hidden by the boxes on top, and the top box stood above my sight line.

I sat in the middle of this mess, trying to get a handle on it. At least the room had a carpet. I'd never owned a carpet before. I thought, one day I might even own a tree. For the last hour, ever since the moving man had taken his tip and my last cigarette, I'd been trying to put some order in my life by moving the packed boxes from one wall to another. Whenever I opened one of the cartons, it was the wrong one. What was I going to do with LPs when I couldn't locate the stereo? I needed a place to put the records. It was on my "must buy" list, wherever that was.

I stood on a chair and looked down on the number of the top box. It didn't mean anything to me. I raised the flaps and saw the buff colour of office files. That box wasn't even supposed to come here. I tried to readjust the lid. I was getting good at closing cardboard cartons. At first I had a devil of a time getting the flaps to lock. It was like trying to tie a reef knot and always coming up with a granny. It took a long time to sort out the over and under technique of getting the tops to hold. Naturally, the mover could do it blindfolded. Further, he demonstrated an assortment of skills: sliding heavy objects through tight corners with a blanket and even getting one awkward package through the window off the fire escape.

I reached for a cigarette and remembered the departing mover. He'd taken the last in the pack, but had let me know it wasn't his usual brand. He had also let me know that he didn't think much of my new apartment. Looking around at the towers of cardboard, I was inclined to agree with him. The place wasn't huge. It was a lot bigger than my room at the City House, but it didn't present a vista of rooms melting away through vast corridors to the vanishing point. It was a room for sleeping, sitting and eating. There was a kitchenette behind a curtain and a three-piece bathroom. Outside the window on one side was a schoolyard with a metal geodesic structure for the kids to climb on at recess. From the other windows I could see a streetscape of parked cars and damp trees. What had started as a Scotch mist had degenerated into a cold, wet drizzle. The windowpanes of the apartment shook in the wind. Parallel rain tracks were diverted by the blasts as they moved down the soot-stained glass.

I pinned a note on my door for the telephone man and left both my apartment door and the downstairs door unlocked. It was time to buy cigarettes and to rethink a few things.

The wind blowing across Court Street wasn't exactly strong, but it cut into me. It made the fierce winter we'd just come through a lot closer than the calendar indicated. Last week we were forgetting our jackets and rolling down the car windows. And now the puddles looked like they'd freeze if the thermometer dropped a notch. In the corners of the alley, the detritus of the winter was still showing; the pile of garbage that had collected in the snowdrifts during February still clung to the walls and gutters. Fragmented newspaper pulp and scraps of plastic wrap stuck to the brick. The wet chill made my feet feel the thinness of my shoes as I hurried to the United Cigar Store for a cup of coffee.

The United wasn't the same. For the last couple of months I'd been hearing that they were going to close it down. I took my usual place at the dark marbletop counter and accepted the coffee as my due when Irene slid a cup in my direction with neither a greeting nor a glance. I was part of her day and needed no more recognition than another full ashtray or empty ketchup bottle. I sipped in silence, thinking of my boxes.

"Benny? Can I talk to you?" I turned around and it was Pambos Kiriakis moving in on me from five stools away. I said hello to the little guy and took my coat off the stool next to me. Shoving his coffee mug along the green marble counter, he left a wet trail of heavily creamed coffee behind him. He frowned at that. I wondered whether that was because he used to be a waiter. Anyway, he let Irene do the honours with her damp cloth. A nod from him initiated another fill-up from her Silex, a smile brought a handful of plastic cream containers.

The first time I met Pambos Kiriakis, he was flipping steaks in the steakhouse which briefly occupied the store under my new apartment. It had been a launderette and a typewriter repair store before that. Now it was having a fling as a Mexican restaurant specializing in refried beans. Death was written on its menu. I didn't give it another three months before it gave up the ghost. Where do people get the idea that you can make a buck from refried beans in Grantham, Ontario? I tried to think of other sure-fire misses: a store specializing in coloured paper-clips, a boutique dealing in designer luggage, a head shop, a rare-book store.

Since he took off his white apron and chef's bonnet, I'd seen very little of Pambos except at the United or at Diana Sweets, where most of the town filters the news of the day. It's a sort of community dialysis. Sitting in a booth at the Di, I can see all of the kids I went to high school with and half of my teachers. Here deals are made and contracts are signed. I've seen a couple leaning across a table so close that their heads touched as they held hands over a banana split. Later I saw the same couple working on a separation agreement. I knew it was a separation agreement, because the boy had asked me to follow his young wife when she was supposed to be going to her choir practice. But that was in the days when there was a buck to be made in divorce work. Right now an honest private investigator has a hard time not reading the want ads. It's the nearest thing to being unemployed in the whole Niagara Peninsula.

I'd heard that Pambos had done well. I remembered that he was managing the Stephenson House, a small exclusive hotel overlooking the old canal. "Benny, I think I need your help. I mean, I think I need your professional help. Can you sit a minute?"

"Sure, Pambos. What's on your mind?"

The little guy stroked his chin, reaching for a place to begin and not finding it. I tried to make it easier for him. "I just moved into that apartment over the steakhouse where you used to work," I said. "It's a Mexican place now."

"Yeah, Tacos Heaven. It's run by a Hungarian from Niagara Falls. I give it three more weeks before it's empty again." He was still groping for a starting place. He took a stab. "You still do private investigations, don't you, Benny?"

"Specialty of the house."

"That's what I thought. I should have come to your office, Benny, but seeing as how I saw you sitting here by yourself, I thought, what the hell? What can he do to me?" I gave him a grin to show that he wasn't stepping on my corns. He smiled too, but then asked in a quieter voice:

"You want me to wait and come to the office, Benny? I can take a hint."

"Pambos, if you want to talk to me about it here in the privacy of the United Cigar Store, that's your privilege. What can I do for you?"

"It's a question of stolen property."

"Pambos, I'm not a fence. I'm au investigator."

"I know that! I'm just having trouble getting the story started. Something that belongs to me is missing. It's not where it should be."

"You're talking about an enpensive object?"

"I want to talk to you about a list." He looked into my face like I was about to tell him he'd won the lottery. If he saw a shadow pass over my features it was a brief recollection of my own list in one the hventy or so boxes in my apartment.

"What sort of list?"

"A piece of paper. It was in my office and now it's gone."

"I take it this list is valuable, eh?" I always try to let my dents see into the workings of a professional investigator's mind. -Little *scraps of deduction or expert knowledge always help. I once tried to get an intimate grasp of the map of the city so I could without looking recall that Binder's Drug Store is right next to the wooden building with a barbershop on the ground floor. On the other side's a gas station. But I was always mixing up Chestnut Street with Maple and Hillcrest with Glenridge. Pambos was looking at me.

"It is and it isn't," he said. "To some it would have value, but it's not valuable in a general way. I mean, it's not money or stocks. It's just a list of names." We both took a sip of coffee. I couldn't help imagining Pambos's list in the last of the bones at my place, in the bottom. I thought of trying to pnt off the rest of the interview until after I'd moved in and gone back to my office on St. Andrew Sheet. But I didn't. I dki something that's routine with me; in this case I meant it.

"Why don't you go to the police about it, Pambos? The cops have a great reputation for finding things."

Pambos's smile went in out of the rain. "Look, I got nothing against the cops. Some of my best friends are cops. You know Christophoros Savas? He comes from Cyprus, like me."

"Sure, I know Sergeant Savas. He's a good cop. Why don't you tell hkn about it?" I thought I'd found an out. In spite of the fact that I needed the business in a general way, what I needed right now was a few snappy stories to help tighten the load of moving-day confusion. I felt like I was a gymnast doing the splits. I was still more than half living at the City House and not safe and dry in my new home yet. I wasn't sure if I had a bed to sleep on for the night. I had the makings of a bed, but that was a mile short of comfort. I thought, what the hell, I might as well come clean. I told Pambos about my problem. He'd just started to give me the usual list of tenreasons why he couldn't go to the cops when I stopped him. He pulled at his chin again. It had been getting bluer as we'd been talking. Pambos needed to shave every half-hour.

"Okay:" he said. "Why don't we go back to your place? I can help you unpack and tell you about the rest of this stuff. What do you say? I'm very good at organizing things," he said with a touch of pride. "It's because I'm not sentimental. I got a lot of true sentiment in me, but I don't get sentimental, if you catch my meaning. There's a difference."

I paid the check and we wont out into the chilly March weather. At least it had stopped raining. □

This is the first chapter of Howard Engel's new Benny Cooperman mystery, A Victim Must Be Found. *It will be published in September by Penguin.*

Blood on the snow

The psychological barrier that made Canada seem an unsuitable setting for murder mysteries has been hurdled so successfully it's hard to believe it ever existed

By **Douglas Malcolm**

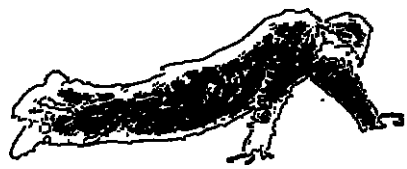


ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID BOLDUC

CANADA HAS ALWAYS had its fair share of murder, arson, robbery, assault, fraud and assorted other crimes. We've even had the occasional case of espionage. But despite all this bona fide criminal activity, Canada until the 1970s was as empty as a Liberal gathering in Alberta when it came to crime fiction. To be sure, there had been many valiant attempts to plant the seeds of the crime novel above tbe 49th parallel (remember November Joe, hunting guide and backwoods sleuth, or Margaret Millar's Inspector Sands of the Toronto police force?) but, until recently, none took root.

Why? Aside from the fact that nearly everyone, ourselves included, regarded Canadians as boring, publishers didn't consider mysteries set outside California, New York and London — the traditional venues of excitement — marketable. The last 10 to 20 years, however, has seen spectacular growtb in the sales of all types of genre fiction, the crime novel included. John Clark of Collins Publishers points out that "when mysteries and romances make up 50 per cent of the fiction market, publishers start taking it [crime fiction] seriously." And when American private eyes started popping up in unlikely spots like Indianapolis (Michael Z. Lewin's Albert Samson) and Ciiti (the Harry Stoner series by Jonathan Valin), it didn't take long for Canadian publishers to get into the act.

Police procedural, spy story, thriller, locked-room mystery and hard-boiled detective novel are just a few of the terms used, often interchangeably, to describe crime fiction. It must seem a terrible muddle to the uninitiated. Smce a great many books (Julian Symons's *Bloody Murder* is an excellent primer on the subject) not to mention academic treatises have pondered the matter, the question'of definition is, fortunately, beyond this project's scope. Still, a rough sketch of the territory would not be amiss.

Crime writers, more than authors of mainstream fiction, focus on the contract between the individual and society. At one end of the spectrum are thrillers. In these novels the central character is often an outsider in conflict with society. Everything and everyone is suspect, and the hero must use every resource at hand in order to survive. The spy story, which puts an agent in just such a situation, is the archetypal thriller. While the practitioner's skill is all important — the few Le Carrés help to compensate for a multitude of hacks — the thriller tends to emphasize action and exotic locales at the expense of characterization. Canadians such as Charles Templeton, Richard Robmer, Dennis Jones! David Gurr (whose *Troika* is a stylistic gem) as well as the bmthen Hyde, Anthony and Christopher, have proved Canadians can turn out this kind of stuff as well as anyone.

The detective story, in all its various guises, is the thriller's opposite number. The detective labours to solve a crime, usually a murder, so that order and harmony can be restored to the public weal. The implicit message, as Margery Allingham once wrote, is that "It is not good to die; any violent death is the concern of the Community." In its demand for plausible character development and intricate plotting, the detective story is much closer to the conventional novel than the thriller. It is also a branch of fiction in which, if international recognition is anything to judge by, Canadian writers have of late been highly successful.

In 1981 *Books in Canada* published a report on the Canadian crime novel by Jack Batten. He concluded that Howard Engel's Benny Cooperman almost single-handedly carried the standard of the Canadian detective story into the future. Since then Canadian novelists have taken top mystery writing awards in both the United States and Great Britain. L.R. Wright and L.A. Morse won Edgars for *The Suspect* and *The Old Dick* respectively, Ted Wood's *Dead in the Water* was named winner of the Scribner Crime Novel Award and Eric Wright picked up the John Creasey Award for Best First Mystery for *The Night the Gods Smiled*. Indeed, so much has changed that the once sparsely populated landscape is all but unrecognizable.

The psychological barrier preventing Canada kom being a suitable setting for a mystery has been hurdled so successfully it's hard to believe it ever existed.

Torontonians will be delighted to learn that their city features prominently in the new wave of detective fiction. ("So what else is new?" will be the response from the rest of the country.) Eric Wright's and John Reeves's heroes are members of the Metropolitan Toronto Police, Jack Batten's sleuth works as a lawyer on Queen West and Anna Porter's Judith Hayes is a Toronto freelance writer.

Outside Canada's largest city, but still in Ontario, one finds Howard Engel's novels set in Grantham (St. Catharines) and Ted Wood's in the fictional Muskoka resort town of Murphy's Harbour. Montreal is the setting for Maurice Gagnon's Deirdre O'Hara books.

Moving both west and east, L.R. Wright has located her Sergeant Alberg series on British Columbia's Sunshine Coast, and Prince Edward Island provides the background for *A Body Surrounded by Water*, one of Eric Wright's Charlie Salter novels.

Mystery writers may have established Canada as a credible locale for villainy, hut they have not been able to shake the influence of their British and American forebears. Since the Canadian mystery has barely bean hatched, it's hardly surprising that writers should look to foreign models for example. Just think how long it has taken poetry in this country to find an authentic voice. Of course the fact that many of the new detective novelists are originally from Great Britain and the United States may also have something to do with it. But for every Eric Wright, (a former Brit who writes British-style mysteries) there is a Ted Wood who came to Canada from England in 1954 and whose books are more American than British.

This phenomenon indicates how compelling British and American models of the detective story really are. Part of this potency can be attributed to their use of recognizable cultural stereotypes: Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer, the restless, sensitive egalitarian, is unmistakably American while the refined élitist John Appleby, Michael Innes's creation, is identifiably English. Given the amorphous nature of the Canadian identity — as Michael Richardson, head of the Canadian Crime Writers Association, ruefully observes, it's "impossible to define what a Canadian is" — it's little wonder most Canadian detectives resemble their counterparts in Manhatten and Middlesex. The exceptions, Engel's Cooperman and L.R. Wright's Sergeant Alberg, have seized the imported traditions and somehow transcended them.

The hard-boiled private dick is probably America's most important contribution to the mystery, and one that has had a sign&ant impact on Canadian mystery writing. Ted Wood, for instance, has patterned his writing on Mickey Spillane's tough-guy Mike Hammer novels. Since 1982 he has turned out a string *of* books, *Live* Bait is probably the best, starring Reid Bennett, chief of police and sole officer of Murphy's Harbour. Bennett's official status notwithstanding, Wood's books, like Spillane's, boast non-stop violence, gratuitous sex, world-weary cynicism and cellophane thin characters. Indeed, one of his better developed characters is not human at all but canine: Sam, Bennett's trusty German shepherd, who makes Rin-tin-tin look like a lap dog.

Jack Batten's first novel, *Crang Plays the Ace*, is also strongly affected by an American conception of the private eye. Batten's major inspiration, by way of Chandler and Hammett, seems to be Robert Parker whose set-in-Boston Spenser novels have been immensely popular. Crang is a &e-spirited Toronto lawyer who has eschewed Bay Street for a criminal practice, defending for the most part, small-tûne hoods. But like Spenser, Crang is a wisecracker, a natty but informal dresser and a fan of all gustatory experience. Unlike the settings of Wood's novels -most of which could be almost anywhere in rural North America — Batten's Toronto emerges loud and clear.

Although he writes in the gritty realistic manner of Chandler and Hammett, Howard Engel's books are all his own. His gumshoe, Benny Cooperman, is Canada's most distinctive private eye. Cooperman operates out of St. Catharines (even Alice Munro might envy Engel's rendering of small-town Ontario), and is Jewish, persistent and inquisitive. What gives these books a Canadian flavour, however, is Benny's self-deflating sense *of* humour, a trait that is best developed in the first two hooks in the series — *The Suicide Murders* and *The Ransom Game*. Cooperman *starts* souring a little in *Murder* on *Location* which, ironically, finds him having to deal with an American movie crew.

The British tradition of the mystery is characterized more by a cluster of traits than a single dominating presence like the private eye. They are usually well-written books emphasizing deduction over action, well-rounded characters and detectives ranging from the eccentric to the commonplace. For &ample, the witty, mannered dialogue of John Reeves's Inspector Coggin and Sergeant Sump series, not to mention the author's love of puzzles, places it squarely in the 'British mould. So, in Timothy Findley's *The Telling of Lies*, does the updated, more complex Miss Marple figure, Vanessa Van Home.

Eric Wright is probably the best of the Canadian crime novelists writing in the British manner. His Charlie Salter books follow the classic pattern of murder, deduction and solution familiar to anyone who has ever picked up an Agatha Christie. salter is an agreeable, low-key fellow who solves his cases through a mixture of perseverance and inspiration. However, it often seems he would be more comfortable at Scotland Yawl than 590 Jarvls. In *Death in the Old Country*, which takes place during a holiday in Britain, Wright carefully itemizes Salter's ignorance of several cultural differences (he doesn't know what *wanker* means for instance) but otherwise Charlie acts as if he'd bean in Blighty forever, which in some ways he has.

In *The Suspect*, L.R. Wright has taken the British mystery and put her own stamp on it. The memorable Canadian setting, a retirement village on the B.C. coast, may have something to do with *that. The three* principal characters — a librarian, the detective and the suspect — are all carefully drawn. Indeed, Wright has published several conventional novels. Her Staff Sergeant Alberg is a mild, sensitive man who enjoys his work, plans to go on a diet, and cares for stray cats. The quintessential Canadian! *The Suspect* is also an innovative book, for Wright begins with the who, as in whodunit, right off the bat. What makes it absorbing is how she is able to maintain our interest in the why until the very end.

The Canadian mystery has clearly been a growth sector of the economy over the seven years since Batten's article. I expect it will continue to prosper in the remaining years of the century. Detective stories will be set in farmhouses on the prairies and lobster shanties in the Maritimes, while sleuths will increasingly overcome their American and British ancestry.

We will also likely witness greater experimentation with style and form. Findley's *Tke Telling of Lies* points the way with a strange narrative composed of numbered entries. What I. would.' dearly love to see is a knock-your-socks-off Canadian mystery that would demolish the genre's supposed limitations. Perhaps Robbe-Grillet and Dostoevsky should be our models for the future rather than Mickey Spillane and Agatha Christie. □

East and West

'One of the strangest things about the West today is that people feel exiled in their own nations. They don't understand how things work any more. Nothing is solid'

By Nancy Wigston

JOHN RALSTON SAUL is the author of three novels (*The Birds of Prey, Baraka,* and *The Next Best Thing*), and has just published his fourth, *The Paradise Eater,* which takes place in the *demi-monde* of modern Bangkok. Nancy Wigston interviewed Saul recently in Toronto.

BiC: *The Bangkok portrayed in your book seems much closer to reality than the usual exotic glitz we read about that city, which by comparison seems like complete lies. Would you agree?*

John Ralston Saul: Absolutely. It's part of the modern phenomenon of tourism, which creates a feeling in people that they know places when they don't. Actually it's a great danger because they come home and say, Ah yes, I know about Thailand, and what they know is totally false. They'd be better to stay home and read a decent analysis.

BiC: *Is your novel designed to expose the soul of Bangkok, so that the city itself becomes the major character?*

Saul: I've always felt that In Canadians novels the geography, nature, is not a background, it's a character, as it is in Russian novels. Canadian fiction is much more like Russian fiction than it is like American or English or French. We waste our time comparing ourselves to London and Paris and New York. The Canadian view of the world is very particular. If the Canadian lets himself go when he's writing the place often does become a character, which is something the English and French can't do. They don't know how to make the place into a character., They're cut off from where they are; they're living in mythology.

The second thing is that I think Bangkok is the character. I make no judgements, but my story is a moral comedy, and Bangkok is one of the few cities left in the world tbat has absolutely everything in it. It hasn't been middle-classed.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LOUIS REA

John Ralston Saul

You have 10 million people, from a king who's a god on through an aristocracy who are really aristocrats, not middle class with titles the way the English and French and Germans are: then there's the Chinese moneyed class in its model bank towers with machinery more sophisticated than you'd find in New York; next door, 15,000 people living in a slum over a swamp: foreigners following neither their own rules nor the local rules; the generals who are corrupt on the one hand and social democrats on the other. You have a mixture Of the past and the present, the East and the West, and it's all thrown together in this city that's sinking in the mud. If you wanted to write something abouf the decline of Western society you couldn't do better than Bangkok. It's like a parable of the decline of the west, even though it takes place in the East.

You have to get outside the West in order to write about the West — that 'theme runs through *Bamka* and The *Next Best Thing.*

BE: *Do you see John Field, the hero, as a kind of corrupt romantic in the style of Le Carré's honourable schoolboys?*

Saul: I think he is a romantic figure, yes, but I wouldn't think of Le Carré, I would think of Graham Greene, who said it all — before the war, during the war, and after the war. Most people are very romantic, and men in particular are very romantic. There are six main characters in the book, four of them women, and what's interesting about those women is that they have very clear views of men. It may be a bit peculiar for a man to write a novel about women talking about men, but the women, if not romantic, are certainly not cynical. Paga [a Thai brothel keeper] is probably the world's greatest expert on men; she's made $20,000,000 out of understanding male psychology. Field and Wuthiwat [a Thai-English doctor] are romantics.

BiC: *Field seems like a typical Westerner in the East: too frail for the West, drawn by the image of the compliant, sensual girl, who, ironically, always evolves into a dragon lady. Is he also responsible for the decay? Is this why his boay is constantly leaking pas?*

Saul: That's interesting. Field is the kind of person who is weak absolutely. He is weak in terms of the way the West works today: he's not a technocrat, he's not an intellectual, he's not power-mad, he's not ambitious. He has none of the qualities that are considered today to make a man successful in the West, and that's why he left. *Baraka* was really about tne modern ambitious man who believes he can make it, and I take him outside — to Nortb Africa — and he's destroyed. If you were to ask me to make a choice between Field and the technocrat I'd take Field any day. I don't think he's responsible for the decay there; his disease is symptomatic of his *own* irresponsibility. He's an escapee.

BiC: *But you can't get out of it tkat easily.*

Saul: No, of course not. But you're making judgements. Robertson Davies wrote a letter about this book and said the nicest thin3 I've ever had said by anybodv. which was that I make no moral judgements about any of the characters; I just-let them act. Everybody is very honest. But Field isn't really a corrupt man.

BiC: *Corruption is visited upon him?*

Saul: He's an escapee. What he loves about that life is that he doesn't have to follow Western rules: he didn't have to go through women's liberation snd all those things, snd on the other hand he doesn't really have'to follow Thai rules either.

BiC: *What about natural rules? Antibiotics don't help his condition, do they?*

Saul: I saw the disease almost *ss a* symbol, although the specifics are very precise and I spent a lot of time with doctors there talking about it. Field is a sort of reject of Western society — he thinks he's been in paradise — but in many ways he's the victim.

BiC: *But his venereal disease is surely a kind of corruption.*

Saul: Oh, absolutely. But there's a line in there that would drive a lot of people crazy. Amara, tbe tipper-class Thsi, says that the worst tragedy happened after the *coup d'état* in the '30s when they brought in monogamy, which obliged the Thais to bring in prostitution. Of course, one isn't in favour of prostitution, but it's very complicated. There was an experiment described by Crappe the newspaper columnist about what hap pens to chickens if you keep them in the dark: they starve to death because they forget how to peck, and the problem with Western girls is tbat they don't have orgasms because they don't screw young enough. Of course it's scandalous snd outrageous, but in fact that's an exact study that was done.

BiC: *About the chickens?*

Saul: The chickens and the girls. It was done in the West, about six or seven years ago.

BiC: *Your target, then, is the moral/cultural straitjacket — monogamy, for example — that the West has imposed on the East?*

Saul: I like to force people to realize that what they believe to be absolute truths are limited by both time and place. That's one of the jobs of the novelist — to try to show people that what they're so convinced is true is a very limited and fragile assertion.

BiC: *The characters in the novel, both the city-as-character and the other compelling figures like Field and Dr. Wuthiwat, seem to tower* **over the** *actual plot.*

Saul: There is no plot. It was a great test, incidentally, to write a book in which there was no plot. This guy stumbles on something he doesn't want to stumble on, he doesn't want to take it, he loses it, he never finds out exactly what's going on, he never finds out who's after him, and you don't know, when he leaves, whether he's solved the problem or not. To do all that and to write a book that you couldn't put down was a great test.

'Field isn't your average guy, except on the surface. He's not a hero. He can't even fire a gun properly . . . . He feels for people. He has a peculiar one-man view of the world. He's not a man who's sold out — quite the contrary: he has his own vision'

BE: *We never really solve the mystery. You feel no responsibility for the plot?*

Saul: Why should I? I don't write genre novels — I've never written a thriller. In all my books the plots are really irrelevant; they're much more moral plays on destiny than they are books witb plots in them. There's a joke on mystery here. The real mystery is that all these people have agendas of their own and these have very little to do with the agendas of tbe other people, and surely that's very much like real life. What's wrong with so much of what we are writing today is that we pretend there are moments when everybody is going in one direction, that there *are* organized plots. Even the most intellectual novel still has this idea. There's nothing organized out there. The lights go on, you get a look, and the lights go off, and you may not have understood a third of what's going on. People wander onstage and offstage. It's something to do with our obsession in the West with time. In Africa and Asia they have a far closer idea of what *time* really means than *we* do.

BiC: *What about your style? The kook could have been longer.*

Saul: I believe in lean writing, the Graham Greene–Malraux school. You don't need adjectives and adverbs. People like

that were influenced by Conrad — he's the great dividing line in many ways.

BiC: *Another mate romantic?*

Saul: Absolutely. You describe very clearly what appears to be physical adventure and what you're really doing is writing metaphysics.

BiC: *Tke dedications at the beginning of tlie book seem to indicate that The Paradise Eater is in fact bawd on real people, real events.*

Saul: *AU novels* are based on real people.

BiC: *What about Field? He seems rather annoyingly real, like a man who's betrayed his paradise.*

Saul: He's not your average guy, except on the surface. I've not suggested for one moment that he's a hero; he can't even fire a gun properly, he doesn't do anything very well. But he has covered a5 the wars. He has that kind of funny courage that's just stubbornness really, au Irish stubbornness. He has a clear view of what he wants to do with his life. That view doesn't suit the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it doesn't suit middle-class morality, and it doesn't suit people who believe you have responsibilities. In a funny sort of way he has built a life for himself; he has a daughter whom he loves greatly. He carries this Catholic guilt around about the woman he abandoned, the girl's mother. He is very loyal to his friends. He has a curiously animal humanity about him. He feels for people. He has a very peculiar one-man view of the world. He is not a man who's sold out-quite the contrary: he has his own vision. Frankly I think a lot of us, *if* we ripped away our protections, would be very much like him. Maybe it's only men.

BiC: *The problem for women here definitely has to be tke whores — no matter how you m&m&t?, there ha visceral reaction against the image of Western men — who, as Field observes, couldn't attract anyone on their home turf — with teenage Thai girls.*

Saul: Again, it's a question of where to start making judgements. The child brothel section shows a reality that's pretty terrible. On tbe other hand, of Paga's 500 girls, probably 300 end up much better off than if they'd stayed in the rice paddies. One hundred of them probably coma out of it pretty terribly, and another 100 so-so. So if you take the practical point of view, given that society, it sort of works as a system. What I thought was interesting was not simply to look at the prostitution in Asia but to show tbe way women look at men and to rip away the norm of middle-class marriage. The women had a much clearer perception of men than a lot of women in Western society. Maybe because the situation is tougher.

BiC: *They're more practical.*

Saul: Very practical, and in many ways less cynical. In the West there is an obsession that sex is essential to people growing up and to being sophisticated aud a success or not a success in society. Just look at the advertising. Sex has something to do with being perceived as being mature or immature, grown up or childish, a man or not a man, et cetera. In Bangkok sex is something you buy and sell; it's really not very important.

BE: *Are you prepared for charges tkat the descriptions of night-club activities are gratuitous or even exploitative?*

Saul: Actually I did restrain myself. Also, tbia is a black comedy. Had I wanted to seriously describe those things I would have done it differently.

BiC: *What about Mrs. Laker, the powerful American talking to her dead husband, who seems to be at the heart of the mystery? Is she symbolic of the corrupt American presence?*

Saul: You could say that, but it would be a facile attack on the Americans. But I think tbe United States today is a profoundly confused society, divided against itself. It clings to its mythology — Jefferson, the Declaration of Independence the rights of the individual — with a kind of macabre desperation, precisely because its society is slipping back into the 19th century, into a society of rich and poor where there's more and more violence, a society tbat doesn't work. Of the 18 developed Western nations there is only one major disaster and that's the United States. And so in many ways Mrs. Laker is the America of today — she's obsessed by the mythology of America, she knows she's right, yet within herself she's a mass of confusion.

BiC: And *Woodward/Wuthiwat is tks ideal, the hybrid of Western science and Eastern wisdom, so he is allowed to stay, but the escapist Westerners must 'be expelled if this paradise is to be redeemed?*

Saul: As a Western woman you look at that and are rightfully disgusted. because they have escaped from the West and Western women. I think the ending of the book is optimistic, because he comes back to where he belongs. One of the strangest things about the West today is that people feel exited in their own nations. They don't understand how things work any more. Nothing is solid. So why not write a book about someone who is totally exiled? But in the end he comes back. □

FEATURE REVIEW

Stamper

In. a *novel of this sort, as* in *a life, when the end draws near, one* wads, *not* a tidy wap-up, but more

By D. **French**

THE SOUTH WILL RISE AT NOON
by Douglas Glover,
Viking, 265 pages, $22.95 cloth
(ISBN 0 670 81892 5).

WHEN THERE were giants on the earth, the Young Lions, tumescent with talent, challenged the status quo and tore into the soft underbelly of the social older. Aging rather than adapting, those that survive are toothlessly impotent. Even Norman Mailer has tucked the tool of his trade into the damp creases below a jutting celebrity gut. There is no other explanation for the vasectomized *Ancient Evenings* — all juice and no seeds — or the bard-boiled *Tough Guys Don't* Dunce evaporating to a moist sigh.

Attention has shifted to a group of Smooth 'n' Cool young men, wbo publish their creative writing assignments with pseudo-lit ti-t& like The *Rules of Attraction.* (It would be uncool to hand them in for class where they'd be, like, *marked.*) They are blasé about drugs and sex and the meaning of life. They can afford to be; the *smooth* tbst is their commonality refers to the untroubled surface of both crotch and cortex.

There is a New Mao. of course, but his sensibility is too, too exquisite for the rigours of fiction; leave him to pasture in the personal essay.

And there's Do&s Glover.

Douglas Glover is not walking around with his shirt tucked into his shorts.

The South Will Rise at Noon matches the best stories in Glover's award-winning collection *Dog Attempts to Drown Man in Saskatoon. The* novel is riotous, rolling, rambunctious, and compulsively readable.

The first-person narrator, Tully Stamper, probably would walk around with his shirt tucked into his shorts but, by the second page, Tully has stripped off his shirt and slacks to get into bed with his ox-wife, who just happens to be fast asleep beside her second husband. Tully has a history of not be-&on top of the situation. But he does try.

Part-time girlfriend, Danger, reminds him, "You said your wife was dead.... *You* said she burned to death under a tanker truck in a Burger King parking-lot while she was still carrying your first child."

"My heart leaped into my throat. I gave her a look that was positively Chinese and said, *'I may have said something like that.'"*

In the context of tbe novel, that exchange is more hilarious than offensive; Tully is merely keeping bis options open. He acknowledges "men and women are such pains in the ass to one another." Tully's vision is cohesive and, despite an idiosyncratic reaction to the analgesic Darvon, very nearly coherent. Here is Tully on Cocaine:

> 'I am a man born suspicious of people who offer salvation in a powder flask. . . . But this wasn't bad. I tried some more. Before I could stop myself I was filling the spoon to overflowing. . . . I wanted to pull my nose off and get it down on the floor where the stuff had fallen.'

Tully on Sex:

> 'When we were finished, we lay naked on the sheets and the dog licked the soles of our feet.' (The dog is a plt bull.)

Tully 0" Music:

> '. . . and the tape deck blaring Vegas Soul: "Lady," "Feelings," "I Cried a Tear" — that sort of thing.'

Tully on the Meaning of Life:

> 'A man is nothing but weak flesh and brittle bone: be is born, is ashamed of his parents, finds a job, wishes he was in some other line of work. falls is love, wishes he had fallen in love with some other woman, has children who are ashamed of him, fails at his job, loses his wife. goes slightly mad learning the wisdom of acceptance, and dies.

It's been a long, long time since a novel has succeeded witb the uninhibited vulgarity of *The South Will Rise at Noon.* This is such a great, toothy grin of a novel, what used to be called a *tour de force,* that I want to quote the whole thing. But I'll check the impulse sod point out that it's not merely a broad-stroked assault on the moronic Just Say No mentality. Although Glover never intrudes on the narration, be has sll bis technical skills in operation and, always at the right moment, slips in a detail to break the reader's heart: "Above the sink I found the shoebox with my collection of potato chips in the shapes of state. maps. I had fifty states, many duplicates and five islands of the Hawaiian archipelago."

He comes by his ingenuousness honestly. His runaway father sends him a postcard on his birthdays. No message. "Once he mailed. us a cheque for $500 which bounced. Ina cried. 'He has such a good heart,' she said." And Danger tells him, "The truth ain't nothing to you but an excuse to make up another bizarre story."

There is a properly convoluted story line, but as readers *of Stan* Elkin *will know,* it is, of necessity, the novel's weakest point. Since Glover has created a whole person in Tully Stamper, even if the novel covered every day of his life, there would be no resolution that was entirely satisfying. In a novel of this sort, as in a life, when the end draws near one wants. not a tidy wrap-up, but *more.*

I haven't quoted Tully on Art, or "Momma's got spinal mennonites," and I haven't eve" mentioned Ruth Appeldorn's work on lobotomizing seagulls to watch the effect on sex behaviours. I really should have discussed the Primal Scene.

Read the novel and discover its delights on your own. You'll thank me. ❑

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL GREENSTEIN

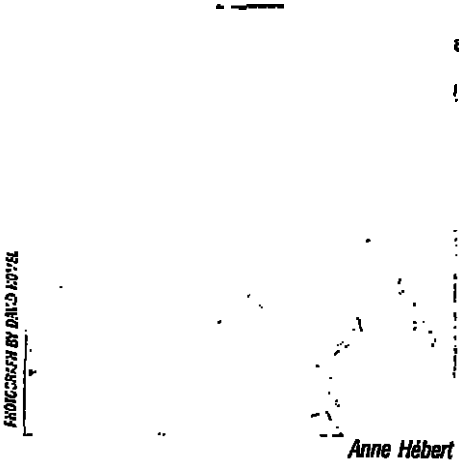
Douglas Glover

FEATURE REVIEW

Daughter of memory

Anne Hébert's new novel, Le Premier jardin, *is a homage to Quebec City, a place richly described but never named*

By David Homel



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID CAMPBELL

Anne Hébert

LE PREMIER JARDIN
by Anne Hébert,
Editions du Seuil (Paris), 189 pages, (ISBN 2 02 009974 8).

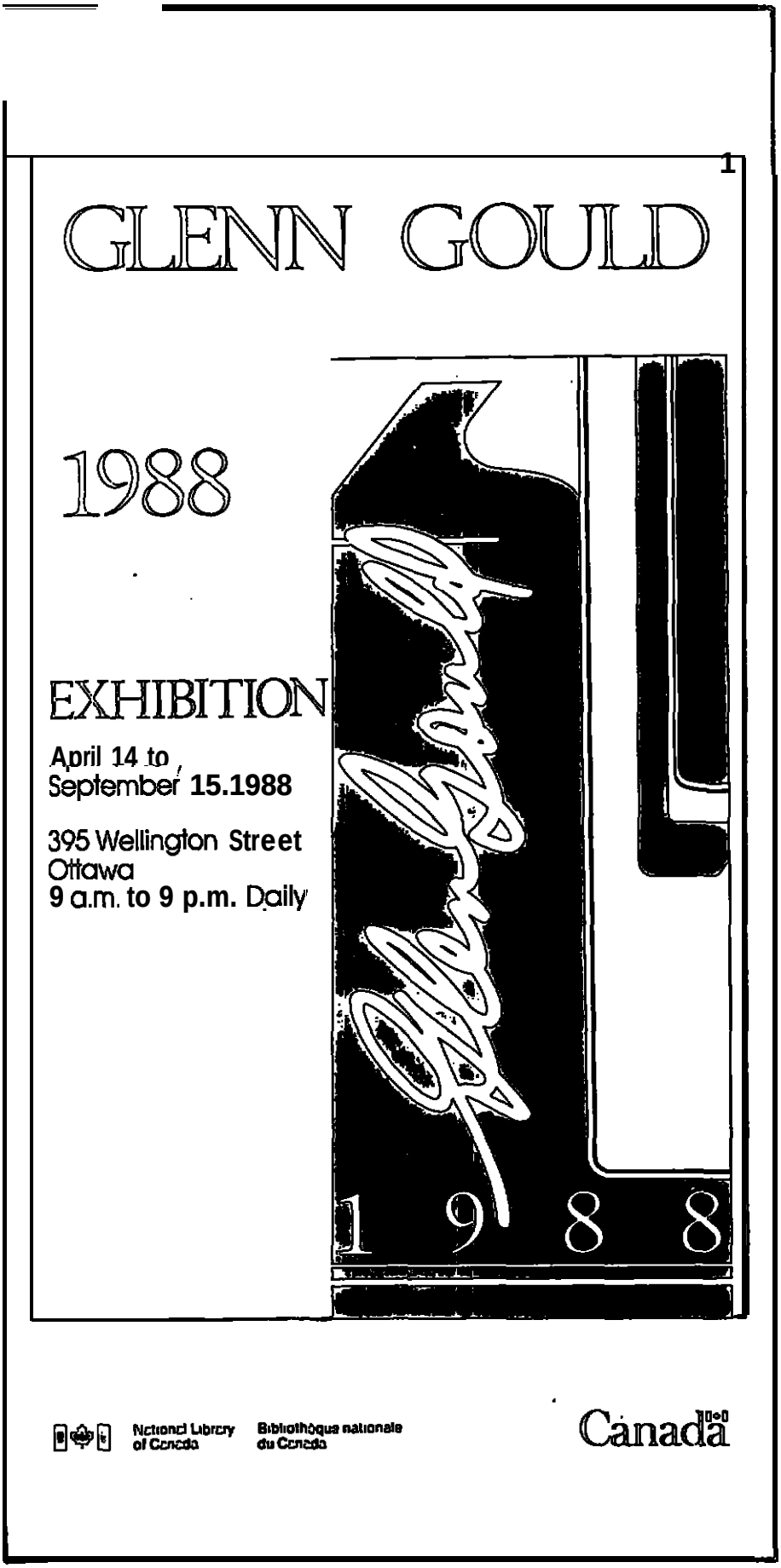
"I GREW UP at a time when death was a closer companion than it is now," says Anne Hébert, explaining her concern with mortality. "My mother had 11 brothers and sisters; only three reached maturity." Her most recent work released this spring in French possesses a primal title that seems to speak of new beginnings — (*Le Premier jardin* ("the first garden") — yet it is as resolute& rooted in Quebec's death-seeking past as any of her other works.

The arrival of Anne Hébert in Quebec is a pmvioce-wide cultural event. though she does return to her native land twice a year — unlike the heroine of her latest book, who deserted Quebec 40 years before her return. There is a certain amount of willed confusion between Flora Fontanges, heroine of the novel. and the author herself. Yet as an actress, Fontanges lives in the limelight, whereas Anne Hébert is intensely private, shrugging off most inquiries about the woman behind the novelist. "My life in Paris is not very interesting," she says. "I work every day. and I would do the same if I lived in Montreal." she reports writing every morning in her apartment on a secluded Latin Quarter street, using pen and paper, resorting to the typewriter only for revisions, for the distance it provides. She treasures Paris and its eminently walkable streets, and her accent hovers somewhere between Quebec and France. Her opinions are expressed somewhat unwillingly, as if she's keeping all her energy for herself. She is evasive, for example, about evaluating the film versions of her works, such as Yves Simoneau's *Les Fous de bassan,* harshly judged by some critics: "It's a fine film. Simoneau saw the book in his way, which is his right, but be was faithful to its spirit," she says. Yet when Hébert does express an opinion in public, it comes across twice as strong, as in her judgement of Simone de Beauvoir as "an essayist, not a novelist. She's programmatic, rarely inspired. Her writing is *dominated* and her characters aren't indenendent." Hébert, on the other hand, complains humorously of the imperious nature of her characters. "When I was writing *Kamouraska,* I needed a vacation badly. But I couldn't stop dreaming of Dr. Nelson; I was discouraged — he had followed me all the way down south! But I pushed him back to where he belonged and went on with my vacation."

Hébert's *Le Premier jardin* is a homage to Quebec City, a place richly described though never named. The city is a character in itself, interacting with the other characters of the novel, especially the heroine. As an orphan born Pierrette Paul, and renamed Marie Eventurel by her adoptive parents, she bad the luxury of assuming, at last, any name she wished; as an actress she chose to call herself Flora Fontanges. Through Flora, Hébert takes us through the successive eras of Quebec City's history, to both monuments and side streets, the latter glimpsed as the heroine's adopted family loses its fortune during the Depression. "I had always wanted to write a novel about Quebec City," Hébert explained, "but the subject does not especially lend itself to fiction. Honestly. I did not know how to go about it."

After two and a half years of working on *Le Premier jardin,* Anne Hébert arrived at a number of solutions. The actress/heroine returns to her native Quebec City from France, when? she is a semirecluse in the countryside near Tows, southwest of Paris. A beckoning telegram from her daughter Maud (born of a brief early liaison with a married man) urges her into action, and sbe crosses the ocean, only to find that her daughter has disappeared. There is a second reason as well: she is asked to play the female lead in Samuel Beckett's *Oh! les beaux jours* at a Quebec City theatre. Our suspicions as readers are soon confirmed: the heroine has come to face the weight of her past. Every step she takes, in tbe Old City, the Lower Town, and tbe newer sections, is burdened by memory. You can go home again, Hébert seems to suggest, but at your own risk.

Hébert qualifies her latest work as more internalized and far less violent than *Kamouraska* or *Les Fous de bassan* (*In the Shadow* of *the* Wind); "it is more like *Les Chambres de bois* (*The Silent Rooms*), *if* a comparison has to be made," she says. Flora Fontanges's pathways through the city are the movements of memory. She conjures up the *filles du roy,* the orphan girls, often social outcasts, who were sent to the colony of New France in the 1600s and 1700s to couple with the settlers and populate the new land. "These girls, these women were tbe myriad faces of Eve incarnated in New



France," Hébert says. "Their very names are beautiful. It is a beautiful thing to speak their names and save them from the dust of time." And indeed. Flora Fontanges pauses before the memory of these women and recites their names: Alfreda Thibault, Laurette Levasseur, Jacqueline Racine, Théodora Albert . . . names that are alive in contemporary Quebec. Hébert describes the scenes, celebrated many times in Quebec popular memory, of the brief but efficient courtship between the settlers starved for female companionship and those young women. whose sins committed in the Old World bad been washed away by the Atlantic passage.

The point is, *of course, that Flora Fontanges is a fille du roy* herself. An orphan girl lodged at the Hospice Saint-Louis, she nearly falls victim to the great fire there in 1927 (which actually took place). Later, she is adopted by a couple who are grimly determined to make a lady of her. The scenes of the heroine's adoption show us Hébert's evocative powers at their best. Saved from the conflagration, the little orphan girl, Pierrette, falls a with scarlet fever, then recovers to find herself adopted into a strange house whose bourgeois inhabitants confer the second of her three names on her: Marie. No wonder the little orphan grows up longing to be an actress who can change her name, her role.. at will.

AT 72, Anne Hébert is something of a gadmother of Quebec writing, though. discreet and modest as a recently betrothed *fille du roy*, she would deny it. "Look at the writers of the *Nouvelle Barre du Jour* group," she points out "See how different they are from me." Her physical beauty is striking, prompting one young woman who could be half her age to ask about her secret for staying young. "If I have a secret, it is a secret even unto me," Hébert replies, the soul of discretion.

Her vision is romantic, oriented toward the past — it is no surprise that the greatest influence she admits to is the Quebec poet Saint-Denys Garneau, a relative of hers. Her fictional world is gynocratic, yet current feminists find her brand of feminine solidarity issuing from the sisterhood of suffering hard to swallow. At the very end of *Le Premier jardin*, her daughter Maud reappears, complaining of betrayal at the hands of her lover, Raphael. Two women alone. mother and daughter, they go out into the Quebec City night, full of discos and crowded cafés, but are unable to agree on a place to go. A man with "cat-like grace" follows them in the shadows. And when her month-long contract to play Winnie in Beckett's play is over, Flora Fontanges takes her leave again, headed for another role, in Paris this time. As the last sentence says, she is very much "like a musical instrument you might brush ever so lightly with your hand, in secret vibration, in the silence of the earth." □

BOOK REVIEWS

Something about her parrots

By Joyce Marshall

ETHEL WILSON: STORIES, ESSAYS, LETTERS
edited by David Stouck, *University of British Columbia, 260 pages, $29.95 cloth* aSBN 0 *7748 02901).*

I REMEMBER saying years ago, when Ethel Wilson was still with us and still publishing her marvellous, quirky novels and short stories, that she was the only writer we had who possessed a completely individual style. I could look at a single one of her sentences, I claimed, and know at once that it was so Ethel Wilson sentence. In this assortment from tbe Ethel Wilson papers selected and edited by David Stouck (six previously uncollected essays, a sampling of the many surviving letters to publishers and friends, and nine stories, only one *of* which, the eerie dream-fantasy. "A Visit to the Frontier," was published during her lifetime) we find again the magic style, those deft, light, wonderful sentences, so full of movement, often with the sly little twist or bend at the end that may be one of the things that make them so characteristically hers.

It is no surprise, then, to discover that Ethel Wilson was a devotee of the sentence. "I have a reverence for the English sentence . . ." *she says in "Some*where near the Truth," a talk delivered at the University of British Colombia library. "that is close to worship." And in a letter to Desmond Pacey, "I like the English sentence. clear. onlush and un-loaded." Do many writers speak of the sentence as something existing as and in itself — "the essential tool." as she pot it, "of tbe writer"! It seems to me that they usually talk about images, or phrases, rhythm, or even vocabulary.

A self-taught writer herself, Wilson didn't approve of the teaching of "creative writing." She disliked the phrase and felt that such "teaching" could only *damage or* delay the would-be writer, an opinion that earned her considerable disapproval in some quarters at a time when "creative writing" was fairly new as so academic subject. (I wonder what she'd think of the proliferation of such courses and workshops at the present time, and of young people who announce that they've written two new stories but haven't had them "workshop@" yet.) She believed that writers should be taught all they needed to be taught at school — to write a sentence. a paragraph, a précis. The rest they most teach themselves, through read- & and practice, and they could accomplish this provided they possessed what she called (the capital is hers) "the Gii" — a combination of talent sod willingness to work. (The talk in which these unpopular views are expressed she titled, rather slyly,' "Cat among the Falcons.")

This is a rich book. for its picture of the literary life of the '50s and early '60s (Ethel Wilson knew and corresponded with a great many other writers) and for its insights into Wilson's own temperament. methods of work and attitude to her writing. Even the stories not previously pub lished, several *of* them chapters written for the novel that was to become *The Innocent Traveller*, and (wisely) not included in the book, can be read not only as examples of the work of a good writer at somewhat less than her best but with real pleasure, for faulty or thin as some of these pieces may be, the marvellous sentences are still there. The essays, three of which were originally given as talks, show that she held very strong opinions about writing in general and Canadian writing in particular. She disliked symbolism as such. She disapproved of conscious Canadianism. Though she often cloaked her views in pretended modesty — "I say what I *think* but do not *know*," she writes — she was not afraid to express them firmly.

And then there are the letters — a small number, we are told, from the body held with the Ethel Wilson papers in the UBC library and in collections elsewhere. (There are in existence 50 letters to Margaret Laurence alone.) Wilson requested that no material of a purely personal nature should be published and this request has been respected. But even so, the letters printed here give a vivid sense *of* her personality and of her private life as tbe wife of a Vancouver doctor — their mutual love and devotion shine through every sentence she writes about him — as well as the professional life of a woman whose first novel, *Hetty Dorval*, wasn't published till 1947 when she was 59. she had, however, been accumulating sketches for *The Innocent Traveller*, her study *of* Topaz Wedgewood, that "lively woman who lived for a hundred years and died, triumphant, in Vancouver," for more than 15 years, but she didn't allow that fact to intrude upon her public persons as a housewife who just "happened" into writing in a moment of boredom during her 50s. Her early diffidence was real enough. In letter after letter to Ellen Elliott, her first editor at Macmillan, she begs not to have her name used as author of *Hetty Dorval* though she might consider, she says, having it appear as "hy Frankie Burnaby as told to Ethel Wilson." But there is no hint *of* timidity in her polite but firm insistence that her decision to use or not to use a comma, or her choice of word or phrase, should be respected.

John Gray, who became her editor after his return to Macmillan from overseas, was soon a dose and sympathetic friend and we see her discussing her books with him as she was writing them, among other things suggesting horrendously melodramatic endings for *Lilly's Story* and *Love and Salt Water*, wbicb fortunately she was persuaded or, I suspect, persuaded herself to discard. Not all the letters are serious or "literary." Many, especially those to her friends, are very funny. There is a delightful account, for instance, of her meeting with Arnold Bennett when she was young and her almost speechless embarrassmeat because under her arm was "a long parcel" containing her first corsets, which she'd just rather timorously purchased. And though it was written on the back of a manuscript page and not in a letter I most mention her painting lessons with "a forthright woman named Emily Carr" which she gave up because. as well as her own lack of talent, "there was something about her parrots that I did not like."

If I may end on a personal note, I was pleased to read in one of her letters to Also and Jean Crawley that she'd had a letter from me. She called it "wonderful" — a word, whether or not my letter deserved it. I'd certainly use about Ethel Wilson's reply. Often as I read these posthumous fragments, I found myself wanting to write to her again — about the English sentence perhaps — and receive another of her warm, witty, idiosyncratic letters in return. □

Free and fair?

By Barry Lesser

FREE TRADE: THE REAL STORY
edited by John Crispo, *Gage, 205 pages, $6.95 paper (ISBN 0 7715 5110 0).*

THE PURPOSE of this book, as described in the introductory chapter by the editor, is "to explain to Canadians what is at stake in the FTA [Free Trade Agreement], in as simple and straightforward a manner as possible." This explanation is required, the editor continues, "because so much of the debate surrounding the issue has been emotional, ill-informed and irresponsible."

That there has been a great deal of emotional, ill-informed and, at times, irresponsible debate is quite true. What is not true, however, is that these faults

have been the exclusive province of the opponents of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. Both sides of the debate have been guilty of excesses and, in certain respects, this book is, itself, an example of this.

The book is unabashedly pm-agreement, although it purports to present a review of "some of the negative as well as tbe positive facets of the agreement." A few of the contributions in the book do attempt to present a relatively balanced view of the pros and cons, the chapter by Richard Harris on "Employment Effects" being perhaps the beat example of this. But most of the authors are guilty, to some degree, of either underplaying the negative arguments, ignoring them, or in a few cases distorting them by way of attempting to dismiss them. Crispo himself represents what Is perhaps tbe most objectionable example of this when, in his conclusion, he characterizes everyone who is opposed to the agreement as a socialist, which is not only an unwarranted and sweeping over-generalization but carries the dear message, despite the way it is phrased, that that alone is grounds for rejecting the opposition arguments.

Richard Lipsey, who contributes to two chapters of the book, provides another example. In one case, he argues, "In a world where Canadians are concerned to maintain the principle of trade, this cannot be seen as a concession." The "this" Lipsey is referring to is the relinquishment of "the right to erect trade-restraining measures that arbitrarily or unjustifiably discriminate against the nationals of the other country." In other words, "fair trade" is "free trade" and its worth, therefore, is self-evident. The argument is used to prove the argument. In another place, commenting on tbe change in the threshold for review of direct acquisitions in Canada by U.S.-owned companies, Lipsey argues, as one reason why concern about this is unjustified: "Investment Canada has not reviewed a single case in the range from $5 million to $150 million." A. E. Safarian in his chapter on "Foreign Direct Investment" makes a similar argument, asserting "... it would appear that Canada did not give up much in terms of present policy practices." For critics of the FTA, the fact that the policies already exist does not imply that they accept those policies. Indeed, their concern about the FTA is that it embeds tbe policies in a way that will make it at least more difficult, if not impossible, to get them changed.

The alleged intention of the book — to present the "real story" on the F'I'A — is laudable if one interprets it as meaning to debunk the myths in the debate on both sides, and to present a dear. understandable and fair analysis of the different positions in the debate. It is something that is needed. And parts of the book do accomplish parts of such a purpose. The actual content of the FTA is, for the most part, explained well, in language the average citizen will understand. Many of the refutations of opposition arguments are expressed well and convincingly. It is, therefore, that much more unfortunate that the book falls prey to its own form of propaganda, unstated assumptions, and misleading argument. The authors admit their bii up front but then proceed, with the vengeance of the righteous, to sweep away before them all the arguments of those who would oppose them.

The potential impact of tbe FTA on regional development policy Is a good illustration of what is wrong in tbe book. The book tells us that regional development policy will remain unaffected by the agreement because it is not addressed by the FTA. There is an admission that the manner of implementation of regional development policy may be affected but it is argued that the goals will not be constrained. Moreover, it is stated that subsidization, or other forms of regional assistance for domestic market firms, as opposed to export firms, will be just as possible after the free trade agreement as it was before. Finally, we are told, consumers in all regions, including the less developed ones, will gain from lower prices.

One could argue, however, that the failure to address regional policy in the agreement represents a failure to protect it rather than the victory of not losing it. One might also argue that maintaining the goals may not mean much if the means of implementation are lost, or that lower consumer prices won't mean very much if the production base of the lass developed regions Is eroded, with resulting loss of jobs and output. In a pure market economy, the answer to this is for people to move. But labour mobility as the cure for regional disparities has never been accepted in Canada. Perhaps this time it would be, but the "real story" fails even to mention it. Finally, one could also argue that it is not only in the case of export firms that regional development policy is threatened. The FTA applies not only to the rules and conditions surrounding Canadian goods going into the U.S. market bat also to those surrounding U.S. goods entering Canada. The right of national treatment and the principle of nondiscrimination as embodied in tbe FTA make the import-competing sector potentially as vulnerable in the post-FTA era as the export sector has been in the pre-FTA era to U.S. charges of unfair competition due to regional subsidy programs.

Despite the above arguments, the book is correct when, in several places, it draws attention to the fact that the real alternative to the FTA is greater protectionism in tbe United States. Ultimately, this is the most convincing argument that is made in favour of the agreement. Whether the FTA makes us better or worse off than we are with the *status quo* is like the proverbial argument about how many angels can stand on the head of a pin. If the *status quo* is not an option, it really doesn't matter very much. Whether we like it or not. the agreement is our best option. If the writers in this book had made more of this argument, while admitting the tremendous uncertainty that otherwise surrounds the probable impact of the FTA — uncertainty that only time will resolve — and bad made explicit tbe value judgements underlying the analysis and hence the trade-offs implicit in both sides of the debate, the book would have made a genuine and

much needed contribution to the free trade debate. By proceeding as it &es,. however, it distinguishes itself very little from the rhetoric already out there on both sides. In the process much that is good in the book is diminished and its real potential last. □

Murder on holiday

By Wayne Grady

DEATH IN PRAGUE
by John Reeves.
Doubleday Canada, 236 pages, $19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 385 25153 X).

MURDER BEHIND LOCKED DOORS
by Ellen **Godfrey,**
Viking (Penguin), 318 pages, $19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 82040 7).

BEGINNING with an improbability, working its way through a couple of unlikelinesses, and proceeding undaunted into a downright impossibility, *Death* in *Prague* manages withal to be an impressive and convincing novel of detection. The improbability is only mildly disturbing: Reeves's pair of investigators, Inspector Coggins and Sergeant Sump of the Metropolitan Toronto Police, no doubt exhausted after their strenuous efforts recorded in three of Reeves's previous books (*Murder by Microphone*, *Murder before Matins*, and *Murder with Muskets*) decide to take long overdue and presumably separate vacations, and both end up in Prague. Those things happen, one supposes.

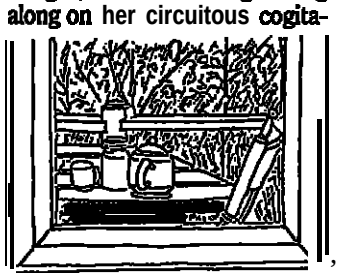
The unlikelinesses are more difficult to swallow: once in Prague, the pair meets up with a group of Czech dissidents — prohibited actors, unofficial writers and other social pariahs — who are secretly making a film that they hope will set the record straight *vis-à-vis* the corrupt and repressive foundations of the Czecho-Soviet regime. Despite the fact that exposure would mean instant death or, worse, a lifetime of menial, state-supervised employment, the dissidents invite the foreigners along to watch the filming, which takes place in an inner room in an abandoned factory. During breaks between takes, they are introduced to various members of the cast — Helena, a former officer in the StB (Czechoslovakia's KGB): Andrej, a Ukrainian who escaped from a camp in Siberia and is living incognito in Prague — all of whom have good reasons to be wary of strangers asking questions, but who are nonetheless alarmingly forthcoming about their lives and activities.

The film is to be in the form of a courtroom trial, a kind of documentary investigation into the death of Jan Masaryk, who in real life was the Czechoslovakian foreign minister at the time of the soviet takeover in 1948: on March 10 of that year, two weeks after the takeover, Masaryk's body was found outside his home, and a subsequent state investigation concluded that Masaryk had committed suicide by defenestration. In the novel, the dissident group — by means of a mole working in the state department — has uncovered evidence that Masaryk's death had in fact been ordered by Stalin and carried out by tbe StB. True to the time-honoured law of detective fiction, which states that when one or more detectives are gathered together on vacation a murder will occur, "0 sooner does the mole take his place on the witness stand to present his evidence than he clutches at his throat and keels over dead. Coggin and Sump, as the only impartial witnesses to the event, are asked by the dissidents to conduct the investigation. The result is an intriguing blend of several mystery-novel ideas: the sealed-room murder, tbe on-the-spot investigation without the advantages of a technological forensic arsenal, and the righting of historical wrongs. There are strong echoes in this book of the detective works of the Swiss writer Friedrich Dürrenmatt (especially *Der Verdich*, 1953), as well as to such better-known classics as Josephine Tey's *The Daughter* of *Time* and the green-room dramas of Ngaio Marsh. Apart from some wooden speechifying masquerading as dialogue. tbis is the best writing Reeves has done to date.

If the locale of *Death in Prague* is exotic and unfamiliar, that of *Murder Behind Locked Doors* probably Isn't: corporate board rooms, downtown fitness centres, business-lunch restaurants. John Reeves's novel is partly about justice on a global scale; Ellen Godfrey explores the concept at a microcosmic level. Both writers make use of the sealed room: Godfrey's is the computer mom of a North York software company — Brian Taylor Systems (BTS) — in which the firm's finance VP is found dead on the eve of a crucial deal with a U.S. buyer. The suspects are the company's other VPs, each of whom had personal and professional reasons for wanting Gary Levin out of the picture. "The real question we have to face," observes one of those VPs to Godfrey's amateur sleuth, Jane Tregar, "Is which one of us murdered Gary Levin? And how in God's name did he a0 it!"

Like the corporate world that Godfrey portrays, tbe novel is fast-paced yet curiouslv slow-moving, clean and efficient yet clogged with detail, with plenty of white Arborite, nonstatic broadloom and characters who talk in corporate/sports metaphors: "management teams" have to be "kept on side" or else brought "back on hack," although it isn't wise to "'go to the mat" over unimportant issues. Jane Tregar is a headhunter working for a firm called Orloff Associates; she placed Levin with BTS, and when Levin is killed she is called in again to find a suitable replacement. Her metaphors are more domestic than sporty, and are sometimes painfully extended — as when she compares her ambivalent attitude toward sex to a sated hunger for a piece of rich chocolate cake. ("When you finally got the cake you were hungry for, you bit into it eagerly and the first few bites were delicious . . ." and so on for 20 more lines, in the manner of a Jacobean sonnet, or a skit from *Beyond tha Fringe*.)

But we are interested in Jane Tregar, and are willing to tag along on her circuitous cogitations. Godfrey's purpose is to recreate the energy and drive and ultimate vacuity of the new corporate culture and to write a mystery novel in the process, and the result is a kind of cross between Tracy Kidder's *The Soul of a New Machine* (Brian Taylor shares at least some of his. traits with Data General's Tom West) and Dorothy Sayers's *Murder Must Advertise*. An altogether pleasant and successful enterprise. □



Sleuth

By Martin Townsend

A DEDICATED MAN
by Peter Robinson,
Penguin, 261 pages, 517.95 *cloth (ISBN 0 670 81423 7).*

WHEN THE bludgeoned body of Harry Steadman is discovered on a hillside overlooking the town of Swainsdale in Yorkshire, chief Inspector Banks soon knows the lack of clues and suspects with motives means he's in for a proh-acted, frustrating investigation. Tbe reading audience, on the other hand, soon catches on that A *Dedicated Man* is going to be, for them, a completely restful experience; while Banks sweats out his first few days without a real lead, the reader settles into a vicarious summer holiday in a picture postcard setting.

Fans of Peter Robinson's first mystery in the Inspector Banks series, *Gallows View*, will recall tbe author's strong sense of place, conveyed not only in characterization and details dropped in passing but also in lengthy background passages evoking urban reality and history. While the earlier book explored the claustrophobic cityscape as a setting for a sex crime, *A Dedicated* Man strolls through pleasanter territory. But Robinson fully explores the irony inherent in his setting; tbe almost pastoral scene masks the peaceful community's hidden potential for murder.

Robinson's penchant for historical perspective—in a genre that usually keeps its bloodhound's nose to the ground — is well employed in the new book, where interpretation and reinterpretation of tie past are central to all aspects. So far in his

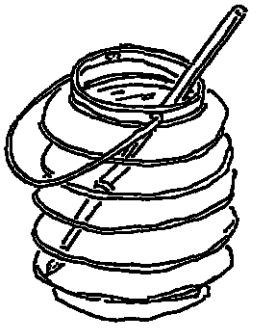
fictional career, Inspector Banks has specialized in the kind of crime-solving where the puzzle pieces are all present midway through the case and await only the sudden inspiration of a chance remark, for instance, to fall into the correct pattern. In *A Dedicated Man*, the crucial *pieces are the memories* of the victim's small circle of friends. Ten years before, especially during an idyllic summer of love and poetry, the seeds of these characters' adult lives were sown and so, it seems, were the seeds of Steadman's eventual murder.

Mirroring the elusiveness of the recent past in the novel is the obscurity of distant centuries. Michael Ramsden, a bard-beaded entrepreneur, suggests that Steadman's scholarly study of industrial archaeology (concerned with artefacts of early factories, mills, mines. and so on) led him to romanticize the past. Penny Cartwright, a traditional folk-singer and retiree from the fast-living music industry, bristles with the cynicism of the ex-romantic who's learned better the bard way. The town itself is subject to uncertainties and illusions of interpretation, with the truth of current events determined by the whisperings and innuendoes of gossips and the distant past subject to revisions and retouching to attract tourism.

Banks moves determinedly through this maze of uncertainty, ever calm, trading rounds in pubs, struggling to keep his pipe lit (in a doomed attempt to give up cigarettes) and, while driving from suspect to suspect, indulging in his new-found passion for recordings of traditional vocal and choral music. Neither alienated nor particularly eccentric, as so many fictional sleuths are, Banks has a personality that is an endearing variety of ordinary. A southerner who bad intended to leave the sordid crimes of Londoners behind him by moving to Yorkshire, Banks is a family man appalled by the irrevocable effect of murder on society as well as on the victim (the hero's feelings are perhaps in this respect shared by the author, who in this novel keeps all the violence offstage). Though he has few real vices, Banks's temptation to fall when it comes to particularly attractive women leaves some mom for doubt-temporarily, at least — about the solidity of his middle-class *respectability*.

Robinson's approach to female characters is a bit more disturbing than his protagonist's, however. As in *Gallows View*, the author's self-conscious attempts to break sexist stereotypes rarely prevent him from defining the women in his stories primarily by their sexuality: as the adolescent virgin, the vixen in disguise, the nosy old spinster, the siren, and so on. At least in this book Banks's sexually charged encounters don't reach the heights of silliness attained in the last one, in which a self-styled feminist colleague of the inspector's vainly tried to get into his pants during a business meeting, with a giggling, blushing joust of *double entendres*.

Even at his worst in this regard, Robinson never approaches the irritation level of most Hollywood movies, and only a few other minor flaws — the author% tendency to get carried away in the descriptive passages, for example — briefly mar what is generally a delightful, intelligent entertainment, well suited to reading in hammocks or on beach towels, but a page-turner in any season. □



Variety lights

BY **Cary Fagan**

THE MACMILLAN ANTHOLOGY
edited by John Metcalf and Leon Rooke,
Macmillan of Canada, 296 pages, $14.95 paper (ISBN 0 7715 9385 6).

JOHN METCALF and Leon Rooke, it seems, have been trying to find a workable anthology/magazine format to showcase both new and known writers. Times do seem propitious: in England *Granta* is thriving, and America has Gordon Lish's *The Quarterly*, as well as numerous "best" anthologies. A literate audience seems to-be out there, eager to be pointed towards the *new*.

This first volume of *The Macmillan Anthology* shows a good deal of promise and already some accomplishment. The quality-paper format, while a bit showy for my taste, has been created to keep jaded eyes interested. The impression is of a handsome jack-in-the-box, filled with surprises.

Particularly welcome are the two memoirs, "Just Wiid and Horses" by Sinclair Ross (the title from his mother's pronouncement on his first fiction) and the acerbic John Mill's memory of his rivalry with Irving Layton, "A Rigmarole." Mill seems to share many attitudes with the outspoken critic of can-Lit Metcalf himself and with Michael Darling, author of the anthology's "The Year in Review," so it seems appropriate to quote Mill's definition of a curmudgeon, which may just fit them all:

> You need a strong and mm-manding personality, at the back of which is a violent streak, visibly repressed. You need to intimidate rather than befriend, and you must seek victims rather than equals. You need a brass neck and little in the way of a conscience. And you have to be solemn about it: any hint that you were not to be taken too seriously, and you were done for. There are excellent models: Samuel Johnson; Evelyn Waugh, of course.

Generally, the fiction is a disappointment. I would like to be able to report that the editors have made at least one major lit&y find; but the new writers, at best, show promise. Most interesting are Holley Rubinsky's "Preacher's Geese," in which a teacher in a small B.C. town tries to influence one of her students, and Terry Grigg's "A Bii Story," a comic portrait of a family that behaves like birds.

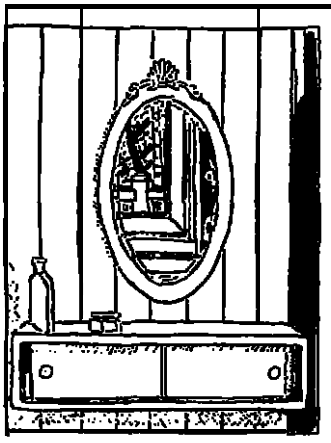
Without question the best work belongs to veteran Mavis Gallant, whose two stories show different but equally impressive sides to her extraordinary talent. "The Chosen Husband," though set in Montreal in 1949, shows the wit and precise examination of manners more characteristic of her European stories. "Leaving the Party" is a brief and pointed satire on politicians and the media.

Gallant's work is introduced by Janice Kulyk Keefer's insightful profile. Kulyk Keefer is right to make central Gallant's courageous and obsessive search for independence; she also notes, shrewdly, that Gallant, for all her brilliance, is not the sort of writer that a reader embraces affectionately.

Norman Levine's "A Maritime Story" is misplaced; it ought to come not at the beginning of the anthology but in the middle, where his clean and simple prose (too spare here, even for an admirer) would have been a happy break from the more convoluted and sometimes muddy styles of the newer writers. Although hardly unpublished, Keath Fraser is not yet *widely* known, and his three stories, while all flawed, show great ambition. "Bones" has a Canadian chiropractor volunteering to help a Third World country recover from war and revolution. The government, he discovers, wishes *him* to *reconstruct* the skeletons of thousands of political victims for a memorial called the Grief House. Fraser's dense and elliptical style is too puzzling and sometimes gives in to cleverness; he seems unsure of the political meaning he wishes to convey.

Neither of Diane Schoemperlen's stories quite works. "A Simple Story," about an affair between a waitress and her boss, is told in the sort of semi-educated, deliberately mundane voice much used these days. The novel technique of employing imperative subtitles to drive, the story ("Describe the restaurant") is modestly interesting but seems a separate matter from the story itself.

Surprisingly, the poetry is superior to the fiction. A generous selection of 10 poems by Lorna Crozier shows, with careful rhythms and a considered choice of words. the phenomena of an ordinary hut resonant world. The excerpt from John Newlove's long poem in progress is harder, more agonizing — the



profile of a poet trapped indifferently in his self, saved only perhaps by the remains of his hard-won gift. David McFadden's prose poems are personal, anecdotal, sweet, and confused. All these writers know how to use language.

Metcalf and Rooke's only real mistake is publishing Michael Darling's supposed year-end review of books. While I agree with several of Darling's critical judgements, his morose and bullying tone makes a mockery of his search for "moral vision." How can someone desiring moral vision also write tbat "The only true test of a work is whether or not it is well-written?" And how can a critic complain of clichés and then write that a character in a novel "really steps off the page?"

Nevertheless, I hope for and expect a second *Macmillan Anthology* next year. ◻

A mixture of flavours

By Carole Corbeil

WRITERS IN ASPIC
edited by John Metcalf.
Oberon, 128 pages, $15.00 paper (ISBN 0 919890 776).

JOHN METCALF has obviously developed a regular appetite for anthologizing. For years now, he has edited annual selections of Canadian fiction; the *Macmillan Anthology*, co-edited with Leon Rooke, is his latest addition to the annual genre. His palate is catholic, bat refined. With tbe exception of Keath Fraser, the "writers in aspic" are the same he collected in *Making It New*, his 1982 anthology: Clark Blaise, Mavis Gallant, Hugh Hood, Norman Levine, Alice Munro, Leon Rooke, and Metcalf himself. (Metcalf's taste is even more stringently refined when it comes to his own work: the same story, albeit a very good one, represents him in both *Aspic* and *Making If New*.) *The* stories in *Writers in Aspic*, moreover, *are* the *same* stories that Metcalf collected for *a* 1985 issue of *The Literary Review*.

What sets *Writers in Aspic* apart from its predecessors is the aptly named aspic: the critical essays that accompany the stories. The emphasis here is on "discussion and criticism." As all Metcalf's readers probably know, his catholicity, or recycling energy. is just one aspect of his obsession with the quality of criticism in this country. He will show us the best, over and over, because we can't be trusted to find it ourselves.

I do not use the word obsession lightly. An obsession can look like an argument, can even contain a kernel of truth, but unlike an argument it has a circular nature, static content, and a charged atmosphere about it. Metcalf's early attacks on critics were notorious for their venomous humour, but lately ha has been content to set up a polarity between thematic criticism and the formal, textual criticism he favours. "Much of our criticism in the last decade." be writes in the introduction to *Aspic*, "has been thematic, quarrying hum fiction and poetry material for the illustration of such topics as tbe Canadian National Identity; these essays concern themselves, more usefully, in my opinion, with the writer's text."

This is hardly contentious stuff. Critics should of course concern themselves with tbe writer's text. But there is something in Metcalf's tone that ends up inflating the argument beyond its means. Is there really a big wall of thematic criticism out then?, keeping readers and writers apart? Does it require relentless assault? Is there really such "discord and division between nationalists and internationalists" within tbs Canadian literary community? Are poor Canadian readers really kept in the dark by "dull boys who are too busy doing giant jigsaw puzzles of the Fathers of Confederation to come out and play"?

Yes, writers deserve better critics, but they also deserve *more readers.* And this seams closer to what drives Metcalf. When you can't get widespread recognition — and most writers in this country, even vary good ones, get very little recognition — what you need more that anything is a nod of understanding. "It is perhaps unseemly," writes Metcalf in his introduction to *Aspic*, "for me to comment at any length on Michael Darling's essay on "Single Gents Only," [Metcalf's own story], but I would like to say that the nuts and bolts he concerns himself with are precisely the nuts and bolts I spend so much time tinkering with when I write." Ay, there's tbe nod.

The effect of the aspic device — each story is followed by a "close textual" reading — is unfortunately not at all what Metcalf imagines it to be in bis introduction. The aim is admirable. Who could quibble with criticism that is alive to "voice, texture, and rhetoric?" Who could ignore essays that are "imbued with an obvious love of writing and of language and with a delight in communicating that love"?

Most of the essayists in aspic. however, are reticent and earnest, so involved with the rhetoric of the writing that they simply repeat the story in quotes, making the obvious more obvious. Love is, after all, a collaboration, not a repetition of the other. There are few flashes of insight here, and little of the quickening of discovery that defines a critic's voice.

There are exceptions. Robert Lecker's essay on Clark Blaise's "A North American Education" is by far the most perceptive and intelligent essay in the book, even though he studiously avoids dealing with the cruelty of the story's crucial passage, when the narrator's father sets up and then crashes his son. Constance Rooke's reading of Mavis Gallant's story, "Irina," is sensitive to nuance, and through a process , close to identification, does manage to glow. James Maitland's essay on Alice Munro's story, "Walker Brothers Cowboy." is also sensitive, even though he would like to rewrite tbe ending of the story. It would have been interesting if Maitland had explored how Munro manages to subvert conventional notions of time through her narrators' supple voices. The past, the present, the moment of telling are inseparable here, as they are in *many* of Munro's mysteriously alive stories.

Some critics give too much to the writer. Keatb Fraser's "Healing" is a very good story, bat it is overwritten. The verbiage is not just a deliberate device that defines tbe psychopathic voice of the narrator. And what are we to make of the the battle of two academics, T.D. MacLulich and Lawrence Mathews, over Norman Levine's rather dull, withholding story, "A Small Piece of Blue"? It seems a tad nutty. As does this kind of dogged approach to imagery: "There are also," writes Matthews, "a number of references to sources of light: the landlady showing Tree the light switch, the dim light bulb on the train, the sundown arrival at the mine, Willie Hare turning his light on, asking Tree to turn it off, the 'naked light' shining in Tree's own room, the candle flame, the hot sunshine of tbe last scene." Thank you, Mr. Matthews.

Leon Rooke's story "The End of the Revolution and Other Stories" is complex, enigmatic, a bit like a knot; it gets tighter the more you fiddle with it Critic Simone Vauthier does a lot of smart semiological fiddling in her piece, but she is at odds with herself. Bent on figuring the story out, she repeatedly asserts that this would be reductive. At one point she fears giving away tbs "key" prematurely, at another she writes that "too intense a preoccupation with the solving of enigmas implies a concern with realism, a commitment to the the values of order and coherence" — in other words, "a monological definition of the real," which may be out of place in this case. "The End" takes a liberated approach to the restraints of convention, of culture." Such fears — of advocating "closure" (gasp), of being concerned with "realism" (double gasp) — are the superego voices of this kind ofcriticism. By completely disal-

lowing the volatile, emotional aspect of the experience of reading, these voices strand the critic on a dry bed of clever equivocation.

While most of these essays are competent, intelligent, and arduously attentive, they have the unintentional effect of making the stories shine with quirky aliveness, with grace and brilliance. It is a pleasure to read them, to fly from one to the other, guiltily dodging the squeaking of sparrows wedged in between. Maybe this is appropriate in so anthology designed for "students" as well as general readers. Maybe Metcalf is on to something. So much of the early, and very real pleasure of literature has to do with a need to soar above the misguided pedagogy that ties our better instincts down. In *Writers in Aspic*, Metcalf provides the pretext. ◻

All that *glasnost* jazz

By Norman Snider

TALKIN' MOSCOW BLUES
by Josef Skvorecky,
Lester & Orpen Dennys, 384 pages, $17.95 paper
(ISBN 9 88619 196 3).

ONE OF the repercussions of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 can be recorded not so much in the realm of political history as in the history of ideas. The contemptible repression of the Dubcek government by the Soviets had the effect of once and for all refuting the notion, for yet another generation of educated Western opinion, that Marxism, taken as a practical method of social organization rather than a theoretical academic critique, was in any way a force for human liberation. one of the writers most responsible for communicating this important fact is the Czech novelist now permanently a resident of Canada, Josef Skvorecky. *Talkin' Moscow Blues*, a collection of essays written in English, is nominally concerned with music, literature, and film as well as politics, but Skvorecky has really one topic: the suppression of the Czech people in the 20th century by the forces of German and Russian totalitarianism.

Politically speaking, Skvorecky is one of a kind: a jazz conservative. This is not to say that like the late English poet Philip Larkin he believes that all authentic jazz came to an end with Max Kaminsky and Zutty Singleton and that Charlie Parker and bop represent the Antichrist. Rather, his experience of American swing during his youth in the 1940s was as close as he's come to mystical revelation. For Skvorecky jazz represents "explosive creative energy." It is not just music but the life force itself, "the love of youth which stays truly in one's soul." Skvorecky's allegiance not only to jazz but to Western writers like Hemingway, Chandler, and Faulkner was bound to get him into trouble with both the Nazis and the Soviets. (One might add that the spirit of jazz permeates the best of his fiction. That small masterpiece, *The Bass Saxophone*, captures the unbridled spirit of jazz just as well as anything Jack Kerouac aver wrote and displays a great deal more Ellington-ish poise and sophistication.)

In *Talkin' Moscow Blues*, however: Skvorecky is less concerned with the discussion of jazz, film, and literature than with the history of their suppression lo Czechoslovakia. Under the circumstances, his obsession is understandable, but, boy, it sure makes melancholy reading. Skvorecky is a militant opponent of ideological thinking, but all his writing on cultural subjects is dominated by politics. As a result, we discover that what ha likes best about Faulkner is that the great Southern novelist lacks any sense of *engagement*. What he likes best about writers as spectacularly different as Evelyn Waugh and Henry Miller is that they both drive Czech cultural bureaucrats wild with irritation. (Although Miller and Waugh were probably incapable of being in the same mom together for more than SO seconds, seen from a Central European perspective the work of both novelists radiates an enviable audacity only possible in the free culture of the West.) Because of Skvorecky's political fixations, he says little that is of fresh interest about Waugh, or Miller, or Hemingway, or Lester Young, except that the Blue Meanies did their best to wipe them out. This we already knew.

Nor, despite his interest in jazz and his friendship with Allen Ginsberg, can Skvorecky be described in any fashion as hip. The essays in *Talkin' Moscow Blues* lack *the stylistic drive of* the stories in *The Bass Saxophone*: *the* prose *is* grey, *stolid.* His experience of Marxism has led him to extol the virtues of those dedicated nonswingers, the bourgeoisie. Everything in these essays represents solid good sense; nobody in his right mind would dispute with Skvorecky on matters Czechoslovak. One commiserates with his suffering and the suffering of his people; but *Talkin' Moscow Blues* *sure* ain't party music.

Like most Central European exiles, Skvorecky finds North Americans, deprived of the experience of the knock on the door at 4 a.m., insufficiently bowed down with *Weltschmerz*. His observations about Canadian political naïvety *vis-à-vis* the Soviets are based on an account of a government-sponsored trip to Prague by some obscure dingbat from that august publication, *The Winnipeg Sun*. As *the editor* of this collection, Sam Solecki, points out in his introduction, on matters political Skvorecky is predictable and intransigent. He skirts the larger issues of the Cold War in favour of easy peacenik targets; as his exchange with George Kennan in a recent *New York Review of Books* *indicates*, he is unwilling to give Mikhail Gorbachev credit for the least bit of good will or put an iota of credence in *glasnost*. The whole planet can go up in nuclear flames before Skvorecky will forgive the Soviets a thing. In his place, I'd probably feel the same way. The hard fact is that if the condition of the liberation of Prague is World War III, then Prague will probably stay unliberated..

The discrediting of Marxism as a political program, as accomplished by the many central European exiles including Skvorecky, has some not so healthy implications. It is the effect of books like *Talkin' Moscow Blues* *to* discourage any sense of political activism or *urgency towards* social reform, because such actions, if one is to take the Hungarian or the Polish or the Czech experience as an example, all end up in one place: the concentration *camp. Domestic conservatives*, like Skvorecky's sophomoric fan club at the *Idler*, are all too eager to take the lessons of the European experience and place them in a Canadian context, where they don't apply. If all social idealism is foredoomed, then all that's left to do is stay home and listen to your Benny Goodman records while the Blue Meanies run the country for their own ends. There are still a few of us left unwilling to do that. ◻

L. A. North

By Brian Fawcett

JIMMY: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY
by Jimmy Pattison, with Paul Grescoe,
Seal Books, 300 pages, $24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 770 42196 2).

FOR THOSE outside B.C. who have (mercifully) already forgotten Expo 86 and are wondering what kind of people would elect a man like Bill Vander Zalm as premier of the province, Jimmy Pattison is the man who had the job offered to him first. There was even a six-month period — while Pattison was the president, chief executive, and resident clown to Expo 86 — when the people of B.C. might have made him emperor. His autobiography, done with the help of 50 hours of tape recordings and some slick editing by Paul Grescoe, is testimony that B.C. might just be better off with Vander Zalm.

On the cover of the book, with

a gravy-eating grin on his face, is Jimmy himself, tugging at the bon tie be always wears, and with what appears to be several pounds of solid gold on each wrist. Just above his almost-cute bald head is the book's title in gold print. Ostentation, B.C. style.

Have I got you a little curious? Good. Jii Pattison, by his own rights, is the five-foot-six-inch, Bible-quoting Pentecostal president and sole shareholder of one of *Fortune* magazine's 500 largest corporations, the Richest Mao West of Toronto, and the owner of a flock of companies that includes Neonex, Crush International, about a third of B.C.'s supermarkets. an array of car dealerships, and a substantial communications network. He hangs around with people like Bob Hops (who called B.C. "a suburb of Jim Pattison"). Ronald Reagan, Oral Roberts. and Lee Iacocca, from whose autobiography he took the figure of 50 hours of tape recordings as a measure of what his own should be based on.

He's a shameless name-dropper, a right-wing bureaucrat-basher sod a self-righteous gee-whizzing business Christian who makes a virtue out of the fact that, every month, he fires the salesman who sells the lowest number of cars at his auto dealerships. But you know what's the most frightening thing about him? No matter how hard you fight it, you'll probably find yourself admiring the guy.

He is, for one thing, not a bigot — unlike Vander Zalm. He has strong loyalties, strong ideas, and strong values, all of which he's thought through. I happen to disagree with most of them, sure, but there's something about bis candour that tells you that he deals off the top of the deck. And that he hasn't the slightest idea when he doesn't. That's what scares me.

In fact, he's kind of like that guy we all knew when we were growing up — the one who ran the comer store, or radio shop, or whatever, and was the president *of the local* Kinsmen or the Chamber of Commerce. Except that in Pattison's case, be "made good" beyond his wildest dreams, and beyond soy rational expectation.

Jimmy Pattison: An Autobiography is a good book if you want to know what makes B.C. tick, or if you want to know what kinds of values are prevalent in today's business community. And as an antidote, I'd suggest you also read Russell Kelly% hostile *Pattison: Portrait Of a Capitalist Superstar* (from *Vancouver's New Star* Books), so you'll know *what* Pattison isn't telling you. The way things are going, it's probably worth your time. No one knows which province is going to be B.C.'ed neat. □

Wilde thing

By B. W. Powe

OSCAR WILDE
by Richard Ellmann,
Viking (Penguin), 680 pages, $29.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 81420 2).

OSCAR Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde (his poetess mother said of his name, "Isn't it grand, misty, sod Ossianic?") posed aesthetics against anaesthetics, paradox against ideology. Wilde brought wildness and public crisis to the English *fin de siècle* and helped prepare the cultural field for modernism. The Wilde revival now reminds us that we too witness a century's end. Richard Ellmann's biography dramatizes that Wilde is the contemporary of those who want a new cultural blast.

Wilde is remembered for Ids quick epigrams. Naturally. Ellmann has written a 632-page book about him. Maxim: a one-liner needs a long study.

Ellmann raised scholarly biography to the level of dramatic narrative fiction with *James Joyce* (1959). He is excellent with story line, good at direct statement, thorough in his research. Ellmann has had less success with his mosaics of ideas, like *Eminent Domain* (1967), because he is uncomfortable with illuminations, networks, eclectic conditions for insight. He works in straight lines: his anecdotes are organized as.. . anecdotes. No imaginative intellect, Ellmann does bring *sympathy* to *his* subjects.

The biography confirms that

Wilde's art lives in the epigram. His subject was the sensibility of his audience. Wilde's writings and witticisms are like letters or dialogues that encourage response and correspondence. At tbe *première* of *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), Wilde said to an appreciative gathering. "I congratulate you on the *great* success of your performance, which persuades me that you think *almost* as highly of the play as I do myself." An epigram needs a listener, a *straight man*, to feed back another word or phrase. "The spectator is to be receptive," he said. "He is the violin on which the master is to play." Wit needs an other: a completing part. "The essence of good dialogue," Wilde commented, "is interruption." He praised laziness and leisure; bat be despised docility and entrapment. He would generously invite anyone to converse with him at anv time. "He certainly has a never-failing *bonhomie*," a witness said, "which makes bim roar with laughter at his own absurd theories and strange conceits. . ." Ellmann narrates what happened when this liberal talker — who asked dulled sensibilities to dream of beauty — talked himself out of comedy and into tragedy.

Wilde's wit — bls presence of mind — enlarged his public persona: the mask of tbe dandy. Expert publicity discarded humility. He recalled aristocracy, but as a parody of pomp: the self became a theatre. At the same time he made bisexuality the secret thrill of his concerns: homosexuality was the love that dared not speak its name; it was promiscuity that the English public suspected he flaunted in their face.

The witty epigram aids oral memory and tba spontaneous moment. What you lose with epigrammatic writers is logic, sequence, and dogmatism. The best method of operation, then, is the maxim, the fragment (the parable and anecdote), and conversation. Once the epigram becomes the artist's primary method, a writer's lines become *memorable*, though *he risks* sounding flippant, a coiner of clichés. (In passing: the epigram is a style peculiarly suited to a postliterate audience. On the printed page, the pithy phrase reads like a headline; in oral delivery, the remark is the one-liner everyone loves to repeat.)

In public, Wilde poked fun at his own making and unmaking of sense. "I like hearing myself talk. It is one of my greatest pleasures. I often have long conversations all by myself, and I am so clever tbat sometimes I don't understand a word of what I am saying."

A wit, like Wilde, assumes that we will fill in the blanks. Masks are necessary for maintaining the power of illusion and involvement. But as Ellmann states, tbe acts of unmasking and discovery, both in life and in art, gave Wilde's work its tension and vulnerability. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *The Critic as Artist* swing back and forth in a ritual exposure of plots and subplots, ideas and counter-ideas, personae and secret selves.

Ellmann argues for the seriousness of Wilde's *attempt to make* a *new culture* of wit and beauty. His personality was shaped into an art object: he was a real fake — which is more of an accomplishment than most people realize. (Wyndham Lewis's 1914 code: "Cherish and develop, side by side, your six most constant indications of different personalities.") Wilde used shock tactics through a double plotting with then-current French decadence and a conscious retuning of the Hellenic cult of beauty. Wilde's aesthetics *drew attention to the* industrialized milieu that was mechanized, colourless, and conformist. (Eliot's Prufrock is also an end-of-the-century Pierrot who sees a city "etherized upon a table.") "The originality I mean," Wilde said, ". . . is originality of treatment not of subject. The true artist is known by the use of what he annexes, and he annexes everything." (Pound in 1908: "Utter originality is of course out of the question.")

Dynamic interplay with tbe audience continues through contradiction — even of yourself. "My next book," Wilde said, "may be a perfect contradiction of my first."

Repudiate previous work! Throw over your books and begin again. Wilde understood tbe call of the radical ego. You must constantly break down your limits: treat success as failure, failure as success. Trade in old masks for new ones: never commit the mistake of believing yourself fixed. Wilde felt the necessity of transformation: *he knew the* false pretensions of the puritan and the *destructiveness of the hedonist.* He sought a poise that could turn and change and yet hold a paradoxical centre of character.

Wilde's love for Art for Art's Sake — his hyperaesthesia — blinded him to the effect he had on others. His rebel sensibility was taken for an ideology of depravity. No one was quite sure what dis-ease he was handing on. ("Tradition": from the Latin *tradere*, meaning to deliver or hand on.) His bisexuality and its suspicious link with bilingualism, his promiscuous ideas, which he scattered like seeds everywhere, his pleasure in subverting convention — all this guaranteed he would soon be in trouble with the morality watchers of his day.

Ellmann's principal idea is his theory that Wilde had another trouble: syphilis. According to Ellmann, syphilis was the subtext of disease tbat infected Wilde's stories and verse. Ellmann attributes Wilde's moodiness and occasional melancholia to the disease. This allows an interesting rereading of *Dorian Gray*.

Fortunately, it is difficult to explain anyone by his disease. That Wilde may have been syphilitic — who wasn't at tbat time? — does not become Ellmann's obsession. His speculations are limited to a footnote and several asides. Disease as subtext will have to wait for further development by those in the midst of the Great AIDS Plague — with its accompanying terror of touch, contact, and influence.

The restless sexuality that Ellmann describes shows that Wilde did not want to be contained. He desired contact, amtinually. The conversational art assured that his books, essays, and plays would not be fully self-contained artefacts. (About *Dorian Gray*, he said, "All conversation, no action.") His work needed others to twist the paradoxes, recall tbe learned allasions, imagine alternatives.

Wilde compressed information so that ideas and perceptions could be passed on quickly: tbis compression and speed are overlooked as a source for further debate and as a method of exploring sensitivities. Wilde's publicity was dramatic; and his drama had to be acted out to its end. After Wilde's trial for corruption, his legend lived in a vulgarized flip through gossip and innuendo. Out of decay comas rebirth. It took the modernists. like Pound and Joyce, to see the value of the debate between past and present, self and environment, tbat Wilde bad began. Tbe best art for Wilde was incomplete. A process remains open when it is pioneering, flawed, and full of twists.

Where is such exploration now? In North America, the moralizing monologue has replaced dialogue and wit. In academe, writers without a readership become hopelessly fixed; the static system is preferred to contradiction and flexibilitv, Most think if you tell a joke no one will take you seriously. A literate vortex like the London Wilde knew has become a corporate whirl where the only bonds are bond trading and spying (James Bond). Wilde's iconoclasm would no doubt end up on a TV talk show: his quick repartee turned into a late-night letter-man for today.

Wilde's finale was poignant for a master of conversation and controversy. He ended sick, broke, and almost alone — a position he had imagined in fables about destroyed statues, poems on puppets, stories riddled with mystery and hauntings. Like most self-absorbed individualists, Wilde craved attention: introspection was displaced by pat-on and provocation. *De Profundis*, ostensibly a confession, accuses an imagined reader — Lord Alfred Douglas — from inside a prison cell as if that other were there to be redressed like the real criminal in the trial,

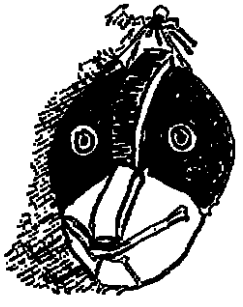
addressed like a tangible presence, and dressed down like a spoiled child. The apologia is cast as a letter: the meditation is aimed outward, not inward; it is a missile launched to again seek a *hypocrite lecteur*.

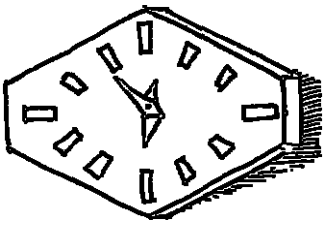
His life was lived like an epigram: he showed how far you can go before you go too far. In the end, Wilde did not understand that an externalized thought process would be taken as superficial (translation: how do I know what I'm thinking until I've said it?); he couldn't imagine that his advertisements *for* himself invited reactionary and not revolutionary completion. The revenge of the hypocrites had been shocked disapproval; and the force *of* law *acted* like *a censor* to stifle *this* anarchist of epigrams. So Wilde's public theatre became Reading Gaol, an exile in Italy, and a slum in Paris.

Prisons held prisoner C.3.3. "I . . . wish," Wilde wrote to Cunninghame Graham, "we could talk over the many prisons of life — prisons of stone, prisons of passion, prisons of intellect, prisons of morality and the rest — all limitation, external or internal, all prisons, really."

Paradox sustained him. "I shall die as I have lived," he said, "beyond my means." We are indebted to Ellmann for reviving this Wilde thing: a dssiclst whose radical ego made his language exceptional; a romantic obsessed with form; an intellectual who was too skeptical to be an atheist; a revolutionary of sensibility who despised the mob; an entertainer who was too serious to be solemn; an isolated figure searching for a receptive other; a crushed man who was never at a loss for words.

Recommendation: rename tbe George Bernard Shaw Festival Theatre in Niagara-on-the-Lake Wilde World. Replacing a didact with one whose deathbed line was addressed to peeling wallpaper: "Well," Wilde said, "one or the other of us has to go." □





Clear-eyed nostalgia

By Norman Sigurdson

A BASKET OF APPLES
by Shirley Faessler,
McClelland & Stewart, 234 pages, $19.95 *cloth (ISBN 0 7710 3111 4).*

GOD'S BEDFELLOWS
by David Carpenter,
McClelland & Stewart, 216 pages, $22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 1917 3).

BOTH OF THESE two new collections of short stories are firmly rooted in a sense *of place* — *Toronto's* Kensington Market area in Shirley Faessler's A *Basket of Apples* and the western prairies in David Carpenter's Gad's *Bedfellows*. *In each* case *the location takes on a* special importance, becoming almost another character in the narrative.

The more interesting of the two is Faessler's collection of nine linked stories, most of which were published in the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine in *the* late 1960s and early '70s. Heavily nostalgic without being saccharine, they are first-person recollections of the world of Jewisb immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe who settled in a small corner of Toronto in the years between the wars.

The first six stories share a common narrator, whose mind is drawn back to the past when she was young and her parents' generation was in its prime. Taken together these stories reveal the life of the community through the eyes of someone who was born into it, grew up, and moved away. She looks back with warmth and affection, but also with dear-eyed honesty.

The stories are arranged chronologically in the order of the events depicted (but not in the order in which they were written) and this gives the collection both the depth and vividness of character typical of a good short story and the sustained sense of narrative that a novel allows.

There is a slightly folk-tale quality to the stories. liberally larded with Yiih terms and expressions, and this suits the sad, funny, exuberant tone exactly. The characters themselves seem both larger than life and believably human at the same time.

Along the way we piece together the narrator's biography. Her mother dies when she and her brother and sister are very young and her father, Avrom, a Rumanian immigrant, through the offices of a matchmaker, finds a second wife, Chayele, "an old maid of thirty-five and entirely without prospects: Chayele's family calls Avrom the "Rumanian Beast" and he calls them the "Russian hordes." The narrator grows up on the border between the rival camps.

She eventually marries a Gentile, gets divorced, and drifts away from the community and the family. But the sight of an old woman or the thought of her father's death brings the memories back. In any case, the stories are more about the neighbourhood than about her.

We meet her uncle Yankev, tbe vigorous, coarse-natured bootlegger and his seemingly mismatched wife, Henye, a stooped, sour old crone. We meet her father, a proud night watchman. and her simpering, histrionic cousins Gedalyeh and Mischa.

The final three stories revolve around a group of neighbourhood women who meet each Saturday night for a session of poker and gossip. The dialogue crackles with humour and the joys of living despite life's harsh reality. Faessler's tales are subtle and accomplished and her delicate balancing act between sentiment and clear-sighted appraisal is a pleasure to behold.

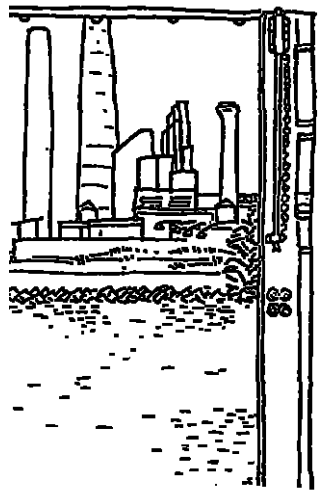
The stories in *God's Bedfellows*, the third book of fiction by Saskatoon writer David Carpenter are likewise mostly first-person narratives. These stories are more varied. but less polished. Carpenter has a tendency to allow his narrators to ramble on a bit too much, and the structure of some of the pieces is quite weak.

These are the sort of digressive, bleary tales you might expect to hear just before last call in a prairie beer parlour. In most of them the narrator wants to tell you about a particular event in his life that marked him in some way, but which he still cannot quits figure out no matter how often he goes over it.

In the title story, for example, a man who recently bad his leg amputated (many of the narrators are somehow physically disabled, a rather clumsy metaphor) spends a drunken night in an Edmonton mental hospital discussing divinity with a recently flipped-out friend. The next day he either does or doss not meet God on a crosstown bus.

In other stories, one narrator tries to come to terms with the disappearance of his childhood friend, a young Indian girl, who seems to have been kidnapped by a bear. and another, a wheelchair-bound former hockey player, strikes up a relationship with a professor in a stalled elevator.

There is in these stories a sense of both the isolation and the unbounded expectations *of the* wide open landscape that characterize the prairie psyche. You can almost feel the bite of the wind and the swirling snow. In their blend of satire and mythology and their earthy colloquialism, these stories show the influence of another prairie writer, Robert Kroetsch, under whom Carpenter has studied. Carpenter's haunted, wounded characters, alone against the vast landscape, are portrayed with compassion and humour, but they need a firmer authorial hand to rein in their excesses. □



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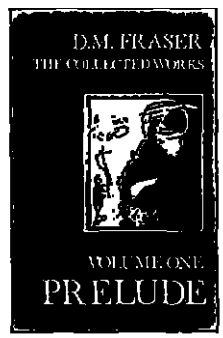

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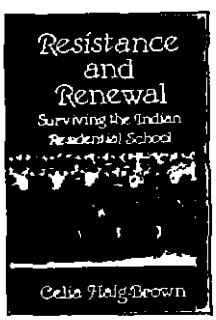

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FIRST NOVELS

Ways to the woods

Like Janice Kulyk Keefer's Spruce Harbour, Joan Clark's Niska is a fictional world complete unto itself

By **Douglas Hill**

TO BEGIN, a pair of slender volumes with ambitions. Botb The Venetian, by Grant Buday (Oolichan, 102 pages, $8.95 paper), and the half-finished christ, by james misfeldt (Fifth House, 55 Paw. $8.95 paper), attempt to extend tbe limits of tbe conventional novel. The results are mixed; win one, lose one.

Buday's originality is a gift for historical reinvention. He imagines the Mongolian Empire's royal city of Kanbalu (now Beijing) at tbe end of the 13tb century. There a homesick, half-drunk Marco Polo, racked with malaria, nears the end of his 20-year stay at the court of the aged Kubla Khan. Polo wants to leave: tbe Khan wants bim to stay. The two men converse at length, with each other and their advisers (in Polo's case his father and uncle): they drink tea and smoke opium; the topics they discuss include such matters as existence, empire, fortune-telling, the course of their relationship.

Buday's writing is awkward in a few places where his odd phrasing seems to serve no particular purpose. but on the whole it's effective in evoking the atmosphere of spiritual paralysis and trancelike mystery he aims for. Polo, as Buday portrays him, is a man who has "lost the faith," an interesting study in rootlessness. As an artistic exercise, a sort of imaginative set-piece, *The Venetian* is thought-provoking. That it's fictionally fairly inert, consisting mostly of meditations and dialogue, doesn't really matter.

Them are no capital letters or punctuation marks in Misfeldt's book, which, along with a touch of temporal dislocation and few stretches of stream of consciousness, is about the extent of its experimentalism. It certainly doesn't offer anything new in the way of characters or ideas. The story is set in the late 1950s; the first-person narrator is a novelist in his 40s who's left his wife and taken up with a young actress; he spends time with his feminist daughter and receives advice from bis sister. He admits to a "selfdestructive bent." Tbe novel's journal form records his depressing days, his observations on the women who minister to him, his writer's block and emotional malaise, his dreams and fantasies.

There are some clever lines in *the half-finished christ*, some insights, and a few moments of sour humour. But it all seems pretty unconnected, a piece of neo-Beat navel-inspecting without tbe energy of a Kerouac or the substance of a Burroughs. For me, there's too much in tbe novel that's second-hand, tired, unoriginal; it all adds up to much less than the sum of its parts.

Barking Dogs, by Terence M. Green (McClelland & Stewart, 214 pages, $23.95 cloth), starts off with a bang, and promises to be a fast-moving futuristic high-tech cop thriller. By the end, though, there isn't enough technology, the action has slowed once too often to catch up on a rather tired domestic subplot, and the Rambo Nouveau revenge morality has become tiresome. (Beware novels bearing dust jackets bearing likenesses of Clint Eastwood/Dirty Harry.)

The novel is cleanly if conventionally written. The dialogue is snappy and sharp-edged and better in general than the connective prose, which stumbles occasionally. The unambiguous Toronto locations are a pleasant feature and add familiar flavour to a story set in 1999. For hardware, there's tbe barking dog itself, a sophisticated *personal* lie detector, beeper-sized, that gives Metro cop Mitch Helwig an edge in finding sod eliminating the killers of his partner. This is fair-to-good entertainment, competence in a genre and not a whole lot more.

To say that Janice Kulyk Keefer's Constellations (Random House, 272 pages, $21.95) is a technically accomplished piece of work is a considerable understatement. Part comedy of manners, part backwoods Gothic, part journey into female consciousness, tbe novel displays intrinsically interesting characters, important themes, and a poet's concern for structure, image, and phrase. Unlike most first novels, it creates tbe sense of a fully imagined fictional world.

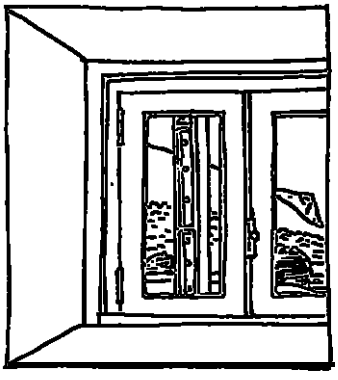
Keefer applies her talents to a small town called Spruce Harbow, located on Nova Scotia's French Shore northwest of Halifax. Claire Saulnier, in her 40s. has come home after 15 years away to teach music part time at ths local Catholic college. A loner by choice, sbs becomes involved in tbe lives of four other people: a disturbed and abused teenager, Mariette; a self-centred Parisian Frenchman, Bertrand, posted to the college in lieu of military service; a young Polish-Canadian woman from Halifax, a promising oboeist, who gives a concert at the college and returns for French immersion study in tbe summer: and finally the collage janitor, Hector. a former protégé of Claire's and a drop-out from a philosophy Ph.D. program in Montreal.

It's one of Keefer's dear successes that she can weave this unlikely mix of locals and exotics into a plausible web of passion, rep&loo, and self-deception. Each character in the drama is revealed through carefully differentiated interior monologues; these soliloquies establish background and motive and seldom hold up the action of the plot, which is fairly intricate. Keefer's voices speak with insight into the perils of family relations, especially the troubled, sometimes dangerous conflcits between daughters and fathers.

My reservations about tbe novel are, with one exception, small. Keefer overplays her erudition, I think; the texture of philosophical and musical reference comes close, in a few places, to being pretentious (and not just when the foolish Bertrand is on stage). She also has a tendency, admirably restrained most of the time, to overheat her prose; portions of Claire's and Mariette's monologues seem too fancy for the circumstances they are treating. Otherwise the writing is first-rate.

Constellations does a number of things remarkably well. It's inventive, intelligent, sure-handed; the characters are clearly drawn; the landscapes are memorable. But for all its craft, its technical virtuosity, it leaves me mildly disappointed. Keefer gets under the skin of her characters, but she doesn't suggest that shs sympathizes very much with any of them, that she validates their lives or affirms their dreams, eve* in part, even if those lives and dreams are defeated. And so I find *Constellations* pretty bleak; it doesn't - m e . It's sharply observant, almost clinically precise in its dissection of love, egotism. and other delusions, but I'm left with a work of art that Seems hollow at the core, where its heart should be.

Now this is exactly where The Victory of Geraldine Gull, by Joan Clark (Macmillan, 288 pages, $19.95 cloth), succeeds. If it makes less of literary techniques, it makes rather more of humanity. Like Keefer, Clark



uses multiple narrative point of view, focuses on a tightly circumscribed community, and deals with questions of leaving, staying, or returning. Here, too, events from the past come to a dramatic (and violent) head in the present.

Clark sets her tale in a Cree village called Niska on the shore of Hudson Bay in the summer of 1978. The band chief, inspired by a young activist, the local teacher Patrick Eagle. wants to move the settlement upriver 25 miles, where it won't regularly flood. The Catholic priest is ineffectual, the Hudson's Bay Company storekeeper is racist. the white art teacher who comes in for a *few weeks* (Willa Coyle) is well naïve.ing There is widespread poverty, filth, and alcoholism. And Geraldine Gull, an Ojibway woman in her 40s married to a Cree (and the mother, before that marriage, of Alexander Bear, a famous Native artist and lately a suicide) is stir-& up trouble with acts of vandalism and thievery.

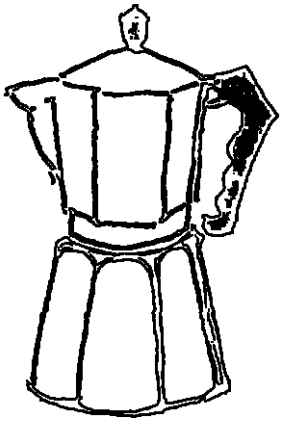
Though many of these characters exhibit qualities we have seen before, in life and in fiction, and are therefore "typical." it's to Clark's great credit that none (save perhaps tile priest) is in any measurable degree a stereotype. And thus each is wholly believable: Patrick's goals and limitations, Willa's *fear* and determination, above all Geraldine's anger and loyalty, self-destructiveness and cunning — these seem the contradictions of which real people are made.

Clark doesn't appear to strain for literary effect, though she does a number of things unobtrusively well. She moves the point of view around smoothly, and her writing is clear and strong, at moments eloquent, without calling attention to itself. She draws her images from the natural world (water. mud, trees, rocks) and from the community (food, shelter, stray dogs, garbage) where she deploys her characters; she reveals beauty but doesn't gloss over pain and degradation. The novel blends Indian mytbs with the biblical story *of the* flood; *this* theoretical underpinning feels unforced (though obviously it's carefully contrived), and it gives tbe action of the plot considerable cultural resonance.

The story moves well, though it could profitably be tightened up. Willa's letters to her sister. for example, add pages, but mostly repeat what the reader already knows. Clark of course intends to go over her material from different perspectives, but this can work against the flow *of the* story when characters tell other characters (as occasionally happens) about what we have just witnessed. The suggestion here is for minor. but not merely cosmetic, surgery.

The ending of the novel is both dismaying and hopeful. Clark has not resolved all the issues she's raised, but she's asked important questions about interdependence and shared responsibility, both at the personal and societal ends of the scale. Like Keefer's Spruce Harbour, Clark's Niska is a fictional world complete unto itself; it will ultimately be the reader's taste and experience that determine wbicb of these worlds she or he prefers.

Constellations and The *Victory of Geraldine Gull* spring from quite different fictional impulses, fictional ambitions. Though comparisons may help to point up how different novels result from these different beginnings, they should not obscure the fact that, as one of John Barth's protean characters was wont to remark, "There are more ways to the woods than one." These are both, each for its own reasons, fine novels. ❑



CORRECTION

The title of *The Dreams of Zoo Animals*, by Valmai *Howe*, published by Nu-Age Editions (Concordia University) appeared incorrectly in our April edition. Books in *Canada* regrets this error.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Girl's own stories

Heroines rather than heroes set off on adventures in most of these new picture boohs

By Anne Denaon

A BRIEF SURVEY of some recent *Canadian* picture books reveals that. despite their varied subjects and styles, almost all their protagonists are female. Whether this is a matter of mere coincidence, literary affirmative action, or perhaps just a reflection of the expected audience in the four-to-eight age group, the adventures of these determined young heroines show beginning readers a world beyond narrow girlish traditions of sugar and spice.

Among the current crop are several translations of books previously published in French. The Birthday Party and The Secret Code, both by Michel Aubin with illustrations by Helene Desputeaux, adapted by Shelley Tanaka (James Lorimer) feature tbe activities of a Québécoise Madeleine, emphatically not to be confused with Ludwig Bemelmans's Madeline. Although, from the covers, she gives her name to the series, she remains incognita in the English text. Perhaps these sties have lost something in the adaptation, so to speak. for their plots, told in the chattily confidential and very contemporary voice of the aforementioned gamine, seem a bit inconsequential and unlikely to survive repeated readings. The illustrations, too. are rather self-consciously charming, and more likely to appeal to adults than children.

Anna, Paul and Tommycat Say Hello and Looking for Tommycat (James Lorimer) were also previously published in Quebec, and are also part of a series. a fact that is forcefully driven home by the cliffhanger endings of both books. Although both adults and children relish the anticipatory pleasures of an extended series, I found this method of pitching the eight forthcoming titles a trifle crude. Michel Bisson's vigorous, if muddily coloured, illustrations, in a style that combines cartoon and German Expressionist woodcut styles (Tommycat resembles an Expressionist Sylvester) dominate the minimal text by Nicole Gerard and Pol Danheux, adapted by Priscilla Galloway. Although both titles have the air of glossy comic books, they could provide brief enjoyment for the younger end of the market. But be prepared to come up with all 10 of them!

Foo by Richard Thompson, illustrated by Eugenie Fernandes (Annick), tells how little Jesse blows kisses to every living thing with uniformly joyous results and finally galvanizes her mother, sluggishly going through the motions at her dance class far across town, with these heart-shaped guided missiles. The book's soft tone is faithfully reflected in *the* illustrations. Although *Foo* treads dangerously *close to* saccharine *sweetness. it* gently conveys a comforting message *to* separation-anxious toddlers, *while* introducing to them the idea that parents, too, sometimes need encouragement and reassurance.

It's hard to imagine exactly who might find similar consolation or catharsis in Forget-me-not (Annick Press), which deals with one *family's* experience of Alzheimer's disease. The book was written and illustrated by 14-year-old Jonah Schein and based on his own relationship with his grandmother, who was discovered to have the disease when he was eight. Although he uses the names of his real-life siblings, whose photographs appear at the conclusion of the

book. be has chosen to tell the story in the voice of bis sister Becky. Regrettably, despite the book's laudable intentions in addressing a difficult and increasingly common situation. it &es not offer much to a child actually facing such a problem. Surely someone old enough to read or to grasp the meaning of this disease would be unimpressed by Schein's frankly amateurish and clichéd drawings, in which Grandma appears as the archetypal bespectacled, cane-carrying, grey-hair-in-a-bun and skirts-to-the-floor figure that must be at odds with the experience of most children today. Yet Schein's commentary is brutally contemporary: on the first page, before Grandma arrives for a visit, the narrator confides that "Matthew and I don't like our grandmother," and that the children avoid her as much as possible. whether this is typical of transgenerational relations today. and I doubt that it is. such sentiments hardly enhance the pathos that should be engendered by the subsequent discovery of tbe grandmother's affliction, her decline, and the news of her death four years later.

Morgan the Magnificent (Groundwood) is a recent hook by the writer and illustrator Ian Wallace. Like his successful Chin *Chiang and the Dragon's* Dame, it tells of a challenge that must be met in the form of a public performance. In this case, however, the challenge comes from within the young heroine herself, rather than being imposed by cultural or familial expectations. In fact, Morgan's determination to be a high-wire artist is discouraged by her father until the circus sets up near their farm and his daughter's almost somnambulistic fulfilment of her dreams wins him, and us. over. Wallace's complex and allusive illustrations place her performance in a magical space somewhere between daydream and reality and surround them with the nostalgic rococo of the quintessential Bii Top. His use of pointillist passages, subdued colours, and striking aerial perspectives recalls tbe circus paintings of Degas and Seurat. At the same time, the author's cinematic approach enhances tbe drama of Morgan's feat: he zooms in for a close-up as she almost falters, then pulls back to show the full dimensions of her triumph. Meanwhile, in the corner of each page, tiny grisaille caryatids provide a mimed commentary on the action. The book ends with Morgan's satisfied return to what had seemed a humdrum life, treasuring a tribute from her idol and mentor, the Amazing Anastasia.

Another young girl's perilous rite of passage is tbe subject of Ids and the Wool Smugglers, by Sue AM Alderson and Ann Blades. Set in a sheep-farming community on an island off Canada's west coast in the early years of this century, it tells how little Ida single-handedly foils poachers set on stealing her pet ewe and her two lambs and emerges from the adventure ready for new and longed-for responsibilities. AM Blades's careful illustrations, facing each page of the text, complement this simply told story with their serene pastels, and their solemnly naïve quality seems to reflect something of Ida's own personality. The double-page vista of spring-softened meadows and woods through which a tiny Ids and her little flock travel, flanked by the lurking poachers, is especially lovely.

Goldie and the Sea by Judith Saltman (also the author of the useful Modern Canadian Children's Books) with pictures by Kim LaFave (Groundwood) features yet another spunky young heroine. Nine-year-old Goldie is an independent sort whose family consists of a cat and a sardonic parrot, and who "gazed at tbe world as if she were a fisherman waiting to catch its marvels in a net."

Possessed by an overpowering desire to see and paint the sea as her grandfather bad done, she sets off with her two companions to find it. Along the way, they encounter various people who would benevolently deter Goldie from reaching her goal. Like Morgan and Ida, she perseveres and eventually returns home satisfied with her accomplishment. Goldie's odyssey is told with enough charm and humour to engage adults as well as the children they may read it to. and LaFave's delicate illustrations reflect its playful appeal. ❑

LETTERS

CRI DE PUMP

To *Bob Blackburn*

BUT ZOUNDS, *Sii!* Exscind your column? No more *E.,O.E.*, the womb of wit, dissolvent of solecisms, nemesis of nugacity, persecutor of pedants, jeerer at jargonmongers, taunter of tautologists and my treasured teacher? Would you obtund my opsimathy? What convinced you? Are you not persuasible? *Verily*, woe! Hopefully you'll repent and relent. Y'know what I mean?

Groovy stuff, your prose. Pure. by a driven pm. Solid jive. It really sends. I'll miss it. My pump will ache. You dig me?

John T. Ross
New Liskeard, Ont.

AUTHOR AND CRITICS

I HAD TO sit through Matt Cohen's diatribe against critics at tbe short story conference in Paris, and was hoping his article would provide a more well-considered agrument. It wasn't to be.

As a writer myself, I understand his concern about critics — especially those *of the* current language-obsessed school — who seem to be trying to displace authors. But there's nothing wrong with saying that a writer's fiction is influenced by, or in fact grows out of, bis or her class background, education (formal or otherwise), religious views or lack of them, etc. etc. I don't see bow anyone can continue to believe the Romantic myth that a writer simply sits down in front of a blank page and acts as the conduit for Inspiration flowing from some mystical spheres.

Furthermore, I suspect that the literary communities of other countries are just as insular as our own; if they are not, it would be because they are larger, not less prone to incestuous tendencies. I've heard that New York's literary crowd exhibits those tendencies in abundance.

As *for the* silence that greeted Matt's Kafka joke: we understood it, all right; we just didn't think it was all that funny.

Allan Weiss
Toronto

AS A LITERARY CRITIC who has thought a fair bit about the *point* of what I do, I was disturbed by ths self-indulgent narrowness of Matt *Cohen's* article ("'Author and critic") in your April issue.

Yes. of course. critics some times fail to do justice to a particular work, and of course they're not infallible -the variety of the responses of the W. H. Smith/Books in Canada jury members to the competition finalists published in the same issue makes that dear.

However, in my opinion criticism is an art, and one that is a necessary complement to literature. Writers don't write in a vacuum, contrary to Mr. Cohen's belief. The act of communication is what writing is about, end I know enough writers to be able to say that most of them care very deeply about being understood, and *replied* to. by critics they respect. Because that is what criticism is — a reply to tbe writer, an articulation of the reader response that is an essential part of the book's existence, and a furthering of the book's existence within culture by tbe discovery of and reflection on some of its possibilities of meaning. And I know that when I immerse myself as a reader and critic in a literary work that "speaks" to me, the journey I embark on, which only ends when my own words take shape around the text, is my version of creativity.

Finally, I'm enough of a critic to know that the difference between Cohen's view and mine of the pact between writer sod reader probably has something to do with our gender. If Mr. Cohen were to look more closely at that "abyss" be faces every time he sits down to write, and to which he attaches his "prestige" as a writer, be might find it was a projection of the "otherness" be needs to feel he's in competition with in order for his male identity to assert itself.

Women writers don't spend an inordinate amount of time glorifying "the idea of the heroic writer facing the blank page" as he does. They tend to be more in-

terested in what they can say that might *matter* to others. by giving form to a shared and as yet unexpressed reality.

Patricia Smart
Ottawa

APRIL 1970 — The bibliothèque Ste Geneviève, Paris.

Suddenly, as I am rereading *Songs of Innocence*, in preparation for the Agrégation, the French competitive exam giving access to a teaching career and further research, I feel the presence of two familiar individuals on each side of me.

To my left. St. Satchel, the schoolchildren's saint, looks concerned: "Are you sure, my dear, that you have the patience, the tolerance, tbe eternal youth, and indestructible faith without which you will "ever teach properly!"

To my right, St. Pen Ultimate, tbe literary critics' saint, assumes a sarcastic tone: "Can you swear that you will always find the deeper meaning and the beauty where they lie. separate the wheat from the chaff, arouse interest where you find none?"

"I'll try, I'll try, I'll always do my best! Now go back to Paradise, you two, where you belong. Be blessed and be gone, and let me work in peace. I will call you if I need you."

4 February 1988 — The Sorbonne, Paris. During the first international conference on the short story in English.

I am worried: he agreed to come, then, from several sources, I learned that he would not, in spite of his engagemoot.. .

But lo and behold! Here he is! I knew I could trust him. From this noble building, I send a grateful thought to st. Pen Ultimate.

He is introduced. A ripple of excitement runs through the assembly. He brandishes something. His paper? No! A pistol. Bang! Bang! He shoots us all! I see my dear friends, colleagues and authors, collapse one after the other while the poor man, who has obviously gone mad with tbe stress of inspiration, sniggers as he fires: "Academics, I bate your guts! Me, a friend of yours? An enemy, more likely!"

As I lie with tbe atrocious pain of the bullet in my chest, I feel some unfairness in my fate. I invoke my two saints. "Was I not tolerant? Dii I not find beauty where it lay and arouse interest even in the least interesting prose? My two saints appear, sorrowful but helpless at the sight of all this carnage.

But just before I expire, I see Herbert Liebman, Albert Russo, and Alan Siitoe raise their eyes and search for mine; their look conveys their last message: "No. no, do believe us: we authors are not all like him!"

Claire Larrière
Université de La Sorbonne
Paris

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

I EXPECT that roughly a thousand people will have told Robert Fulford by now that the word *entomic* means pertaining to insects. What kinds of dictionaries does he have? He had better ask for his money back.

It was a bit shocking to see our erudite Canadian writer and critic admit to such a lack of knowledge! And in writing!

However, I think he did pick the right person as winner for the W. H. Smith/Books in Canada award.

Elda Cadogan
Stratford

IN THE CHAIR

AS A WRITER, Mordecai Richler is a winner, but as a judge for the W. H. Smith/Books in Canada First Novel Award for 1987, he is a failure, I feel. When one sits in the critic's armchair, one should abide by its rules and that includes reading a book completely. In your April edition, Mordecai Richler showed a bitter display of disrespect towards a fellow artist by admitting he only read 70 pages of W. D. Barcus's *Squatters' Island. Tossing* aside a miter's first novel because he was bored is an error in judgement.

In this same issue, Mary di Michele writes in "Field Notes" that there is a lack of an indigenous audience who will read Canadian literature. How sad that a famous Canadian novelist fits this category.

George H. Kislashko
Toronto

PULSARS AND QUASARS

BRIAN FAWCETT, in his review of *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, laments Canada's "national short-sightedness and mediocrity" that has caused McLuhan's reputation to wane "while our truly public attentions go to shallow media stars like David Suzuki, Rick Hansen, and Wayne Gretzky."

In the case of David Suzuki and Rick Hansen, I hope we are only dealing with a bad choice Of "media stars" to illustrate a possibly valid point. David Suzuki is. fortunately, telling an anaesthetized nation, in print and on television, that we are physically destroying ourselves arid our planet. Rick Hansen has become a media star because he represents the kind of hope and regeneration that we need to acquire, as a nation, in order to reverse our self-destruction.

Yes, it would be nice if everyone read McLuhan, but they never win. Academic sniffs about mass cult can turn into the kind of lazy thinking we can't afford any more.

Steve Payne
Toronto

RECEIVED

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

Abuse of the Elderly: Issues and Annotated Bibliography, edited by Benjamin Schlesinger and Rachel Schlesinger, University of Toronto.

AIDS: A Teacher Resource Package, by Jill Golick and James D. Greig, Globe/Modern Curriculum Press.

Anatomy of a Nightmare: The Failure of Society in Dealing with Child Sexual Abuse, by Martyn Kendrick, Macmillan.

And Justice For Some: Power and Patronage in Ottawa, by Robert Harrison, Eden Press.

Below the Peacock Fan: First Ladies of the Raj, by Marian Fowler, Penguin.

Between Europe and America: The Canadian Tradition in Fiction, by T.D. MacLulich, ECW.

Café Poems, by Norm Sibum, Oberon.

The Canadian Bed & Breakfast Guide, by Gerda Pantel, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

Canadian Books for Young People (4th Edition), edited by André Gagnon and Ann Gagnon, U of T Press.

The Caretakers, by Bernard Mathias, Viking.

Compassion and Solidarity, by Gregory Baum, CBC Enterprises.

Conservation: A Thoughtful Way of Explaining Conservation to Children, by Robert Ingpen and Margaret Dunkel, Macmillan.

Corporate Loyalty: A Trust Betrayed, by Brian A. Grosman, Viking.

The Debt Matrix, by Roy Culpepper, The North-South Institute.

The Diary of a Bank Robber, by Dwight Pichette, Eden Press.

Disaster Management for Libraries, by Claire England and Karen Evans, Canadian Library Association.

Discussion Paper on Credit Card Interest Charges, by officials of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group on Cost of Credit Disclosure, Consumer & Corporate Affairs Canada.

Double Exposure, by Gaetan Brulotte, translated by David Lobdell, Oberon.

Down by Degrees and Other Stories, by Abdullah Hussein, TSAR.

Dream Train: A Novel of the Orient-Express, by Charlotte Vale Allen, Doubleday.

The Dried Flower Encyclopedia, by Barbara Radcliffe Rogers, Collins.

Duck, by David Lloyd, illustrated by Charlotte Voake, Annick.

Entertaining Angels, by Elizabeth Brewster, Oberon.

"Everywhere They Are in Chains," by Asher Horowitz and Gad Horowitz, Nelson Canada.

Expres: The Exercise Prescription, Macmillan.

The Facts on Free Trade, edited by Ed Finn, James Lorimer.

XV Olympic Winter Games: The Official Commemorative Book, by Lloyd Robertson and Brian D. Johnson, Key Porter.

Figure of Eight, by David Wevill, Exile.

Film Video Canadiana: 1985-1986, National Film Board.

Firm Foundations: A Chronicle of Toronto's Metropolitan United Church and Her Methodist Origins, by Judith St. John, Metropolitan United Church.

flowers of ice, by Imants Ziedonis, translated by Barry Callaghan, Exile.

Footsteps on Old Floors, by Thomas Raddall, Potterfield Press.

Free Trade, Free Canada: How Free Trade Will Make Canada Stronger, edited by Earle Gray, Canadian Speeches.

From the Land of the Totem Poles, by Aldona Jonaitis, Douglas & McIntyre.

The Further Adventures of Slugger McBatt, by W.P. Kinsella, Collins.

Garth Turner's Survival Guide, Summerhill Press.

Give Your Kids a Sporting Chance, by Kevin Spink, Summerhill.

Guide to the Papers of Earle Birney, compiled by Debra Barr, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

Gynocritics/La Gynocritique: Feminist Approaches to Writing by Canadian and Quebecoise Women, edited by Barbara Godard, ECW.

Handley Chipman: King's County Planter, 1717-1799, by James Doyle Davison, published by the author.

The Harrowsmith Perennial Garden: Flowers for Three Seasons, by Patrick Lima, Camden House.

Housing in Postwar Canada, by John R. Miron, McGill-Queen's.

How to Make Love to a Lobster, by Marjorie Harris and Peter Taylor, Macmillan.

Human Bones, by Ally McKay, Oberon.

I Don't Know What to Say: How to Help and Support Someone Who is Dying, by Robert Buckman, Key Porter.

CanWit no. 130 *By Marvin Goody*

Everyone knows about Jack McClelland,
From Barry's Bay to Perth and Welland;
But who, in or out of the publishing biz,
Has the slightest clue who Stewart is?

Susan Musgrave's quite a gal;
Her favourite scent is Lure de Mal.
So what if her work's a little patchy,
She's welcome to heat up my *hibachi!*

There seems to be nothing CanWitters like better than verse, especially bad verse. Readers are invited to submit brief epigrammatic verses on Canadian literary personalities (not necessarily conforming in length, rhyme, or meter to the foregoing samples). The prize is a *Books* in Canada sweatshirt and the deadline is September 1.

RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 128

Phil Surguy's request for suggestions for tbe Bob Blackburn Memorial Sentence to honour Bob Blackburn on his retirement from eight years of *English,* Our *English,* brought a flood of entries. We are delighted that Mr. Blackburn consented to judge tbe contest. The winner is Alec McEwen of Ottawa, for the following *sentence:*

Between you and I, tbe reason for my message is because, as the author of *English, Our English, I* would feel badly not to input my congradulations to Bob Blackburn for the enormity of his masterful columns comprised of correct writing principals nor to infer that this memoranda has less mistakes than it might do if I would have failed to make a concerted effort to follow his very unique criterias, for my philosophy is that grammatical errors are aggravating and make me personally nauseous plus they reveal a miniscule knowledge of tke language by those individuals whom we know can't write or speak good. yet people of that ilk who continuously flaunt and alibi the rules, even when told them verbally, could care less and can never be convinced to get off of their backsides to pick up a copy of *Book's* in *Canada* which is what I intend doing moment&so that hopefully I can find out what is transpiring literaturewise as compared to the sports scene or the many other alternate modes of mutual entertainment that surround me on all sides, as well as reading I. M. Owen's new innovation *The Written Word* which, not to pour cold water on a different ballgame, is just a momento of his pedantry-oriented predecessor who as tbe penultimate authority we presently miss not having.

Honourable mentions:

Momentarily springing up off of *the* floor beneath him, his heart sunk to immediately recognize the two villeins whom he thought may have been hopefully decimated last night: oblivious to both his own laserations, and irregardless of their's, an ensuing fight to the death broke out.

— Gena K. Gorrell, Toronto

It is continguent upon those of us who have priorized functional interpersonal communication to come on-stream at this point in time and access some productive networking; who is to say what a little brainstorm interfacing might not facilitate in terms of current linguistic bottom line?

— Guy M. Fuller, Saskatoon

As a woman. he wanted to kiss her.

This plane will disembark momentarily.

Police confirmed that the victim had been fatally killed.

The object of the subject of the new innovation of literary contexting is to impact more insightfully on the object or the subject of the subtext above the main text, critically pot.

— Barry Baldwin, Calgary

Judgement and comments by Bob Blackburn:

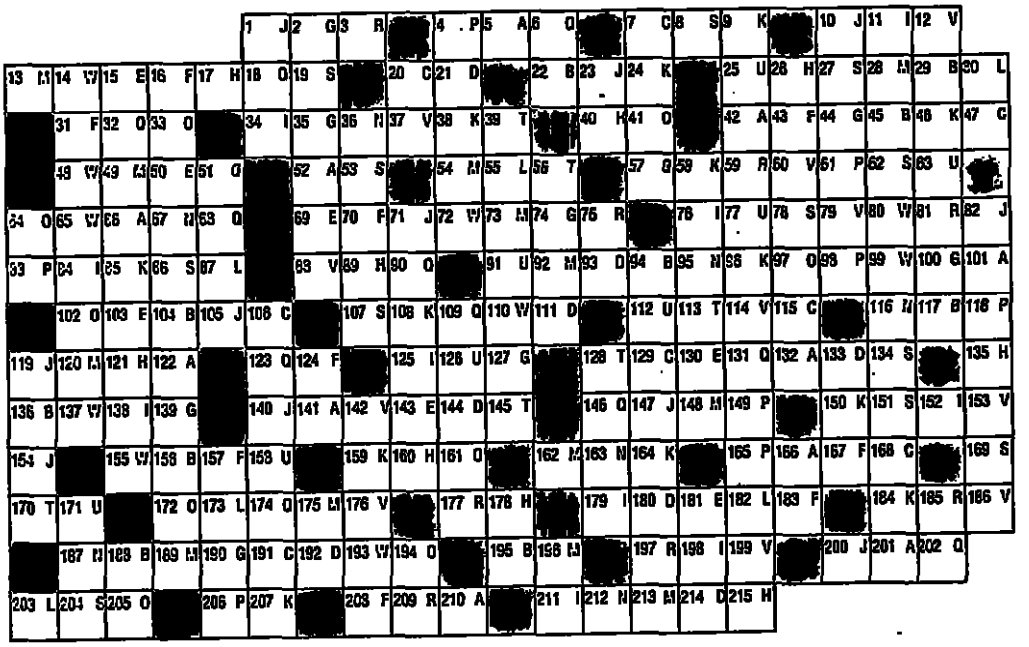
THE PRIZE must go to Alec McEwen, although he goofed in writing "would have" instead of "would of' and although his was but the second longest sentence (excessive length surely being an advantage — although not a requirement — here), not only because he packed in so many of the most egregious common errors, but because he did it deftly and resisted the over-enthusiastic excesses that marred some otherwise worthy entries among the many generally excellent responses to this challenge, all of which I am delighted to have been given tbe opportunity to read and to chuckle over, not to mention my gratification at the revelation that there are still many readers around who care about preserving the means on which we must rely if we hope to understand one another, this being, after all, what this is all about, if I make myself clear.

Images from the Film Spiral, by Sorel Etrog, text by Marshall McLuhan, Exile.
Indian School Days, by Basil H. Johnston, Key Porter.
Leopoldina's Dream, by Silvina Ocampo, translated by Daniel Balderston, Penguin.
The Letters of Malcolm Lowry and Gerald Noxon: 1940-1952, edited by Paul Tiessen, UBC Press.
Living with Diabetes, by Heather and Barbara Crim, U of T Press.
The Lighthouse Nest, by Louise de Kiriline Lawrence, Natural Heritage.
Love of Loons, by Kate Crotey and Mike Link, Key Porter.
Map-Makers' Colours: New Poets of Northern Ireland, edited by Todd Swift and Martin Mooney, Nu-Age.
Married Lovers: A Vulgar Entertainment, by Kent Thompson, Goose Lane.
Mata Hari's Lost Words, by John Oughton, Ragweed.
Mind Over Money, by Norm Forman, Seal.
Moose, Me and Murder, by Ann Walsh, Illustrated by Cathie Allen, Pacific Educational Press.
The Music Is in the Sadness, by J.M. Cameron, Porcupine's Quill.
Native In Literature: Canadian and Comparative Perspectives, edited by Thomas King *et al.*, ECW.
The Naturalist's Garden, by John Feltwell, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.
A Negotiated World: Three Centuries of Change in a French Alpine Community, by Harriet G. Rosenberg, U of T Press.
On The Sky: Zen and the Art of International Freeloading, by Robert Hunter, M & S.
The Opening Eye, by Nancy Bauer, Oberon.
The Other Side of Dailiness, by Lorraine York, ECW.
Packing It In!, by Robert J. Browning, J.P. Armstrong Productions.
Pain: Learning to Live Without It, by David Corey, Macmillan.
Paradise Garage, by Michael Estok, Goose Lane.
Photographing Wild Flowers, by Craig and Nadine Blacklock, Western Producer Prairie Books.
Pilgrim's Progress: A Study of the Short Stories of Hugh Hood, by Susan Copoloff-Mechanic, ECW.
Planting Seeds, by Patricia Quinlan, illustrated by Vladyana Krykorka, Annick.
Postcards Home: Poems New & Selected, by Christopher Wiseman, Sono Nis.
The Postmodern University: Essays on the Deconstruction of the Humanities, by Stanley Fogel, ECW.
Private Parts: An Owner's Guide, by Yosh Taguchi, M & S.
Privatization: Tactics and Techniques, edited by Michael A. Walker, The Fraser Institute.
Pumping Ions: Games and Exercises to Flex Your Mind, by Tom Wujec, Doubleday.
Quiet Heroes, by Andre Stein, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
Reckonings: Poems, 1979-85, by M. Travis Lane, Goose Lane.
River Without End, by Robert Marteau, translated by David Homel, Exile.
The Road to Nunavut: The Progress of the Eastern Arctic Inuit Society Since the Second World War, by R. Quinn Duffy, McGill-Queen's.
Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees, by Uma Parameswaran, TSAR.
Science Under Siege: The Myth of Objectivity in Scientific Research, by Beth Savan, CBC Enterprises.
Selected Poems of Frank Prewett, Exile.
Sleep While I Sing, by L.R. Wright, Seal.
sophie, by Lola Lemire Tostevin, Coach House.
The Spy in Question, by Tim Sebastian, Doubleday.
The Stress Solution, by Samuel H. Klarreich, Key Porter Books.
Stung: The Incredible Obsession of Brian Molony, by Gary Ross, General.
Swimming Alone, by Patricia Keeney, Oberon.
Talk Sex, by Sue Johanson, Penguin.
Trishanku, by Uma Parameswaran, TSAR.
The True North Strong & Free?: Proceedings of a Public Inquiry into Canadian Defence Policy, Gordon Soules.
Uncommon Kingdom: The British in the 1980s, by Stephen Handelman, Collins.
Uneasy Lies the Head: The Truth About Canada's Crown Corporations, by Walter Stewart, Collins.
Volkswagen Blues, by Jacques Poulin, translated by Sheila Fischman, M &S.
Voyage to Vendée, by Robert Marteau, translated by David Homel, Exile.
Waterfront Warlord, by Peter Edwards, Seal.
The Western Kingdom, by Bryan Moon, Oberon.
Whiplash, by Arthur Ameis and Edwin Uruvitz, Seal.
The Wollaston Interviews, compiled by Lois Dalby and Lynda Holland, Holland Dolby Educational Consulting.
A World of Difference, by Lisa Yarmoshuk and Chris Coy, Broadview.

CORRECTION

A typographical mishap in our May issue. resulted in the repetition of a paragraph in Rohinton Mistry's *Passages. Books in Canada* regrets *this* error.

CanLit acrostic no. 16 *By Mary D. Trainer*



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. 15 appears below.

A. Tarragon Theatre artistic director, 1971-81, 2 wds. — 52 132 201 5 122 141 66 210 101 / 42 166

B. Study of insects — 138 94 22 195 117 188 29 45 104 / 156

C. Physical disorders — 20 129 108 7 115 188 191 47

D. Removed from political office — 192 133 111 144 93 21 214 180

E. Inside facts — 130 161 69 50 15 143 103

F. Understanding of a special subject: 3 wds. — 70 124 31 203 157 16 183 43 167

G. Former, previous — 127 35 57 100 74 2 190 44 139

H. Employment condition: 2 wds. — 26 160 17 178 121 215 89 40 135

I. Liberal Party rabble-rousers: 3 wds. — 84 193 152 78 11 125 34 179 138 / 211

J. Chain of high-fashion stores: 2 wds. — 23 200 119 1 147 105 71 140 154 / 62 10

K. Musical and dramatic performances, e.g. — 96 164 184 108 46 150 159 85 207 / 38 24 9 58

L. Skier — 87 182 30 55 173 203

M. "Money is the _____": 4 wds. — 152 148 73 54 26 196 49 189 175 / 213 92 120 13

N. Appoints to a duty — 163 67 116 36 95 212 187

O. Attracted to novelty — 205 194 172 41 102 18 64 97 33 / 161

P. 1867 formation — 165 4 149 98 61 118 206 83

Q. Edible plants of the fern family — 146 123 6 131 174 90 32 51 109 / 202 68

R. Deniers of God's existence — 59 177 185 3 209 75 197 81

S. Popular 1940s radio show: 3 wds. — 169 107 62 151 8 27 78 53 134 / 204 86 19

T. Evasive statements — 170 113 145 128 56 39

U. Shunned — 77 158 25 126 171 112 91 63

V. Types of restaurants — 79 142 88 60 176 12 186 114 153 / 199 37

W. 1988 Olympic venue — 99 137 110 193 65 155 72 14 48 / 80

SOLUTION TO ACROSTIC NO. 15

I was convicted of Second Degree Bookfondling . . . I tried to live a normal life . . . For years I was a closet fondler . . . I would buy hardcover books, novels, coffee-table books, non-fiction, even children's books. I'd take them to a secluded spot, remove their dustjackets, and photograph them nude.

W.P. Kinsella, *The Alligator Report*, Coffee House Press

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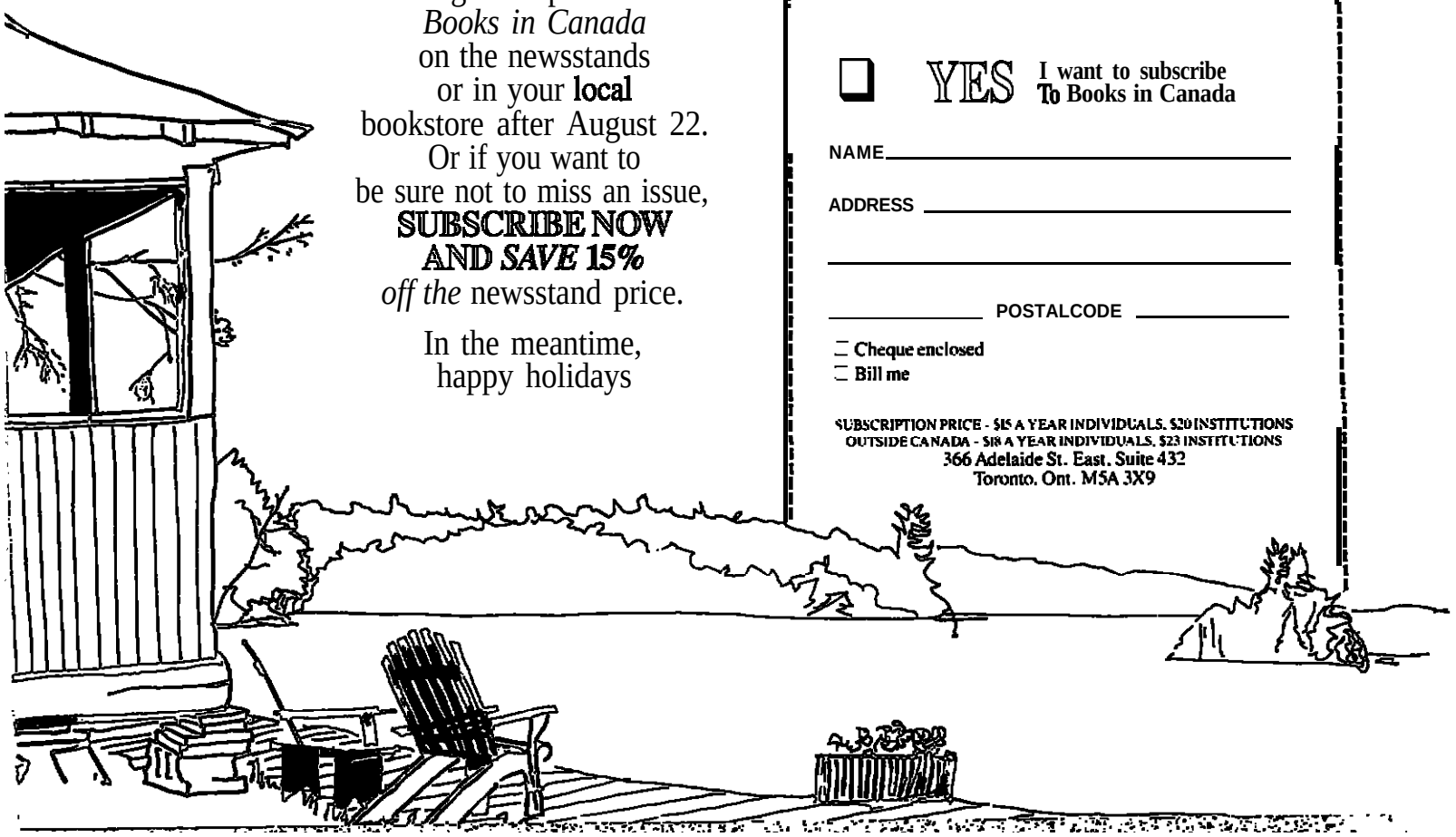

Summer Reading

from
Fitzhenry & Whiteside

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The bestselling author of *The Sunne in Splendour* returns with another rich historical narrative: the divine right of Kings' conflict between Henry III and Simon de Montford. 50,000 print

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New York Times Book Review

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—Kirkus Reviews

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