

# BOOKS

I N C A N A D A

## HER LIFE ENTIRE

Margaret Atwood's  
*Cat's Eye*  
reviewed by  
Douglas Glover

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WINNERS  
of the Canada  
India Village Aid  
Poetry Contest

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The Mennonite  
poets and novelists  
of Canada's prairies:  
a survey by E. F. Dyck

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An interview with Gary Ross

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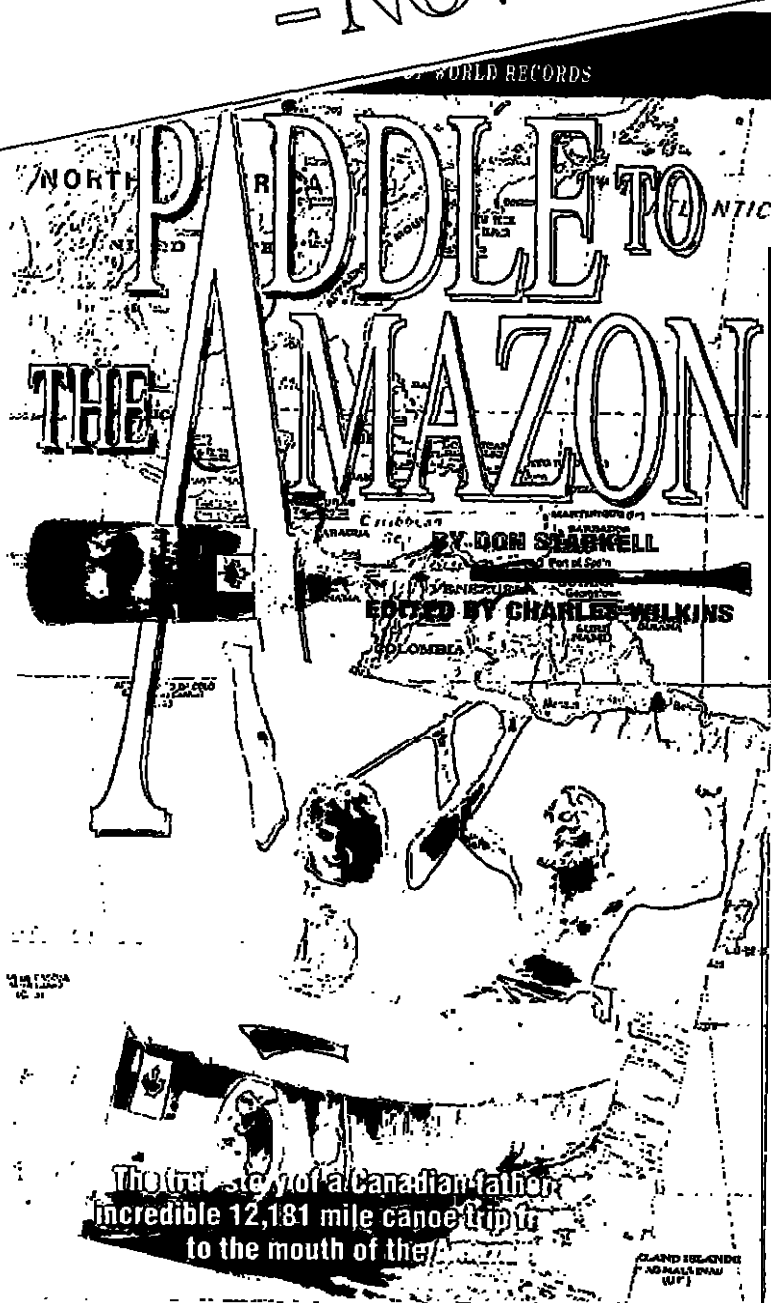
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and David Suzuki and Peter Knudtson



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# BOOKS IN CANADA

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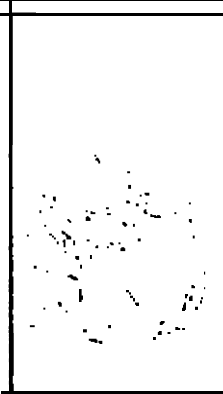
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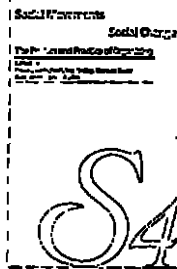
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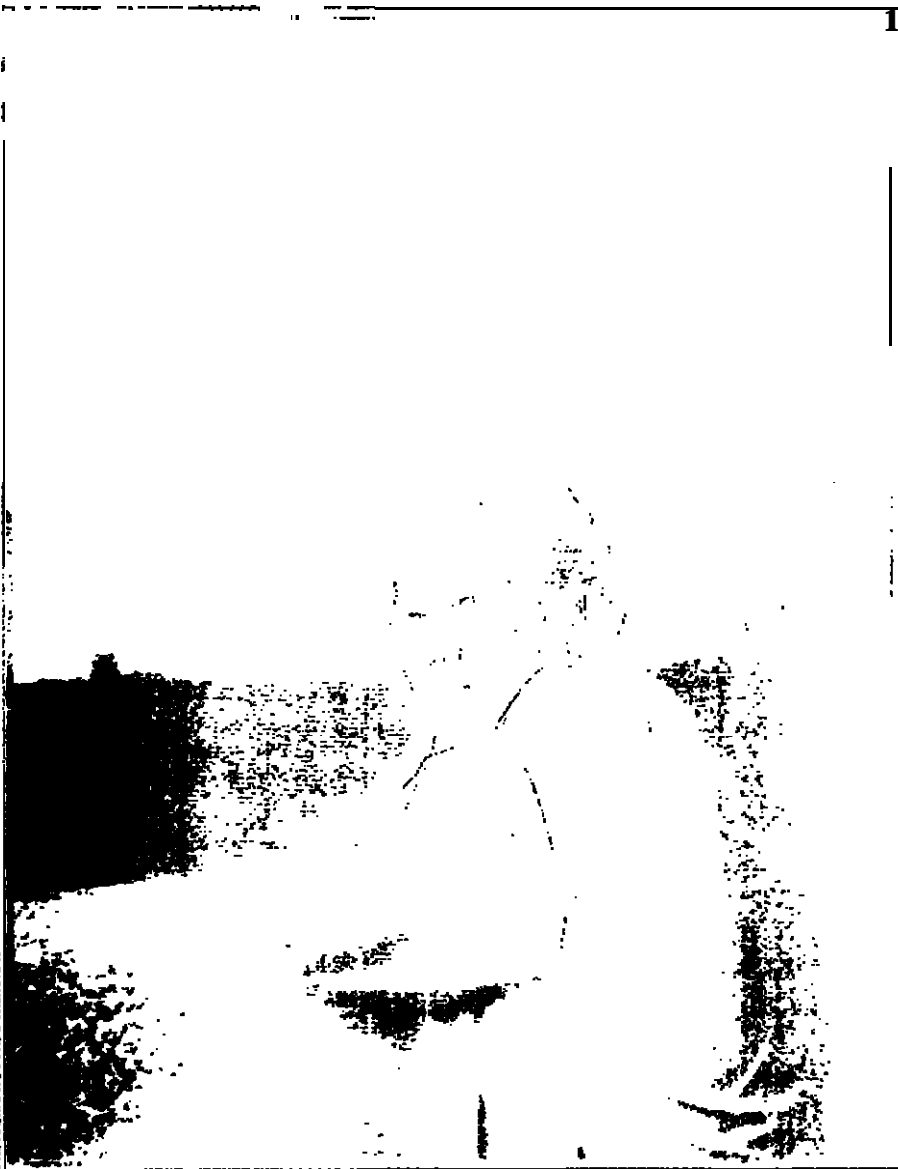


# 'The book'

*Ondaatje is at the mike, his back to the lake. Down on the beach, waves are crashing. We strain to hear the lush, smoky voice, dry and subtle in its wit .... Later, we drive home along streets whose names sound musical for the first time.*

MY FRIENDS and I are walking around the R. C. Harris Water Filtration Plant in the far east end of Toronto. It is August 18th, dusk; a quarter moon is becoming more visible—changing from wax-paper to bone.

We have come to hear. Michael Ondaatje brings his words home. Visual Arts Ontario has invited him to read outside in the lengthening shadow of the filtration plant that figures so prominently in his new novel.



PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL GREVISTE '87

Michael Ondaatje

Ronald Caldwell Harris, a character in *In the Skin of a Lion*, and the real Toronto Commissioner of Metro Works from 1912 to 1915, built this 'essential temple' of pale brick, marble, and copper. The architect Pomphrey, modelled its entrance on a Byzantine city gate. A woman walking near us says, "I hear they use this place as a prison in lots of movies."

The grass incline against the lake side of the plant is already starting to fill up like bleachers: people stunned by a tow through the pumps and gears of the building ("they opened doorways onto waterfalls"), or sizing up the art-in-architecture installations featured on the grounds. A few members of the audience are trying out the odd concrete lawn-chairs designed by Montreal architect Jacques Rousseau. From a distance, they look like chunks of a giant egg carton thrown about the lawn.

When we sit down, the lake and the wind-brushed grey-purple sky are before us and above us, meetly along one tan-pink smog line. Between here and the horizon, sailboats are jostling near each other, ready to head back in. Below us, tunnels and pipes and filters must run ("This mad scheme by Commissioner Harris to collect lake water 3300 yards out in the lake").

This reading is part of Water-Works, an exhibition representing 18 international artists and architects on the subject of water and design. The sponsors have set a reading post and microphone below us where the slope levels then drops again to the shore of Lake Ontario. The woman who introduces the novelist says that people around here call *In the Skin of a Lion* "the book." And no wonder we love it so. Our childhood and education brought us to know the streets of New York and London, England, better than our own, and so how good it is to hear "After bathing under the pipes they walked up Bathurst Street to Queen . . . After a beer they would continue up Bathurst to the Oak Leaf Steam Baths. . . ."

So far the novel has won for Ondaatje the 1987 Toronto Book Award, this year's first annual Trillium Book Award, and a nomination for the recent Ritz Paris Hemingway prize. People tend to discuss it as if it were a first novel, as if Ondaatje had finally broken through, accomplished "the big form." But we should not forget *Coming Through Slaughter*, the chicory-blue and wine-red pastiche about the legendary jazz player, Buddy Bolden. Nor should we forget the structure of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, or the family and cultural anecdotes of *Running in the Family*. The structure and style and concerns of this new work continue and coalesce the structures and styles of those earlier books. The texture and pacing are the same.

I read *In the Skin of a Lion* the way I have always read Ondaatje's prose: slowly, in small units, as if it were poetry — which it is. By telling in musical prose the working history of

the spot we are sitting in, of Toronto in the '20s and '30s, Ondaatje has caused us to look again at the ignored structures around us. By how many anonymous bands have they been built? How does the practical beauty of this water works compare to the gilded pretensions of Casa Loma? Each day, as I trundle in the subway over the Bloor Street viaduct I look out through the steel girders and imagine the nun on page 31 falling. . .

But now Ondaatje is at the mike not chatting, a straightforward, sonorous reading, a fumble for glasses as it darkens. First he reads a short prose piece about the filtration plant he faces. Then he goes back to earlier work, and reads what begins as a factual, humorous report of Bessie Smith singing in Massey Hall, downtown. By the second set, though, Bessie is levitating beside the piano. And I am watching a strange grey hearse circle into the parking lot below me.

Next, we are told about the life and death of Fats Waller. He liked women who owned pianos; he died sitting in a car down on the beach the waves keep crashing, and a tan hound runs full out and back and forth along the surf. Ondaatje's back is to the lake; he can't see the dog. But as if sensing the dose-ness of one of his favourite subjects, he now reads of how a hunter would shave his hounds every spring and spray-paint their names on their sides (Dickens 1, Dickens 2). This way, other hunters will be too disgusted to steal them.

Beside me, my friend nurses her baby. This is like listening to the humble confidence and mastery of a jazz performer — a picker, not an entertainer.

"I can't hear anything but waves," says the poet at the end of his piece about the dogs. It is dark enough now to read about fireflies, luna moths, lamplight: "The last of the summer's fireflies had died somewhere in the folds of one of his handkerchiefs."

Somewhere in "the book" it says: "Only the best art can order the chaotic tumble of events." And only prose of this quality could hold our attention as the waves get louder in the darkness. We strain to hear the lush, smoky voice, dry and subtle in its wit, a hickster's voice telling only the truth in the darkness. Security lights come on, pushing our shadows downhill toward the podium. One of the installations a bamboo construction by the Japanese group Team Zoo, keeps filling with water and tipping to gong a cymbal.

Only our clapping at the end can silence the waves a moment.

We go home a little more enthusiastic for here — this place as encrusted with sweat as any — sweat that has at last been honoured. We drive home along streets whose names sound musical for the first time.

In my kitchen, I run a glass of tap water. Now that I know where it comes from, it tastes better. I drink a toast to Ondaatje's riffs, a toast to the mechanisms of clarity.

— PHIL HALL

the informative titles of *Ten Poems* and *Eight Poems*, both for the ludicrous price of \$75. Both are elegantly printed, but unless you're a print fetishist they're not quite worth the admission price. *Eight Poems* was also published in a tie edition with a more -- able price tag of \$15.



Now Oberon has published a 72-page collection, *Café Poems*. It's the largest chunk of Sibus poetry yet published, and for that, I suppose, we should be grateful. The book design, though, is terrible: the cover uses a reasonably interesting painting by Janet Moore (an abstract nude with rather large and off-centre breasts) but no book title or author's name. The jacket copy on the back isn't much more informative. It reads like the copy the Coach House Press used to run in the 1970s when they were trying to convince themselves that Fred Wah and Daphne Marlatt represented authentic West Coast consciousness. No mailing address for the press is supplied — so if you want this book I guess you're at the mercy of the CTA software or a bookseller smart enough to track down Oberon (I've heard that can be tricky). But the price of chapbooks and the design and distribution skills of Oberon are not what this is about either (although both are tempting subjects).

At any given time, Sibus's big book — his still untitled work-in-progress — consists of between 50 and 90 pages of verse, always in exact proportion to the current state of his understanding of his street, and the poetic measure of its economy; it reflects, too, his obedience to the instructions of an exceedingly demanding Muse. I've known hi personally for much of the time he's been working on it, but only in the past four or five years have I been close to his work, to hi obscure fidelities, and to hi rigorous methods of composition.

I could go the usual mute from here, and write about hi personal eccentricities, his background as an exile and draft-dodger, his early life as a U.S. Army brat, or about his insecurities at having so small an audience. But to discuss him that way would be to ignore the essential truth about him: that hi personality and hi private identity are secondary to hi commitment to his Muse and to the demands of hi craft.

His untitled volume is not yet *Great Poetry*. Dennis Lee, who recognized the depth and seriousness of Sibus's undertaking, rejected

## The poet's work

Across the street, kids were breaking the windows of a block of abandoned shops, one of them the former campaign office of an unsuccessful right-wing politician, another called, cryptically, *The Third World*.  
It all got into the revisions

FOR MOST of the 20 years I've lived in Vancouver I've called myself a poet and I've talked, played, and fought with close to a thousand other poets of varying seriousness and skill. If that sounds like the preamble to yet another joke about the over-abundance of poets in Canada, you can relax that's not quite what this is all about. I'm concerned with just one of the thousand — the only one I've met, during those 20 years, who works at his craft day in and day out.

I'm not talking about myself. I certainly haven't done that, not with poetry. While I still wrote verse, I operated (as most poets seem to) on the principle that not having to work very hard at my craft was the chief employment benefit of being a poet. It was the laboratory, in T. S. Eliot's phrase, that held the fascination for me, which is to say, I enjoyed hanging around, compiling the data for poetry, but I thought composition was a mystical activity. I had to be shown, by another poet, that poetry requires habitual daily labour, like any

other productive activity, and that the poet's work is no easier than that of any other artisan.

The poet who taught me this was Norm Sibus. For more than a decade now, Sibus has lived on Commercial Drive, driven taxi one or two days a week to make ends meet, and worked on his poetry. He works every day — reading while on shift or in the afternoons, and working on his poems the rest of the time in a strange to-and-fro weave from a string of cafés to his apartment — revising, writing new lines, and retyping.

He's working on a single volume of poems. Sections of it have been released as chapbooks: *Small Commerce* (Caitlin Press, 1979) and *Among Other Howls in the Storm* (Pulp Press, 1982) come to mind. More recently, Sibus has allowed Canadian literature's own Rasputin, William Hoffer, to letterpress two more chapbooks. One is a 10-poem section from Sibus's master manuscript, the other eight more poems. They're available under

versions of poems from the book for inclusion in the McClelland and Stewart anthology of Canadian poets of the 1970s and '80s. Lee rejected the poems with all the agonized moral contortions one expects of an intelligent man thrusting his foot down his own throat, having been trained, in the bizarre commercial aesthetics of CanLit, to recognize superior publication value only in the narrowly conceived and executed confessional poems of people like Roo Borson, Roo DiCicco, Roo di Michele, and (for that mattered me). But by the time the rejection landed in Sibum's lap, the versions of the poems Lee had rejected had been revised eight or nine times and most had been pushed out of the compositional frame of the book.

Sibum's ego was stung, but he couldn't quite remember which versions he'd sent to Lee. I've seen as many as 30 revisions of a single Sibum poem, and each time, the poem is turned end over end, pulled apart, re-researched, written out by hand, corrected again, and then retyped. For the revision of three or four poems he was working on at the same time, I've watched him ransack a good portion of Roman literature, looking for the exact words of a casual line in Virgil, because it called into question some aspect of his working structure: something that the Muse whispered.

In one recent revision it was a conversation between St. Augustine and his mother, about imagining the voice of God without access to the singing of birds and the souging of the breeze along the leaf tips of the boulevard trees. For that he read a large portion of the canon of medieval theology, while across the street from the second-floor tenement window that allow him to write and watch the street at the same time kids were breaking windows on the block of abandoned shops awaiting redevelopment. One of the shops was the old campaign office of an unsuccessful right-wing politician. Another was called, cryptically, The Third World. It all got into the revisions.

Watching Sibum's book progress is at once heartbreaking and uplifting. The uplifting part is easy to locate: his research methods alone provide a striking contrast to the illusions many poets harbour about their importance to this particular human civilization. He risks his entire understanding with every line, and when that understanding fails, he quietly picks up the salvageable fragments and goes back to work, undeterred. He is never content merely to surround and colonize the small zones of consciousness that have come to signal contemporary poetry. Each line he writes reminds us that there is no cultural rainbow to catch us, no government program that will enable our half-assed musings to alter the conditions of the world we live in.

When Sibum's complete book is published — at some point in the coming decade it will surely reach 100 pages or more and a range that will satisfy Sibum and his Muse — it will not be as slick as any of a half-dozen volumes of verse that are published each year in this country. But in a different and older sense of poetry, it might turn out to be as large as Rilke's *Duino Elegies* or William Carlos Williams's *Desert Music* or Pindar's *Odes*. And that is the only measure of a poet's work that matters.

— BRIAN FAWCETT

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By I. M. Owen

**JOURNALISTIC MANNERISMS:** In William French's survey in the *Globe and Mail* of forthcoming books for fall I read about actor William Hutt, singer Gordon Lightfoot, pianist Oscar Peterson, and opera star Teresa Stratas. Now, I'm certain that in conversation French never talks about publisher Roy Macgarry or editor-in-chief Norman Webster. If you use a phrase in writing that you wouldn't use in speech it gives your style a "artificial, unconvincing air. If he'll give up this usage I'll promise "ever to speak or write of reviewer Bill French. But then I wouldn't anyway.

I'd like to be able to say that I have never yet heard this phrase spoke" out loud, but that would be a lie. I hear it daily on CBC music programs, in contexts that render it peculiarly superfluous: the *Montreal Symphony* under the direction of conductor Charles Dutoit, or Beethoven's *Piano Sonata no. 7 in D minor*, played by pianist Glenn Gould. (I should mention that I don't think Bob Kerr, the best of classical disc jockeys, ever does this.) What bothers me is that a generation of listeners is growing up to whom it may sound natural.

Another highly artificial journalistic usage, which probably started with *Time* and is much loved by *Maclean's*, is to introduce a quotation from somebody with *Said so-and-so*. In one article in the issue of *Maclean's* that arrived as I was writing that last sentence I find it tolling like a bell all through: *Said Alberta Liberal Senator Daniel Hays: "7 think . . ." Added Ruth Robinson: "Both sides . . ." Said Representative Samuel Gibbons: . . . Added Representative Philip Crane: Said Lafalce: . . . Said Liberal House Leader Herb Gray: . . . Say I: Stop it.*

**PERCEIVE/PERCEPTION:** On the back cover of the January/February issue, a" advertiser stated in large type: *In business, perception is reality.* So what else is new? One of the many losing battles I fight almost daily is against the very recent "se of *perception* to mean opinion, probably mistake".

*It was because of a perceived threat on the backstretch that Hawley decided to send Regal Classic after the leaders a lot earlier than he had intended . . . Hawley mistakenly thought . . . (Tom Slater in the Toronto Star).* The meanings given for *perceive* in *Collins* are:

1. to become aware of (something) through the senses, esp. the sight; recognize or observe. 2. (tr.; may take a clause as object) to come to comprehend; grasp.

Clearly you can't become aware of something that isn't there; and if you comprehend

something, it's true. But the new meaning has gained a small foothold in the second edition of *Collins* (1986) under *perception*:

4. way of perceiving; awareness or consciousness; view: *advertising affects the customer's perception of a product.*

Which is a" excellent capsule description of the way the new meaning developed. Curiously, in the *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* (1987) the meaning has disappeared again. That's encouraging, since this dictionary is based on computer analysis of actual contemporary texts.

A" article for a weekly paper said that a certain executive was *perceived* by many people to be an inefficient manager. Thinking this a bit rough on the man". I advised changing *perceived . . . to be regarded . . . as*. But it turned out that that was what the writer had written in the first place; she had changed it on the insistence of the paper's lawyer. Thus, legal advice has turned a noncommittal factual statement into one that to anybody capable of reading a dictionary was potentially libellous. A large part of a lawyer's function is the precise interpretation of words; so all I can say is, Whither civilization?

You may object that we already "so see in much this way. Yes, though we always use it with *as*, which makes some difference. Words do tend to weaken their meanings as time goes by, and I suggest that *perceive* came into common use as *see* weakened, to make it clear that the object of the verb was to be understood as red. Are we now going to have to find yet another word to perform this function?

A headline-writer for the *Globe and Mail* has introduced a new twist: *Parole setup ill-perceived but essential, report finds.* In case you want to know what this means, the report (to the Canadian Bar Association) says that "politicians are reacting to public perceptions that are based on information that presents a distorted correctional reality." The lawyer who wrote that presents a distorted verbal reality.

**HARK, HARK BACK, H(E)ARKEN:** In an image that harkened back to slavery, Jackson declared . . . (Marci McDonald in *Maclean's*). I have seen the quaint phrase *harken back* several times in manuscripts lately. Seeing it in print prompted me to wonder about the origin of the actual phrase, *hark back*. As should have been" obvious it's a foxhunting expression. When a fox is sighted, the cry to hounds and riders is "Hark! Away!" Hence, when the hounds lose the scent and retrace their steps to pick it up again they are said to *hark back*.

Of course *hark* and *hearken* are really the same word, starting in Old English as *heorcan*, to listen. Incidentally, the *OED* says that *harken*, the preferred American spelling, is older and better than *hearken* and really ought to be preferred by us all. The *s* was introduced by mistaken association with *hear*. Hearing and listening aren't the same thing, as every teacher knows.

**NUMBER:** It's very easy to make nonsense of a sentence by mixing plurals and singulars, and judging by the number of examples that came my way during last summer's heat wave the frequency of the phenomenon may increase with the greenhouse effect. Here are three of many: *Nearly three-quarters of a million students will be going to a university in Canada this year. / The provinces are to some extent separate kingdoms, with their own cabinet and legislature. / It proved that he, not they, were responsible. The first two are easily dealt with. Extreme overcrowding on that unnamed campus can be averted by changing a university to universities, and in the second example we can revive the federal system by making it cabinets and legislatures or, better, each with its own cabinet and legislature. The third example is trickier and more interesting. The plural were got in, of course, because of the proximity of they. If you simply substitute was the resulting sentence, It proved that he, not they, was responsible, is perfectly correct and utterly intolerable. It trips the reader up. Recast — It proved that he was responsible, not they — and all's well; you have combined clarity and grace with mere correctness. □*

## Dear Bill

The Correspondence of  
William Arthur Deacon

Edited by John Lennox  
and Michèle Lacombe

The dean of Canadian book critics from 1920 to 1960, Deacon exchanged letters with a wide range" of writers and thinkers. Collected here are letters to and from the likes of E.J. Pratt, Laura Goodman Salverson, Hugh MacLennan, A.R.M. Lower, Gabrielle Roy, J.S. Woodsworth, Grey Owl, and Peter Newman.

\$37.50

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

# BRIEF REVIEWS

## CRITICISM

TH

by Nicole Brossard  
translated by Marlene Wildeman,  
*The Women Press*, 163 pages, \$10.95  
paper (ISBN 0 88961 123 8)

AN AERIAL LETTER, writes Quebec feminist writer Nicole Brossard, is "what becomes of me (through the written word) when an emotion slowly sets to work, opening me to forms of existence other than those I have known through the anecdotes of political, cultural, sexual, or sensual mores." The 12 theoretical and critical feminist essays, poem and fiction fragments collected in Brossard's *The Aerial Letter* are her aerial letters to like-minded readers.

Each theoretical "test" (as Brossard chooses to call them) is accompanied by an illustrating poem or fiction fragment. At the heart of all the texts is Brossard's challenge to patriarchal reality — in its manifestations in language and sexual and social politics. She challenges its authority in her theoretical reflections on language, creativity, lesbian fiction and criticism, and in her rejection of the linear logical and grammatical structures of "patriarchal" prose in favour of spiralling, repetitious syntax and looser grammatical constructions — to the end of removing the "screen which stands in the way of women's energy, identity, and creativity." As well, all the texts are, she writes, personal "tours of myself on the turning platform. Mine: visceral, cerebral."

There is much that is challenging, demanding, intriguing, exasperating, and baffling in her writings. Her tests range from eloquent, pungent, axiomatic, accessible meditations like the following: "In writing, I can foil all the laws of nature and I can transgress all rules.... I know that to write is to bring one's self into being" to opaque, obscure paragraphs built with grey slabs of abstraction, such as "I am displaced by several lines and this recomposes all around me the episode thus begun, thus begun, lets loose, spreads out, enlarging my fields of vision."

All her texts are animated by her missionary fervour; her preaching, alas, is largely addressed to the already converted. Although much of what Brossard has to say is thought-provoking, one reads *The Aerial Letter* fre-

quently feeling excluded from the texts by Brossard's rhetorical strategies and narrow focus.

— SHERIE POSESORSKI

## FICTION

### SPENCE + LILA

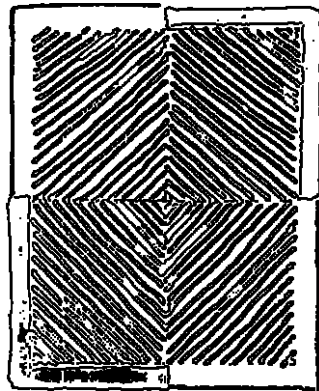
by Bobbie Ann Mason  
*Harper & Row (Fitzhenry & Whiteside)*,  
163 pages, \$17.95 cloth  
(ISBN 06 015 9111)

THIS IS a book that leaves a reader smiling: not for its humour, although it has that, but with warmth. This is a brief book stuffed to bursting with tender detail, yet not for a moment is it sentimental the way some novels of family feeling drown in their own syrup. This is a plain book, and like its people, it's fine.

This is a family facing aging end the approach of death. Spence and Lila, the married couple of the title, Kentucky farmers, are joined by their grown children — daughters Cat and Nancy, son Lee — as Lila undergoes breast cancer surgery and then a further operation to prevent more of the tiny strokes she has been experiencing.

Lila, surrounded in hospital by complex and bewildering medical procedures, and Spence, pacing out his terror with farm jobs and bargain hunts for things like windshield-washer fluid, think of each other, and their thoughts slip between the "resent and recollections of their history together. They are tart-tongued and teasing with each other, and also entirely tender.

These are people smart city folk might call "salt of the earth," in patronizing tones, implying that while being salty is all very well, such types don't, when it comes down to it, know much. Bobbie Ann Mason, however, knows bet-



ter and she demonstrates full respect.

These are not people who discuss their feelings — partly because they can't. As Lila says, she "married into a family that never knew what to say." Partly, though? it's because they know the limits of words and the powers of unspoken passions. "At times there is no way on earth [Spence] can say what he feels.... Real love requires something else, something deeper. And sometimes a feeling just goes without saying."

This is a book about many things: what is satisfying, what gives lives meaning, how people take care of each other. What it feels like is some fine people all bound up together in speechless love.

— JOAN BARFOOT

### HUMAN BONES

by Ally McKay  
*Oberon*, 128 pages, \$12.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 88750 718 2)

THE HUMAN BONES of the title story are the remains of 43-year-old Violet: we're told this at the beginning, as a hook to draw us in. Violet is in Florida with her husband, Pete, friend Les, and Les's second wife, the too-young Amy. They're trying to decide if they should buy a condo. It's Amy who points out that Violet's eyelids are baggy — this from a woman who can only remember one television commercial, and that for Kraft cottage cheese (does Kraft make cottage cheese?).

The story skips along from one superficial note to another until, offstage, it reaches the ultimate consumption: of Violet. Readers are forgiven for speculating that the crocodile escaped from a Lacoste shirt.

But the other stories have strength, if not depth, and present their women as able to develop the resources they need to overcome unemployment, desertion, or a death in the family.

A few passages of dialogue strain to propel the story-line and read as too formal, or false. "Is it absolutely necessary for you to work?" and "What was it about the city that got you down, Lydia? call too much attention to themselves to serve as transitional devices

*Human Bones* is Ally McKay's first collection of stories.

— D. FRENCH

### LUNA

by Sharon Butala  
*Fifth House*, 294 pages, \$12.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 920079 36 9)

A WRITER wishing to portray a way of life unfamiliar to most readers is often satisfied to draw on the form and techniques of the realistic novel that others have already shown to work. *Luna*, Butala's fourth book of fiction, is a novel of life on a prairie ranch, and it succeeds pretty well in fulfilling its pictorial requirements. Butala lets the reader see the grasshopper swarms, feel the cold of a cattle drive at 30 below, sympathize with the unending work and financial worry.

More particularly, *Luna* is about the women who live on ranches. It is also a feminist work which, in this novel, is not quite the same thing. Selena is the central figure (although the narrative nips in and out of other women's minds with some awkwardness), a wife and mother who not only feeds and clothes the family and "ids in the ranching but, with the other wives, must help maintain the fragile sense of community. Butala is strongest when painting group scenes of fowl suppers and anniversary celebrations where women make mountains of mashed potatoes, keep an eye on the children, dance with their husbands, and tie rumours of the latest farm bankruptcy.

The novel's individual characters are only partially successful, including Selena, whose thoughts and emotions are at times leaden and overly predictable and follow a path too obviously meant to reveal to us bits of the past: the author wants us to know. At the same time, Selena's loving ambivalence towards her husband's cowboy masculinity and her fear for her sister who has fled for the big city of Saskatoon are sensitive and real.

The danger of this kind of realistic novel is a certain mechanistic quality, and while it is pleasurable reading, *Luna* suffers from a lack of spontaneity and emotional depth. The problem is made worse by the feminist patina that springs not from the novel's soul, but from the author's external intellectual apparatus. That feminism has created a "unconvincing matriarch in Aunt Rhea who tells a ridiculous feminist reworking of Genesis, ridiculous because implausible. We need feminist critiques but Butala has done herself

an injustice by dropping them into her novel. The story of Selena and the other women's difficult lives would have been feminist enough.

—CARY FAGAN

## SOCIETY

### JIM: A LIFE WITH AIDS

by June Callwood

Lester & Orpen Dennys, 288 pages, \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 88619 224 2)

IN 1933, only a handful of articles about AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) were listed under the heading "Immunologic Diseases" in the Canadian Periodical Index. By 1937, two and a half pages of the index — more than 200 items — were devoted to the topic. Nowadays the disease is constantly in the news and there are books galore giving us "the facts" on how it's transmitted and its devastating effects on the body's immune system. In a clinical sense, we're getting educated about AIDS. But what do the frightening statistics — for example, the World Health Organization's estimate that 100 million people could be infected with the AIDS virus by 1991 — really mean, in human terms? June Callwood's *Jim: A Life with AIDS*, while being informative, focuses on this neglected issue.

Jim St. James was a good-looking, popular member of Toronto's gay community whose acting career was just taking off when he was diagnosed as having AIDS four years ago. (He's still alive today, defying the odds that the virus is usually fatal within two years of diagnosis.) This book describes St. James's physical and psychological struggles with the disease, as well as the conflict between his homosexuality and his religious convictions (he's a Jehovah's Witness), which comes to a head as a result of his condition.

In part, this is a grim story; only Callwood's crisp, restrained prose keeps it from veering into sheer pathos, especially toward the latter part of the book, when St. James's friends are dying one by one, in agony. But it's also an account of dignity and spiritual strength, of AIDS sufferers defying the "victim" mentality and coping positively with their illness — a gutsy attitude summed up in St. James's own declaration, "I've got AIDS but it hasn't got me."

The value of *Jim: A Life with AIDS* goes beyond its demystification of the deadly virus known as "the plague of the 80s." To the

general public, AIDS is a disease of homosexuals and drug addicts, two groups on the margins of society. There has always been fear and ignorance of gays: the growth of AIDS, also feared and often misunderstood, has increased hostility. This book promotes greater understanding by "putting a human face" not only on AIDS but also on homosexuality.

—BARBARA CAREY

### UNCOMMON KINGDOM: THE BRITISH IN THE 1980s

by Stephen Handelman

Collins, 256 pages, \$26.95 cloth (ISBN 0 00 217752 8)

A RECENT bestseller, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, illustrated the cyclical nature of imperial power. Few of us will doubt that Great Britain (or "formerly-great Britain" as its detractors sneeringly call it) is a perfect example of a great power that has passed its peak and is now on a steady and inexorable decline.

But even though it has deteriorating cities, chronic unemployment, and now one of the lowest standards of living in Western Europe, Stephen Handelman, the *Toronto Star's* former chief European correspondent, was surprised to find that in a survey on happiness published in 1935 it was shown that the people of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland were the happiest in the world. In this book he sets out to find the source of that contentedness. He claims that Britain reached rock bottom in the 1970s and early '80s and is now in the throes of a "renaissance."

The evidence of this renaissance, however, is fairly trivial. The British, he says, enjoy home postal delivery twice a day, but he ignores their abysmal telephone service. He marvels at the creative energies of their television and movie industries, but ignores the fact that a large portion of the audience is just killing time because they have no jobs to go to. He even finds some reassurance in the dismal political war in the Falklands, which "restored a sense of national pride."

Too often Handelman cannot see the forest for the trees, singling out particular entrepreneurs who have struck it rich but not telling the stories of middle-aged steelworkers whose mills have closed for good, or of their 30-year-old sons who have never had a job.

—NORMAN SIGURDSON

## MEMOIR

### THE BOX CLOSET

by Mary Meigs

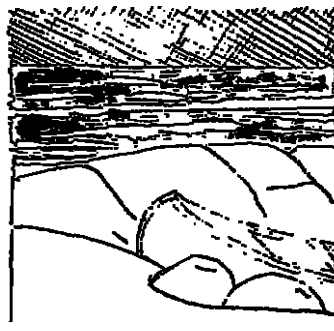
Talonbooks, 223 pages, \$11.95 paper (ISBN 0 88922 253 3)

THIS IS an intensely personal book, both attractive and repellent in roughly equal measure. Ostensibly its title derives from the attic room in the Washington, D.C. home of author Mary Meigs's parents that, after her mother's death, was found to contain the hundreds of family letters and diaries on which this book is based. More significantly, though, "box closet" is also a metaphor for the circumscribed world that Meigs's "upper class" parents were obliged to inhabit.

Some portions of the book reflect this world just as Margaret Wister and Edward Meigs saw it during their 1903-1910 courtship and 30-year marriage. Yet unfortunately it is Meigs herself, their rebel daughter, who really dominates *The Box Closet*. Loving one moment and lecturing the next she subjects her parents' private selves and opinions to what is, in effect, one long, relentless review. Although some of Meigs's judgments seem justified ("Anti-Semitism was part of their shared inheritance, along with all the other prejudices of their class"), others appear "pen to question" ("But how can two people ever stay together except by declaring truces that silence their eloquent inner sense of themselves?").

In the end, *The Box Closet* turns out to be a portrait of two people painted not as a faithful likeness but as a reflection of its author's own view of her subjects. "The words of a letter that survives are alive and emit the energy of a living person," writes Meigs. If she had been able to let those "alive" letters tell their own story, *The Box Closet* would have been a better book.

—PAT BARCLAY



painstakingly scrutinized by both sides for evidence of enemy morale, locations, and impending attacks.

Like hundreds of soldiers on both sides, Edwin Vaughan ignored orders. From January 4, 1917, when he set out as a raw subaltern to join his battalion of the Royal Warwickshires until August 23, when he found himself one of 15 survivors among the 90 men of his company who had attacked at Passchendaele, Vaughan kept a detailed and sometimes eloquent account of all that befell him, from the fatherly rebukes by brother officers to the horrible sensation of a near-drowning in the Flanders mud.

If German intelligence officers had studied the diary they might have found some scraps of useful information. They would have taken heart at Vaughan's almost unconscious revelations of his ignorance and incompetence as an officer. Exceptional only in being a devout Catholic, Vaughan was all too typical of the young, educated Englishmen who accepted a commission and its privileges as the right of their class, packed his Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* with his kit and went off to lead the labouring classes to victory. For Vaughan, the undoubted horrors of war were mitigated by a soldier servant who carried his valise and cooked his meals, the certainty of a dugout in the trenches and a limitless supply of whisky to settle his nerves. Men in the ranks had no such fortune.

The fascination of *Some Desperate Glory* is not so much the fresh description of the old miseries of war; it is the evolution of a callow prig into a mature human being. The aloof barbarians who are his fellow officers and the oafish slackers he commands evolve into comrades as Vaughan himself comes to share the survivor skills of a trench soldier.

Achieving maturity meant surviving the terrible odds.

## THE PAST

### SOME DESPERATE GLORY: THE WORLD WAR DIARY OF A BRITISH OFFICER, 1917

by Edwin Campion Vaughan  
Henry Holt (Beaverbooks), 232 pages, \$28.50 cloth (ISBN 8050 06710)

KEEPING A DIARY during the First World War was a serious military offence. The reason was simple. Captured diaries were

Vaughan lived through not only Passchendaele but the war. Part of his growing op. unfortunately, was abandoning his diary. When he died in 1931—after a doctor mistakenly administered cocaine instead of novocaine—relatives hid the journal in horror at its revelations of overindulgence in liquor. With the war now 70 years in the past, how many other such treasures will still be discovered?

—DESMOND MORTON

## TORONTO OF OLD

by Henry Scadding

Dundurn Press, 400 pages, \$19.95  
paper (ISBN 1 55002 027 7)

HENRY SCADDING had no pretensions as a formal historian when he assembled, in 1873, his recollections of Toronto before its incorporation as a city in 1834: the Simcoe-founded and Strachan-ruled garrison, church, and government town that struggled out of mod. war, and several fires to topple hills, fill ravines, and spread out in all directions. But because Scadding "identified with Toronto from boyhood, to him the long, straight ways of the place nowhere presented barren, monotonous vistas" (He's speaking of himself in the third person.) To anyone familiar with the city that assertion is as Scadding himself suspected, "visionary."

"Toronto of Old" succeeds in rendering a city rich with historical interest. This is due first to Scadding's thorough, charitable, and immense memory. But the book's impact also depends on there being a present-day Toronto in the mind of the reader, whose imagination is taxed in the extreme to conjure a parallel vision of the city: Scadding's contemporaries continually demolished and rebuilt (sound familiar?).

Scadding was rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity (his home and charge are now embraced by the walls of the Eaton Centre), progressive in his views, and a keen amateur naturalist. Those last two virtues make his loving perambulation up the Don Valley painful reading now: the complete destruction of the once incredibly fertile ecosystem of the river had clearly begun, though to Scadding's 19th-century mind it was all "divinely intended and legitimate" improvement. In this way Scadding's book is full of indications of how Toronto was to become itself—required reading for all who have settled beneath the shadow of the CN Tower.

—WARD McBURNEY

## POETRY

### ENTERTAINING ANGELS

by Elizabeth Brewster

Oberon, 118 pages, \$9.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 88750 710 7)

THERE ARE two poems in Elizabeth Brewster's new collection that I will go back to often; and the title sequence, a summer journal concerned with a sister's cancer, is so disarming in its crisis-of-the-usual atmosphere, that I let fall my pickiness, and totally respect it.

"Letter To T. S. Eliot" and "Uncles" both lit? away from the general small-talk of this book, and reveal themselves as the small-talk of a giantess.

There are interesting poems here about H.D., Dorothy Wordsworth, Bliss Carman, and the Duchess of Windsor and some humorous poems about the writing of poetry and fiction. All of these are informative and entertaining, but sparkless.

I find many of these poems too methodical, too close, perhaps, to their initial journal entries.

I like to know my poets in their poems, but I also expect the finished work to push past "Awake before five / this morning in early June / Can't go back to sleep, so / make myself hot strong tea" — past all that, to revelation. Many of these poems are content to go no further.

Here are my examples of what I mean by "methodical."

In "Tools" the last lines read: "or merely piercing ears and cutting / with delicate precision / the small necessary jewels / to place in holes." Look how the last line ruins the tension and beauty of "the small necessary jewels" by extending the poem one explanation too far.

Similarly, the first line of "The Women Of Greenham Common" is: "Women of Greenham Common." Surely, the first line should go, or a new title is in order.

These gripes aside, it is obvious that Brewster is one of our best technicians of the casual line (with her I'd group Joan Finnigan, Howard White, Bronwen Wallace). Her poems are best defined by what she sees in Mary Pratt's paintings:

trifles placed  
to advantage  
in a clear light  
all at a point  
of repose in which there is still  
love

—PHIL HALL



### THE NIGHTMARE ALPHABET

by sean o huigin

Black Moss, 62 pages, \$9.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 88753 165 2)

THIS NEW BOOK by sean o huigin plays with the traumas of learning and development. Maturing can be as much fun, and as hazardous, as an adult trying to snuggle back into the baby seat of memory.

The nightmare alphabet forms part three of the long poem "the story." This book deals with the anatomy of words in relation to bodies of knowledge, interior and exterior worlds, signifier and signified. O huigin's abecedarian is a boy. The male context does not really ruin the universality of the text. The work is not deconstructive. It rebuilds with 26 "id blocks. Women should also find this book entertaining.

In o huigin's bad dream, the symbiosis between life and letters begins in the womb, with the letter A

The A begins  
it curls up  
neatly in a gentle  
shape and turns  
to ah  
it rolls and  
softens  
laying sound upon  
the surface of  
the speechless brain.

Onward to B, where, phonetically and pictographically, a minihistory of barbarism and civilization begins to take shape.

The A now  
quickly takes a  
knife edge  
slicing off a  
hump of B to  
leave it small  
and cowering  
beneath the  
mountain  
A.

Onward, all the way to XYZ:

The D is dumb  
at first  
disgraced by  
stutterings  
and lacking in  
coherence when  
it tries to  
sound  
frustrated by  
its closed off  
shape  
which seems to  
keep its  
meanings in.

Or

an O  
for absence  
and for  
overflowing  
an O for  
octopus  
and ovaries.

Or

the Q  
stands  
oldest of  
the letters  
and it  
needs a  
cane.

Or

and chains  
of liny  
Xs  
make a formidable barricade.

The boy reaches puberty and "envisages himself united in one body, pictures standing amid the storm of swirling symbols." Growth forces him towards "maybe selfdestruction, maybe liberty." Communicating his confusion to a messed-up world may lead to regression of madness "picture this, a young boy naked, curled inside a padded room, chattering babbling no" stop to the walls."

We can all compile our own list, in alphabetical order, of intellectuals who are emotional cripples. O huigin toys with the verbal and visual toss-ups of ideation inherent in the English language to stimulate imaging, "picture all the possibilities, picture all the levels." The nightmare alphabet does not decode those unresolved fears that govern sleep; it lightly enhances the wonder.

Did the Phoenicians start this way?

—RAY FILIP



# Her life entire

**Cat's Eye, Margaret Atwood's seventh novel, presents an artist at mid-career. It's dense, intricate, and superb: a summation of what she knows about art and people. It's also a vision of Toronto as Hell**

By Douglas Glover

**M**ARGARET ATWOOD'S public image is huge. She's an icon and a target; she's the blank sheet everyone gets to write on. She's the face on the construction-site wall that everyone gets to deface — moustache, halo, horns, the works.

When Elaine Risley, the acclaimed Canadian painter-heroine of Atwood's new novel, *Cat's Eye*, comes upon a defaced poster of herself on a Toronto street corner, she thinks:

I have achieved, finally, a face that a moustache can be drawn on, a face that attracts moustaches. A public face, a face worth defacing. This is an accomplishment.

This is vintage Ahwood. dry, deadpan, and deadly. She writes jokes with as many barbs as a sea urchin. But Risley is not Atwood — or is she? Risley and Ahwood are the same age. They share an entomologist father, parents from Nova Scotia, and childhood summers spent in the northern Ontario woods. Atwood loves to play hide-and-seek at the place where autobiography and fiction meet, always ensuring there is a back door open for quick escapes. The front matter for *Cat's Eye* contains the following disclaimer:

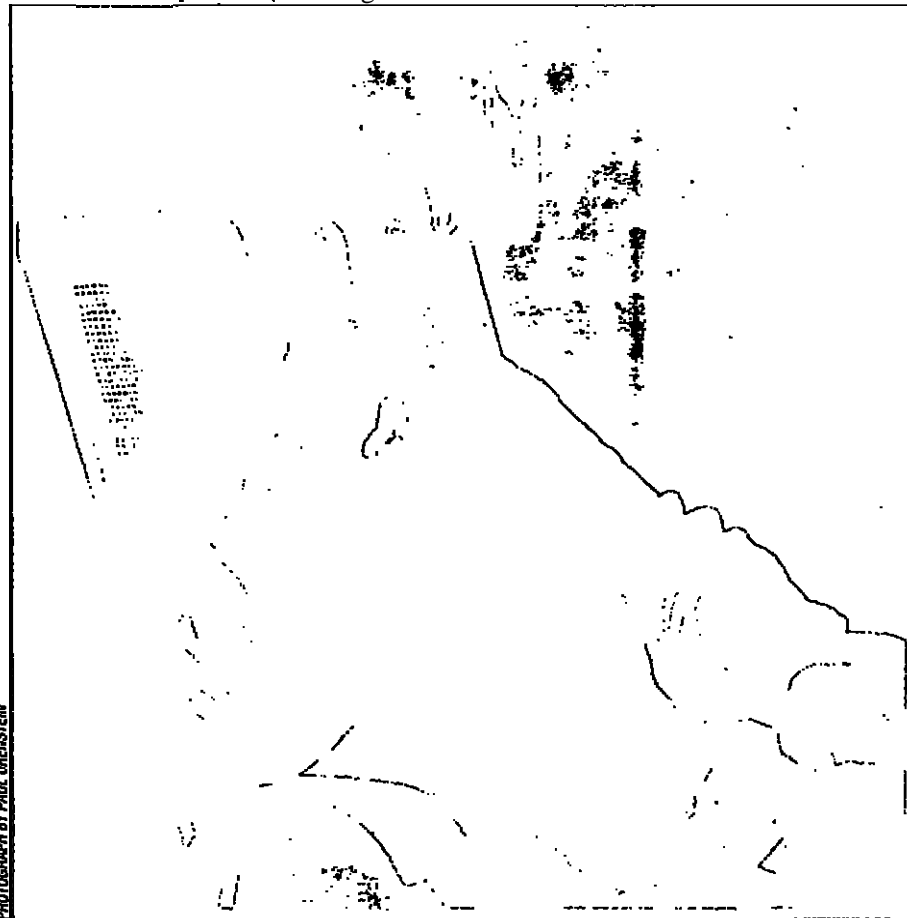
This is a work of fiction. Although its form is that of an autobiography it is not one.

*Cat's Eye* is Atwood's seventh novel. It is dense, intricate, and superb, as thematically diverse and complex as anything she has written. It is what you might expect from a writer at mid-career, mid-life: a portrait of the artist, a summation of what she knows about art and people. It is also an

Atwoodian *Under the Volcano*, a vision of Toronto as Hell.

On one level (in Ahwood novels, it is always necessary to specify levels), *Cat's Eye* is about the life of Elaine Risley, artist, painter of neorealist works pleasantly reminiscent of Jack Chambers and a raft of other Canadian painters (Atwood gives a

list). Risley's life splits into two parts: up to age nine, and after age nine. This is because, for this novel at least Ahwood has adopted the psychological truism that our personalities are more or less set by the time we are five (or six, or nine). "Get me out of this," thinks a middle-aged Risley, late in the novel, "I'm locked in. I don't want



PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL GREENSTEIN

Margaret Atwood



National Library  
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du Canada

There's More to the Story...

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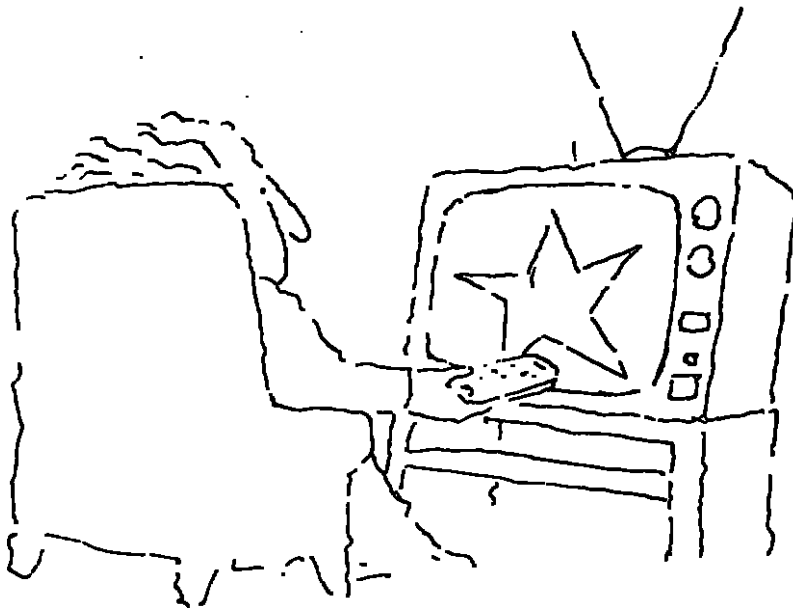
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Canada

to be nine years old forever."

What happens to Risley up to age nine is gruesome. Her earliest memories are Edenic, her family wandering happily like nomads through northern Ontario, sleeping in tents, searching for the insects that feed her father's research. When she is eight, however, the Risleys move to Toronto, to an unfinished house near one of the many ravines that cut through the city's geography. To her new schoolmates, little Elaine is a primitive, a freak.

Three friends, Carol, Grace, and Cordelia (variously associated in the novel's image pattern with the three muses or the three witches in *Macbeth*), take it upon themselves to socialize her, to teach her their language ("twin sets" and "pin curls"), games (cutting up Eaton's catalogues for scrapbooks), proprieties (girls don't climb ladders for fear of showing their under pants) sad religion (Grace Smeath's cinched and pious family invites Risley to their church).

But the project soon reveals itself as insidious, as something like the childish reign of terror in Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Cordelia, especially, torments Risley, humiliating her, tripping her up over words (words like *bugger* and *kike*), forcing her to submit to trials, even a mock burial. Risley begins to eat herself (chewing her fingers, her hair, tearing the skin off her feet); she has fainting spells. "Cordelia," she thinks, "you have made me feel I was nothing."

At nine, she suffers a nervous breakdown — or mystical vision — when Cordelia forces her to descend into a ravine haunted by "bad men" (unseen child molesters) and polluted by the runoff from a nearby cemetery (atoms of dissolved dead people). Fainting with terror, Risley falls through the thin creek ice, then sees the Virgin Mary (variously through the book *Our Lady of Perpetual Help*, *Our Lady of Perpetual Hell*, the *Virgin of Lost Thi*, sad so on) wearing a blue robe, with her red heart clutched to her breast, floating down from an ancient, rotting foot-bridge to comfort her.

This is the climax of the first half of *Cat's Eye*. Following Atwood's psychological paradigm, Risley represses everything — "I've forgotten things, I've forgotten that I've forgotten them . . . I've forgotten all the bad things that happened."

A few days later, she returns to school, but the whole tone of her world has altered. She remains friends with Cordelia, but her friendship is distant and cynical. She develops a "mean mouth," a razor-sharp wit with which to flay her playmates. Her secret, the past she has forgotten, gives her an edge. She and Cordelia bade places, the tormented becoming the tormentor. Years later, when Cordelia calls her from an asylum where she has been locked up for attempted suicide, Risley refuses to help

Risley's first painting instructor calls her an "unfinished woman."

You can draw objects very well. But as yet you cannot draw life . . . Both are necessary. Dirt and soul . . . There must be passion.

Of course, he's wrong; he's telling Risky this to get her in bed (which he does). Risley's objects are her passion and her Salvation. When objects from her childhood — a silver toaster, a wringer washing machine, a cat's-eye marble, three girls, Grace Smeath's mother stretched on a couch, the Holy Virgin on a bridge — come unbidden to her canvases, she thinks:

I know that these things must be memories, but they do not have the quality of memories . . . They arrive detached from any context; they are simply there in isolation . . . I have no image of myself in relation to them. They are suffused with anxiety. The anxiety is in the things themselves.

On the surface (in Atwood novels it is always necessary to specify, etc.). Risky remains very much a mirror of her generation; emotionally aloof yet ambitious, she decides to be a painter, has affairs, marries another painter, bears a child, flirts with the women's movement, separates, and escapes to Vancouver. Her relationship with her first husband, Jon is one of the delights of this book harrowing, comic, good-hearted and sly — note especially the way Jon flits from fad to fad only to end up making sci-fi movies in Hollywood while Risky stubbornly sticks to her own "reactionary" agenda and becomes a great artist.

But Risley's real life, the life of her emotions, the life of the luminous, grotesque, mythic creatures of her childhood, has gone underground, only to reappear in her pictures. The drama of the second half of *Cat's Eye* climaxes when Risky attends the first retrospective show of her work. All the images of her childhood are there, hung in a Toronto gallery appropriately named Sub Versions; her paintings are like stations of the cross, her past recapitulated in her art. And the last painting of all, the keystone and culmination of her oeuvre, a picture called *Unified Field Theory*, is Risley's childhood vision — Risky in the ravine, the Virgin floating above the bridge.

*Cat's Eye* is Risley's Progress, the journey of her soul; when she visits the ravine the day after her retrospective, she is cured. The locus of her breakdown is no longer charged or mythic.

There was no voice. No one came walking on air down from the bridge, there was no lady in a dark cloak . . . The bridge is only a bridge, the river a river, the sky a sky. . .

Risley has healed the rift, banished the ambiguity of language, rediscovered her self (or selves—the lost Cordelia, the child Elaine, Grace . . .) in the univocal meaning of things.

ALTHOUGH *Cat's Eye* is not autobiography, in a sense Atwood is teaching her readers how to read her. All Atwood's novels are alike in this: they contain highly complex patterns of images. Usually the title of the novel is hinged to its dominant pattern — in *The Edible Woman*, Marian's anorexia, in *Surfacing*, the narrator diving into a lake to look for Indian petroglyphs, in *Life Before Man*, Lesje's dinosaur fantasies, in *Bodily Harm* cancer, surgery, torture.

The passion, joy, and craft that Ahwood pours into these patterns reminds me of something the fictional poet John Shade says in Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire*:

I feel I understand Existence or at least a minute part of my existence only through my art in terms of combinatorial delight.

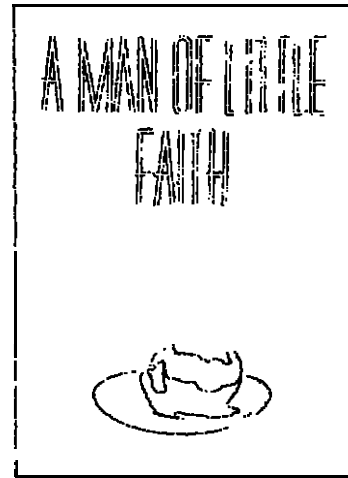
Or it reminds me of the American experimental novelist John Hawkes who once wrote:

Structure — verbal and psychological coherence — is still my largest concern as a writer. Related or corresponding event, recurring image and recurring action, these constitute the essential substance or meaningful density of writing.

But Ahwood is no experimentalist; her novels are reactionary, i.e., conventionally realistic in the same sense that in *Cat's Eye* Risley calls her paintings "reactionary." Risley's paintings are representational; she uses traditional techniques like underpainting and concentrations of egg tempera to give them a luminous flatness." Atwood's originality is very much Risley's originality — they both produce startling effects by a somewhat daring juxtaposition of experimental (image patterns) and traditional (plot, character) devices.

Atwood's mass-audience appeal derives from a reading of her novels as conventional narratives, as good stories, with meaningful characters and contemporary themes. Her audience (and her critics) see her variously as a feminist Boadicea, a flag-draped nationalist, or a yuppie bard. The experimental side of Atwood, her self-conscious manipulation of images, her attention to language, makes her critics (and mass audience) uncomfortable. It seems somehow too intellectual, too calculating. Hence, Atwood's other reputation as the Ice Queen of Canadian Literature, e.g., (from reviews of her previous books) "I found myself in awe of the stylistic grace and precision of this cold pastoral and yet . . ." "In fact it's astonishing what a funny, entertaining

## INSPIRED



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book she has written without any of that warmth. When this ice-jam breaks, what an even more astonishing book she will write.' "Margaret Atwood's new novel is a departure, quite different from its predecessors, though immediately recognizable as coming from the same mind, by the grace of its style, the penetration of its wit, and the emotional chill that pervades it"

I'm sure Ahwood can live with herself as Ice Queen, though it must be irritating to be so underestimated. Reflecting on her former teacher Northrop Frye, Atwood once wrote how reassuring it was to turn to his essay

on Emily Dickinson, which presents her "either as a White Goddess, despite her manner of dressing, or as a feeble neurotic, but as a skilled professional who knew exactly what she was doing.

I emphasize those last 10 words because I suspect this is precisely how Atwood would prefer to be known herself. If you assume she knows what she's doing, if you assume Atwood's great art is in her art, then a new way of reading her reveals itself.

You reread *Cat's Eye* with a slight squint so that instead of reading the story of Elaine Risley, you watch for the images that repeat. You reread with a pencil in your hand, reading backwards and forwards so that you begin to notice that a blue cat's-eye marble appears on page 396 and on pages 61, 95, 139, 140, 143, 153, etc. This should be fun; think of it as a game of golf. Atwood drives off the tee on page 61 and then walks down to page 95 and hits a three iron ahead to 139, then chips to 140, and so on until she holes the ball (image) on 396.

Patterns emerge. On page 396, Risley finds the cat's-eye marble inside a red purse inside a steamer trunk full of family memorabilia. (This novel, Risley's retrospective, you might say, is a steamer trunk full of family memorabilia.) You go to Eod all the red purses (the tee for red purses is on 53). You notice that Ahwood repeatedly associates red purses with hearts. Then, on 406, you read this description of that keystone painting, *Unified Field Theory*.

She is the Virgin of Lost Things. Between her hands, at the level of the heart, she holds a glass object: an oversized cat's eye marble, with a blue centre.

Feverishly, you flip the pages until you come to where Risley looks at the cat's-eye marble in the purse and sees her "life entire." Which means that Risley, the painter, has painted the Virgin of Lost Things (lost as in Risley's memories) holding Risley's life to her heart, and suddenly this shiver of combinatorial delight begins to travel down the back of your neck

But the cat's-eye marble complex is only an instance of eye imagery that tees off on

page 2 when Cordelia, Risley's childhood tormentor and alter ego, rolls her "grey-green eyes, opaque and glinting." There's a radio with "a single green eye" like a cat's-eye marble and a veritable swamp of pickled ox-eyes, heads like eyes, not to mention dead turtles with hearts like eyes.

At a certain point the golf-game analogy will break down. Sometimes Atwood's image patterns seem like nuclear chain reactions; one atom splits another, which splits two others, which split four others. This is how she manages to create such complexity — juxtapositions and associations mount geometrically. (Atwood herself likes to play with the idea of language as disease — words are contagious, images metastasize.) One image (cat's-eye marble) hits another (radio with a green eye), which hits another (signals from space), which hits another (time, curved space, strings of light, the universe), which hits another (a jar of cat's-eye marbles that Risley describes as a "jar of light").

The image ramifies, transforms, slips (*slippage* is one of the words that post-Saussureans like to use). The cat's-eye marble becomes an image of the universe of modern physics as much as it is an image of Risley's entire life. It is an image of everything, or everything is infected with cat's-eye marbleness. So that in *Unified Field Theory*, the painting, the Virgin of Last Things holding the cat's-eye marble to her heart is described as

a woman dressed in black, with a black hood or veil covering her hair. Here and there on the black of her dress or cloak there are pinpoints of light. The sky behind her is the sky after sunset; at the top of it is the lower half of the moon". Her face is partly in shadow.

Her face is partly in shadow.

The Virgin of Lost Things is the Universe, the night sky, or the moon (that ambiguous "Her" is a wonderful touch) — the Virgin Mary becomes the female lunar goddess, the mother of all things.

But that's not all — hold on to your hats. Flip the pages again. You'll find Cordelia's face described as "a blurred reflection of the moon" and her name translated as "Heart of the moon." Risky's childhood enemy is both the lost and the Vii of Lost Things!

*Cat's Eye* spirals in on itself, or implodes. It becomes so self-referential that it begins to feel like the dilemma of the Cretan barber who said, "I am lying." It becomes a logically impossible novel. a) antinovel, a novel, to paraphrase Nabokov, that proves the impossibility of novels.

At this point it becomes something like pure art.

WRITING a novel at this level of self-consciousness is a highly risky business. What is at risk, for Ahwood, is her novel's

verisimilitude, its quality of appearing to be real, the very quality that attracts her mass audience.

Atwood's solution to this problem is insipid. All her sensitive female narrators are neurotic (usually they are more or less cured by the end of the book). It's an axiom of modern psychology that neuroses occur when a person cannot face certain traumatic events and emotions. The traumatic events and emotions are hidden in the unconscious only to reappear in symbolic forms. Meaning occurs at the point where the plane of language meets the plane of the unconscious. As Risley says, "A lot of my paintings then began in my confusion about words."

Atwood's characters live in a fetishized universe. Neurotic symbols obey dream laws — laws of association and juxtaposition — which are just the same as aesthetic laws. Ahwood manipulates the fetishized universe of her narrators as though it were a poem. On one level (in Atwood novels it is always etc.), it is psychoanalysis; on another, she is creating art. But the art is safely cocooned inside the framework of psychological realism. When Risley goes out on the streets of Toronto she carefully disguises herself as a "non-artist."

To ask what this all means only ratifies a ridiculously reductive impulse. No doubt some critic will want to nail it down, nail image patterns to themes. Someone will say *Cat's Eye* is about the psychic healing power of art. Someone else will say it is Ahwood's leap into religion, that she has finally, at 48, come to terms with her own mortality and God (and, as one would expect with Atwood, God is a woman). Still another will say she has adopted some notion about Zen and modern physics, that we are all one with the universe.

But you could pull a dozen themes out of *Cat's Eye* and not exhaust it (and not be true to the book — like the blind men with their marvellous elephant).

Risley calls her painting *Unified Field Theory*, she gets the physics from her scientist brother. She doesn't really think physics; she thinks images. So you don't get any help from Risley. But the novel's references to field, language as an entity, and to secret or encoded messages are clues to a complex theory of language. Words (people, the world) exist in self-referential fields of meaning; they are messages on a chain of messages.

As a writer, when she is actually sitting at her desk composing, Ahwood knows that there is no meaning, that meaning only happens when you put two things together. Perhaps the truth of the matter is that Ahwood means simply to say that the world is ineffably complex but that it is not a symbol, that it refers to itself, that the novel is a book (and not a) autobiography), the bridge a bridge, the sky a sky. □



# Poems for the wells of India

The Canadian Poetry Contest was launched in the fall of 1987 to provide funds that would be used by Canada India Village Aid in its program of building dams and digging wells to help counter the serious drought conditions that had arisen in north-western India in recent years. By the contest deadline of April 15, 1988, the continuing vitality of the verse-writing tradition in Canada had been reaffirmed: 1,255 poets had entered no fewer than 3,223 poems. They came from all the provinces and both territories. They came from Canadians abroad as far away as Brazil, and from foreign poets who were welcome because of the international nature of the appeal. They came from known and unknown, from younger and older poets. And they earned

enough money through entry fees for CIVA to build three village dams and help deepen several dry wells.

The judges who chose the six prize-winning poems were themselves poets — Margaret Atwood, Al Purdy, and George Woodcock; they were notably assisted by an advisory and reading committee consisting of poets George Bowering and George McWhirter, of W. H. New, editor of Canadian Literature, and Ingeborg Woodcock. The winners, whose poems are published below, were celebrated in Toronto at a Harbourfront occasion on September 13. An anthology of the 51 best poems from the contest, *The Dry Wells of India*, will be issued by Harbour Publishing in spring 1989. —GEORGE WOODCOCK

FIRST PRIZEWINNER

## Actaeon

A man who surprises the goddess bathing, naked  
to full blush, head and shoulders haughtily above  
her scurrying handmaidens, who stumbles

upon her by accident, in an idle moment  
as you or I upon the full, clear moon  
over the mountain's white shoulder  
driving, some January afternoon  
the mundane highway. Such a man

in shift  
from man of action to man the actor  
in her drama, in transition, on the cusp  
unaccountable, inarticulate, awkward  
within strident grace

dies at the hands of his companions

dies in the teeth of his training, his prized hounds, dies  
her death as image of his desire — wild, elusive  
specimen, silhouette

on a high ridge, leapt

out "I range, out of bounds

except to accident, the hicks

of idleness, subtle art  
of intention at rest, of the huntress. He dies

in the noise of his name, his friends shouting  
"Actaeon, Actaeon..." wondering  
at his absence, missing  
the thrill of the kill.  
And "Actaeon," in tone

innocent, excited  
echoes today in its exile (unchosen, undeserved  
and not bad luck exactly) echoes

because he cannot answer, strains to  
through his muzzle, soft lips, thick tongue  
of the herbivore, makes sounds

not animal, not human  
and cannot and dies

in a body made exquisitely  
for life, a trophy, a transport

for his name, lapsed quickly

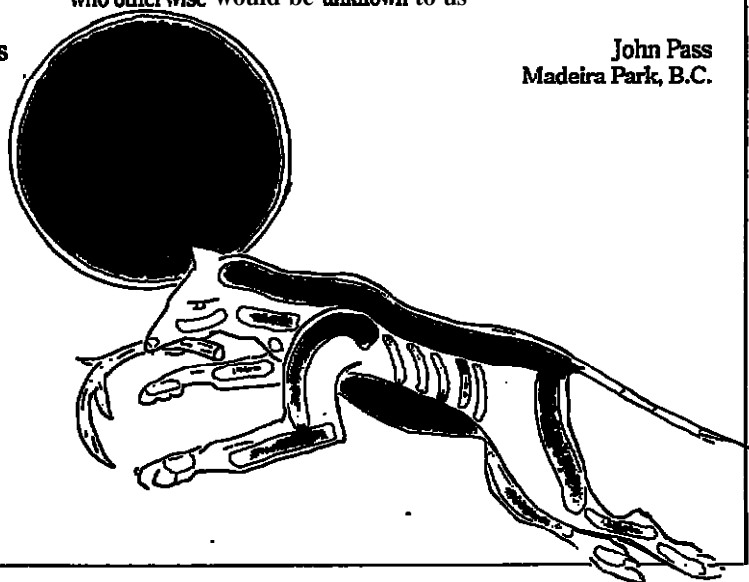
on the lips of his companions (never  
comprehending) on my tips now

ironic, uncertain, changed as he

who saw her  
saw through the guise of modesty and boyish  
enthusiasm, her bright body, wet  
as any mortal's, saw

through no effort or virtue or fault  
of his own, his eyes a deer's eyes

darkening, widening, feminine, startled  
who otherwise would be unknown to us



John Pass  
Madeira Park, B.C.

## Life in the late hours

I fished around inside the bodies  
of good dead men. and could **find** nothing  
but my **own** fear, my own **disappointment**

### *After midnight in the Gross anatomy lab, cramming*

God forbids the middle **ear**;  
you are here to explore only the larger stations,  
refusing to see them as they **once** saw themselves.  
Women. Men. In **formalin**.  
On cool metal tables, catch their deaths. . .  
Tables so short you might never guess their **purpose**,  
blindfolded. But then, many come **from** India.  
Infant skeletons a major export.  
Their organs pulled out for inspection  
then put back **in** their cases. How many  
might still play well inside other bodies?  
**Though** after **midnight** these dead **get up**,  
to **play** tennis  
the **Prosects** against the Dissects;  
at **first** the **Prosects** always lose  
— their cut muscles **flapping** from their bones,  
but gradually. . . **gradually**. . .  
the Dissects start **losing** a muscle here. a nerve there,  
**pectoralis major**, then **minor**,  
so if you catch the game late enough **in** the term  
it's a toss-up  
**who** wins.

### *Scratching with his scissors for Fallopian tubes*

**Searching** for life in the late **hours**,  
the rest of the class **gone** home for the good sleep,  
leaving behind their pure white suits  
in a pile.  
On the particular day they did **the face**  
he **came** down **with** something.  
and had to miss the lesson:  
**Something** in his own **body** **knew** that the **lipless** grins  
**would** forever make watering the specimens  
more difficult Like a game of mime,  
**warm** water trickling **through** a punched-out spout:  
pretends **he's** watering **plants**; his mind  
dousing their heads with **humour**. Vegetables.

### *Each of twelve remember*

throbbing in the now empty  
**thoracic** cage. And **if** a cage,  
for what **variety** of bird  
that must **sing** sweetly in love  
yet eat **its way** through meat  
for the **final** escape.  
And what degree of animal  
must the skull **contain**.  
**Twelve well-preserved** women and **men** going bad  
their thin beams up in stirrups  
a unisex clinic. full of **tampon-remover** jokes,  
**whores** in the **wrong** hands. . .

### *By morning the skylight buys back the room*

for the living.  
I return to my **favourite** body, his **face**  
behind the **flat** green drape.

While his mask was **still** attached  
**he** wore a long **thin** reed of a moustache  
waxed up at the ends  
and was nicknamed the Colonel.  
**With** not a **single extra** ounce of fat  
— must have had cancer.  
Yet he is the colonel still, **my** colonel  
and acquiescing **cadaver**;  
and when he willed hi husk  
to teach me, he too  
had wanted to rise and meet  
the basic science.  
**Through** the silent **shroud**:  
A tear for what we **are, and** must be,  
might still be squeezing **through**  
the tiny **twisted** canals  
even **while** the two of us  
explore —

Ron **Charach**  
Toronto

## Narrative changes

**In** the old story, she is able. She can move.  
inconspicuously in a **roomful** of dancers whose steps  
are happy. She is everything ordinary and young.

Only the shoes are left, insensible. Visitors arrive  
wearing street clothes, never having spent one day in  
distracted isolation. When it **all went** wrong.

she would remember a day tilted with rain. or **wind**.  
Unimportant **differences**. An afternoon of new distance  
This was not her idea of the scenic mute. Ceiling **squares**,

**blood-count**. It **all** adds up to **flowered immobility**.  
A carload of the strictly common, **ditched in** a country  
without maps. After driving to a night of local **colour**,

nothing **strange** to tell. Autumn across the **hillsides**,  
pastures of bison, the harvest hayride **offer** typical  
testimony. As **a woman of character**, she enters each dark

with its morphine sense of motion, plotting  
impossibilities. Intensive **Care: draw** the curtain.  
She stages a comeback Tubes for every **orifice**,

dripping, **draining**, maintain the body's balance in its  
perimeter of bedside apparatus. The walls blossom  
with Get-Well **graffiti**. Her feet remember their history,

thrusting back to the **dance-hall**. The crystal globe  
**spins** its splintered light Memory lodged in **nerve-code**  
breaks loose like a headless hen. When she wakes

alone. the day **is** bruised, icebound. The floor  
does not go unnoticed; poppies fall on it,  
and a sleepy silence. **Even** in good weather this is

dangerous How much of travel is prior arrangement?  
A movement toward beds you will make. Name on  
the telegram  
delivered in the dream you **plan** to have.

J. Delayne Barber  
Davis, California

## The death of the violin

. . . **in our house came after four years.**  
**She had practised — and not practised —**  
long enough to **(finally)** make music.  
She had entertained my **father** and mother,  
and I had been proud of **the** songs  
she had coaxed from those harsh **strings.**  
She **was,** however, not staying **with** it.  
**We** could no longer continue with  
reminders, because reminders would be  
nagging, and **we** wanted discipline  
on her part: we wanted her to bring her **will**  
into play.

November is a hard month to give up anything,  
especially **if you** have held it  
four years, watched it **grow** in your arms,  
until you knew just **how**  
to make the music leap.  
My own **father's** violin hangs on the wall  
and I remember when he played,  
touching the **strings,** jabbing  
at the notes until the instrument  
became **a fiddle,** and around him  
**guitars** and accordions  
filled up **the** family with their talk.

Once, when she played,  
his violin played back,  
reverberating on the **wall:** just once  
there **was that** calling note. **Then silence.**  
Filled up now with **rain,**  
with arguments about who's **supporting whom**  
through **this** decision — **they** last their time  
and fade, but stay, **fill** the air  
and are cast back **slowly** into the **pit**  
of **all** old family **figths,**  
**where** the **world** gets drained off to  
**when** it lurches and  
can't move gently into change  
and someone's disclaiming all reason  
and another's volume rises to **the** shriek.'

Dale Zieroth  
North Vancouver, B.C.

## The listening perch

I

**At** the edge of a pine **clearcut,** a horned **owl** sbii his weight  
**from** claw to claw on #snag birch

He **hears the** shrew creep under the **earth,** **hears** the vole  
steal up toward moonlight

**When the** vole rubs **topsoil,** the **owl** **stiffens his** spine, wings  
**flex,**  
tail feathers flip

**The owl** sweeps toward the pulse, his clawed leg jams **the**  
**tunnel,**  
**finches** once

**Wings beating a tense** hover, **he** draws the small life to his  
beak,  
clips the nerve from the skull

II

My **father** is a child blowing a duck call **through the** night

Squawks, chortles sprawl in wind **behind the muffler**  
His father's Stetson brushes **the** roof of **the Ford**

The back **seat has** melons, strawberries, crates of peaches  
The trunk reeks of salted pelts, white mink, raccoon

An owl shatters **the** windshield, hits the boy in **the** chest  
a vole **flops** into his **father's** lap

Dawn at Lake Saline, they cut the bird for **catfish** bait  
**A black** Lab swims after the boat, down **clings** to his **muzzle**

III

Smell of formaldehyde  
I stand on a chair, peer down into a woman's belly

**My father** jokes with his **German** nurse **Helga,** I keep **hearing**  
**Bach**  
stream **from** his hands, a fugue I play

**In the dark,** feeling for sounds  
I **don't** understand the jokes or **the** ovaries but I laugh

**The knife** clips them out  
He tells the story of hunting teal off the coast of Cameron

**The** woman looks dead but her breasts heave

**Mudboat** stuck on a sandbar, tornado snaking over **the** Gulf,  
pluming the marsh up and **down in** a waterspout

He prayed **under a** shrimp barrel when the eye sucked his  
**breath**  
Hours **practising** knots, not touching



When bodies lie still and won't get up, it's hard to believe

Helga nods/o *bitte* with every joke and I keep tapping  
Bach on my fingertips

IV  
This moon brings a scent of orange rind  
It hovers, this groan of a trunk dried by lightning

My lover reads a history of cure rates in Bedlam  
I hammer chords, keep my heart alive

He sneaks up behind me, his hands flinch  
My lover, a sweet lie on the tongue

Orange rinds float on the pond and there is no metaphor

Crack of tree rings, hushed impact on ground cover

Kerry Johanssen  
Iowa City, Iowa

## A tapestry

Backs to the miniature pear-trees  
in the medieval herbal garden,  
my sister and I goof around,  
teen-aged. The pears muscular  
as green uteri, unpicked,  
untasted.


The leaves are locked in resin  
as though in a museum for extinct trees.  
Above them our mother sits, cross-legged  
on a satin cloud, surrounded  
by a crowd of women. She's talking  
to us through a loudspeaker,  
She's saying, have you killed her yet,  
the impostor, the new wife? Have you learned  
how to torture your father?

Fighting the drone of a plane  
that writes a message in the sticky  
blue-seamed sky over the Hudson.  
mother talks louder,  
her dead mother joins her and then  
her only son, alone  
among all those women.


It's for him I let go  
of my sister's hand, climbing up  
on the stone wall  
warmed by September,  
past the comfrey and gold of pleasure  
St. John's wort and fennel seed,  
and the nuns building gigantic nests,  
like storks,  
beside the tombs of the crusaders.

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Toronto

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# The true colours of plain speech

*Traditionally, Mennonites are known for literal readings of the Bible, an aversion to killing, and a peasant-agrarian style of life. But lately poets and novelists of the Canadian prairies have been coming up with some startling new kinds of plain speaking*

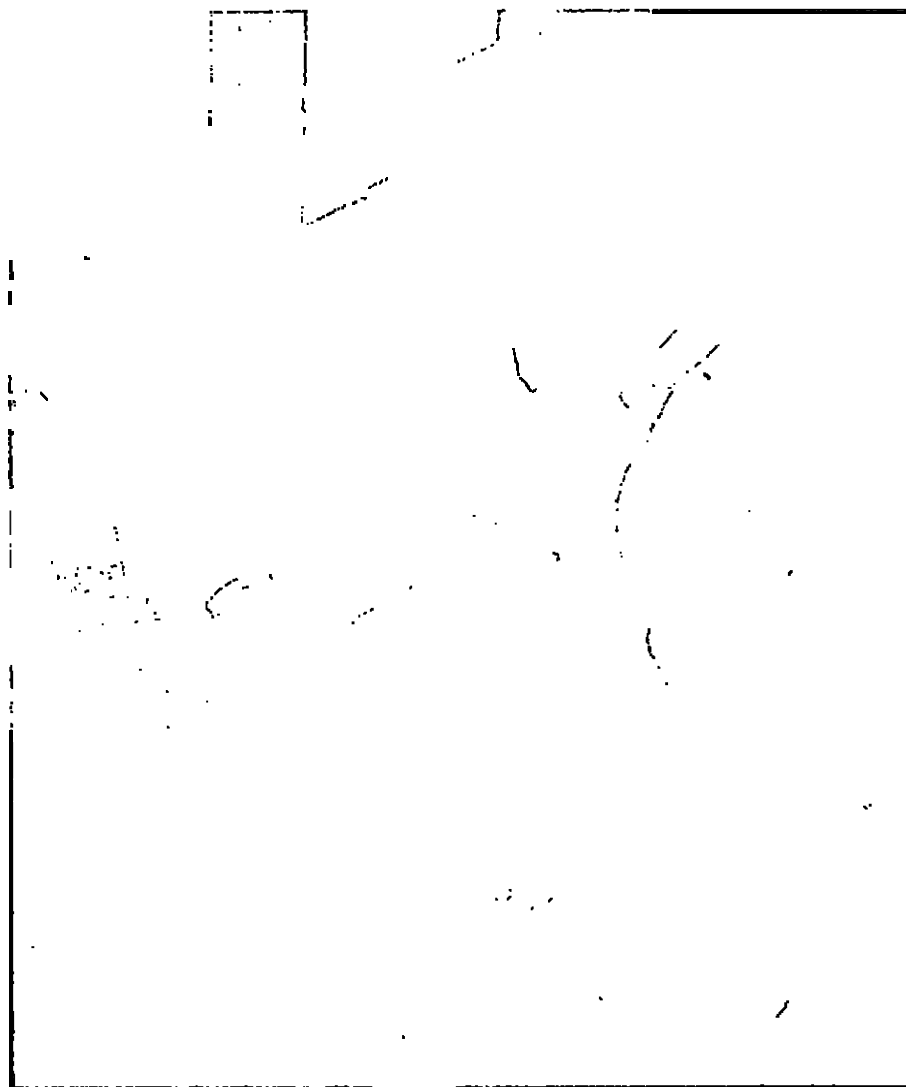
By E. F. Dyck

**I**N A EASEMENT recording studio in Regina, a young poet and a professional actress are running on the spot. Both joggers are panting before they slow down; their breathing becomes less frenzied but remains heavy. A red light glow suddenly through the glass windows across the room — and the man releases a chant of obscenities, all of the four-letter kind, punctuated by gasps that are the real thing. The woman replies in measured tones with vaguely German-sounding, nurturing words, undercut by her own breathiness, words as obscene in their own way as the man's. The dialogue continues until the poet Victor Jerrett Enns, signals the technician in the booth and the red light goes off.

In Winnipeg, a young woman with two children pursues her career with elan — she is a graduate student in English and a poet; her husband is an artist who drives cab and bus to help the family survive. Di Brandt's first collection of poems has been critically acclaimed across Canada:

*& what do i want in this my contradictory  
most treacherous false heart of hearts  
i want you passionate steed sword & bridle  
gleaming hero still to carry me away  
with your longing capture me in  
your flaming  
eternal all knowing yes in spite of everything  
the women the teacups the wine  
sitting together  
here in this room speaking our  
independence  
our new vision what i want is the  
old promises  
all the ironies swept away Cinderella rising  
from the ashes glassy eyed her empty face  
her transparent shoes*

Enns and Brandt belong to a tiny



Victor Jerrett Enns

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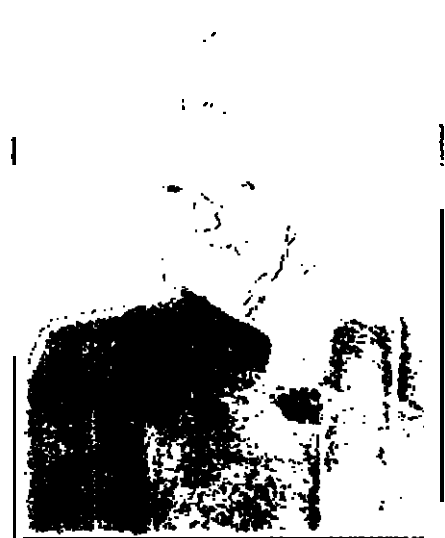
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are always in.

Canadian minority, an ethnic group distinguished traditionally by its literal readings of the Bible, its aversion to killing, and a peasant-agrarian style of life. They are Mennonites, the Z&h-century descendants of the followers of a defrocked Dutch-Catholic priest named Menno Simons who became an Anabaptist in 1536. This group includes established writers like the novelist Rudy Wiebe, the historian Flank I-I. Epp, the literary critic Magdalene Redekop, short-story writer Sandra Birdsell, and poet Patrick Friesen — to mention only a few of the most obvious names. Winnipeg is in danger of becoming the Mennonite literary capital of Canada: Turnstone Press has become Canada's leading publisher of Mennonite writers (15 titles since 1976); a *Journal of Mennonite Studies* was begun in 1988 at the University of Winnipeg; Low German plays have been performed in the Winnipeg area for years; and a popular musical comedy group, Heischraitje & Willa Honig (*Locusts & Wild Honey*) has produced at least one album of songs, both old and original, sung in Low German.

If the Mennonites are an ethnic group, then their writing is ethnic writing — and what that is is only slowly revealing itself or being invented. Is it a facet of Canadian postmodernism? An aspect of regional literature? A manifestation of our vertical-mosaic-not-melting-pot identity? Or a barely distinguishable subset of "immigrant literature"? The editors of a special issue of *Canadian Ethnic Studies* ("Ethnicity and Canadian Literature") remark in their introduction that one of our current interests is "ethnic genealogy"; they suggest that ethnic literature belongs to the near-genre of immigrant literature, with its themes of "alienation, loneliness, and the existential quest for identity," and its realistic and naturalistic modes. Mennonite critics are themselves uncertain about "Mennonite fiction": In the periodical *Mennonite Images* Victor Doerksen argues that "the Mennonite imagination" has been locked into its own language and a narrow notion of Christian fiction in the past, but that "recent Mennonite literature has been so different as to raise the question whether it can still be considered Mennonite at all." In the same issue, Peter Pauls argues that a search for identity is a recurring theme in Mennonite poetry written in both German and in English in this century.

The same old problem, of course, used to be raked about "Canadian literature," and there's something comforting about its sheer obstinacy and durability: Is "ethnic writing" a thing? Is it the "real" thing? That Mennonite writing is a good deal like other writing is the appropriate place to begin, for ancestor hunting is endemic to Canadian literature, indeed, to the human plight, and there is no reason to be surprised that Mennonite writing shares this concern.

Still, it's the species not the genus we're after, and Mennonite writing does have particular characteristics. To establish these characteristics, we might begin with the notion of Mennonite and simply define Mennonite writing as writing done by Mennonites. But what 'is it' to be a Mennonite?



Di Brak

From a contemporary perspective, Mennonites as a group exhibit one major characteristic — a unique peasant ideology. No doubt there are those who will be enraged by this observation, but I think it is an accurate and historically valid description of the group — and I add that the peasant is as admirable as anyone and a whole lot closer to most of us than the aristocrat. A peasant is "one who lives in the country and works on the land, either as a small farmer or a labourer" (*OED*); the High German equivalent is *Bauer*, and a recent Mennonite Low German dictionary glosses *Buea* as "builder, farmer, pioneer, peasant". The economic, geographical, and religious history of the Mennonites, moreover, overwhelmingly demonstrates that Mennonites are lower class and agrarian, that they have the kind of value system generally associated with such groups, and that one of the unique ingredients of their particular ideology is Anabaptism. But the strongest and clearest example of Mennonite ideology is found in their language — for as Wittgenstein said, to know a language is to know a world.

The Mennonite language is *plautdietsch*. In a detailed study of its origins, development, and present state, Reuben Epp points out that *plaut* (*platt* in High German), which refers to the flat lowlands of northern Germany and Holland, also signifies "clear or understandable," as in *plain-speaking* (*Journal of Mennonite Studies* 5, 1987). When Menno Simons began preaching and writing heresy in the 16th century, he rejected the High Latin of the Church, and

used the Low German of the people around hkn. In doing so he defined linguistically what it has meant ever since to be a Mennonite: to accept the ideology of plain speech. The seriousness with which Mennonites have held to this belief may be measured by their migrations from Europe to the steppes of the Ukraine, from the Ukraine to the prairies of North America, from North America to the plains of South America. Each migration was undertaken to preserve the language and its ideology.

The peasant ideology encoded in *plautdietsch* has had and continues to have enormous consequences for Mennonite art in any form but especially in writing. Mennonites as a group take their ideology seriously, which is to say that they adopt a rhetorical stance while denying that the stance is rhetorical (it's the God-given truth, they say). To be a Mennonite literary artist under such conditions might seem impossible but for the fact that there have indeed been such creatures. In fact, critic Harry Loewen's term "Mennonite Literary artist" is only a paradox, not a contradiction, and its resolution by individual writers has been effected on traditional grounds. *Emigré* writers like Fritz Senn and Arnold Dyck (who wrote in both High and Low German) more or less satisfactorily resolved it; it continues to haunt, fruitfully, English-language writers like Rudy Wiebe and Patrick Friesen; and, more recently, it informs the work of a bevy of new Mennonite writers.



Patrick Friesen

To be a Mennonite literary artist, then, is to exploit the rhetoric of a peasant ideology encoded in a common dialect and taken seriously by Mennonites as a whole. Plain speech, too, has its rhetoric; the absence of named or recognized figures of speech is the presence of so far unnamed and unrecognizable figures; and in the name of their own language, Mennonites actually identify the very figure of their rhetoric: *plautdietsch* is plain speech.

That this insight has not been lost on Mennonite fiction writers has long been apparent. Arnold Dyck (1889-1970) created the low-comic characters "Koop" (a buffoon) and "Bua" (a rustic) in the '30s, and they have delighted and instructed Mennonite readers of Low German ever since. More recently, Rudy Wiebe has returned to the issue of Mennonite ethnicity (with which he made a name for himself in his 1962 novel, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*) by publishing *My Lovely Enemy* (1983). Wiebe's earlier exploitation of the rhetoric of plain speaking was confrontational and serious. The central character of the later book, James Dyck, a professor of history and long-winded armchair philosopher who has clearly traded one rhetoric for another, recovers plain speech and ethnicity through the idealized sexual ministrations of an idealized wife and an idealized mistress. James is high English for Jacob, as *Jasch* is its Low German equivalent, and Dr. Dyck could use a good dash of low satire rather than his creator's empathy with his rampant sexual fantasies. The book is most persuasive in a 20-page section dealing with the death of James's mother, a wonderfully realized character, where the rhetoric of plain talk is so well contrived that it becomes utterly and authentically serious.

Armin Wiebe's "Yasch" (*The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*) is both the vehicle and object of his author's satire: "I should have clawed out from there fast, I guess, maybe to Mexico or Thompson even," says Yasch, revealing in his tortured syntax (a literal translation from *plautdietsch*, idioms and all) what happens when peasant ideology is grafted onto North American greed and helped along by chokecherry wine, good old-fashioned lust, and death. Yasch Siemens and James Dyck are therefore two very different figures revealing the complexities of the rhetoric of plain speech. Yasch, who disdains the "high" and lives by the "low," speaks naturally in the most ornate language:

And then Oata is climbing under my blanket and she is covering me with her acres and the crop is so big that I almost can't breathe and there is so much to disk and to plow and to seed and it seems like it will never be finished and the wild mustard keeps growing behind the plow and a cow bone gets stuck in the harrow and two crows are eating the seed behind the drill...

James, who fancies himself well beyond such rusticity (revealing in this fancy his proximity to rusticity), records his mating with mistress Gillian — on a buffalo rub bing-stone in the middle of the prairie:

We have to get down quickly, back into the warm hollow of earth against the rubbing stone; the length of it no longer than we need lying down. Mare's-tails fray into the

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# CONDAR

## NICHOLAS LUARD

sky above us, flaring out quickly, whipped by some stratospheric wind and then we mould ourselves together, trembling as gently, finally we know we have given ourselves over to this relentless rush into space. The mind knows only what lies near the heart. Such awesome presence surrounds us, we have to close our eyes.

Both, in other words, use the same *topos*, the same place of invention, for words with which to create experience — the land itself and its keepers, be they Mennonite farmers or Plains Indians. Both show that so-called plain speech is dressed in its own ornaments and colours, homespun or romantic.

Two other fiction writers are much less overtly Mennonite than the two Wiebes. Indeed, but for the facts of biography and genealogy one might not recognize them as ethnic writers at all. Sandra Birdsell's second collection of short stories, *Ladies of the House* (1984), deals with characters who are Mennonites, true, but this is accidental and not essential to the stories 'The Bride Doll' is the eldest daughter of a Paraguayan-Mennonite immigrant to Agassiz; her groom is a mentally retarded young man who lives with his bachelor uncle. "Niagara Falls" is Elizabeth Zacharias's ambiguous emancipation from a husband who is slowly dying of a stroke. The subject is woman first, ethnicity second, a neat commentary on the version of plain speech practised by Mennonites, for that version places woman second. Birdsell's rhetoric is matriarchal, even feminist: male-female relationships are treated in a deflationary way, and the only hopeful relationships are those between mothers and daughters. In "Keepsakes," Milka, who first appeared in her earlier volume, *Night Travellers* (1982), returns to her memories of growing up in a Russian village and raising a family in Agassiz. "I had one who ate dirt," she remembers, "I had one who haled water," and one who came home one day and cut off her hair for no reason at all. As the memories mingle with the present reality of a mass visit by her daughters and their children, one childhood memory rises sharply from all the others, a "strange frightening story about the woman they buried alive":

Milka continues to tell the story, her voice gathering strength, rising up in the kitchen along with the smoky-sweet smell of ham, cooked cabbage. Heat radiates from the granddaughter's body as she sets the tomato juice down on the table. She will interrupt, Milka thinks, ask about food and when is it time for eating. But she is surprised when this one lingers, stands in the doorway fiddling with the strings of an apron dangling from a hook, stands there listening.

Lois Braun, in *A Stone Watermelon* (1986), is perhaps even less "Mennonite"

than Birdsell. A number of Braun's stories contain ethnic traces, but her rhetoric is not of the plain speech variety or its obverse. Braun's realism pushes into the mythic and verges on the fantastic; her style is classically middle, clear without being low, and therefore resists easy labels. The latent homosexuality of Ben and Julian is delivered with careful economy when Ben and his friend 'Julie' talk ("The Maltese Mistress"). In "The No-Place Bar and Grill" Braun brings a bizarre array of characters to life in a tight circle of the human condition, and the story ends (almost) where it began:

Truman Leonard flies alone through the sunsets. Rita tends the bar! her gold bracelet and gold ballet shoe jangles and clicks on the countertop. Artie has run off to be a dancer, in California this time, where he can sleep outside in winter, and every Monday morning the girl named Buri picks up eight bottles of rum in an army jeep. On Saturday nights, Welder-Fiddler Bob plays his fiddle and flirts with the women while Truman and Rita waltz on the wooden dance floor of the No Place Bar and Grill.

If Mennonite fiction writers' struggles to liberate themselves from the ideology of plain speech by exploiting its rhetoric have nearly succeeded, the same can be said of Mennonite poets. In his latest and best book, *Flicker and Hawk* (1987), Patrick Friesen, the preeminent Mennonite poet of the prairies, no longer founders in his attempts to escape pure seriousness. Friesen is an accomplished poet, and he presents us with a narrator whose problem is fundamentally ideological: "I want something other than rhetoric or ritual maybe / a gesture." This narrator's desire to escape rhetoric and return to plain speech is the canonical desire of the lapsed Mennonite; it is a desire to return to a simpler and less self-conscious state: and it is paralleled by the same narrator's desire to experience the true love of his ideal of woman ("nothing in the mirror"). It is not always clear on which side — rhetoric or ideology — Friesen stands. Does he think the narrator is a fool? Or does he think the narrator is a serious fool? In other words, is Friesen being serious or rhetorical when he allows the narrator to use the word "fool"? My own guess is that Friesen wants it both ways but that remnants of plain speech ideology prevent him from admitting the paradox of *homo seriusus/rheticus* in himself — so far. For a Mennonite to escape the law of the excluded middle is not easy.

One such escape may well be through myth, and that is the path Victor Jerrett Enns has explored in *Correct in this Culture* (1985). In a diction as clean as a Mennonite boy's hands before supper, Enns refashions the timeless tale of our fall from innocence

into experience ("Mother Tongue"). The world evoked is Everyone's — not because the poems are mere generalities (they are in fact grounded in the Mennonite migratory experience), but because the poems' symbolic values range among those that have endured. What we love well remains, the rest is indeed dross; and what Enns loves best of all is language. For him, the fall into experience is a recurring fall into language, and his sequence transforms an ethnic group's flight from a national oppressor into an individual's flight from an ethnic oppressor into every writer's search for his own tongue. In Enns's poems, historical lime curls upon itself.

For sheer toughness, Di Brandt's *Questions I Asked My Mother* (1987), difficult as they are, cannot match the questions she raises about the ideology of plain speech. Brandt's challenge to the Mennonite way is that she will speak in public and betray her heritage. A far greater danger than her boldness, however, is her argument. It is informed as well as passionate, it employs both plain talk and ornate figuration, it praises and dispraises in the same period, and it shamelessly desires what it despises, unafraid to use this admission to persuade others more timorous. These are the *topoi* of the poem I quoted at the beginning of this article, a poem that is quite simply the best in a strong first collection worthy of the Wife of Bath herself: "let me tell you what it's like/ having God for a father & Jesus / for a lover on this old mother / earth."

Audrey Poetker's *I Sing for My Dead in German* (1986), unusual as it is for a Mennonite female poet, will evoke a feeling of *déjà vu* in anyone but the reader captive of the Very ideology the book confronts. Where Brandt's rhetoric enrages and engages the attention fully, Poetker's aggressive sexual talk undermines itself, and only the poems celebrating death are persuasive. Similarly, Maurice Mierau's grandfather poems (*Grain, Summer* 1998) look back to an earlier prairie poetic rather than ahead. But Mierau's cycle, "The Martyrdom Method" breaks new ground: the Mennonite imagination is so fixated on the traumatic Russian experience that it overlooks its European roots, an oversight Mierau begins to redress in a style reminiscent of Victor Jerrett Enns.

Today, Mennonite fiction and poetry stand ready to assume the full rhetorical riches of their *plautdietsch* origins. A proper orthography for this language has now been developed, and English-Low German dictionaries are at hand. It is not too much to assume that someone will do for Mennonite poetry what Armin Wiebe did for prose: when that happens, Mennonite literature will escape at last from plain-speech ideology — by using its chains to fashion freedom. □



# The past as prison

*'You can deny life's mysteriousness — just put blinders on and go through it — or you can embrace it'*

By Wayne Grady

**G**ARY ROSS WAS BORN in Toronto in 1948. After studying Canadian literature at the University of Toronto, he decided he wanted to live abroad whenever possible: he spent two years in England, a year in the south of France, and now has an apartment in Venice where he does a good deal of his writing. He worked as senior editor at *Weekend* magazine in the late 1970s, where he earned a reputation for being one of the toughest and most perceptive editors in the business, and from 1980 to 1987 was senior editor at *Saturday Night* under its former editor, Robert Fulford. Ross's first novel, *Always Tip the Dealer*, was published by McClelland & Stewart in 1981; in 1987 he wrote *Stung*, a biography of the embezzler Brian Molony that was named best nonfiction book of the year by the Crime Writers of Canada. Tears of the Moon, his latest novel, is published by Penguin Ebooks in Canada and Viking Ebooks in the U.S. Ross is a partner in the new publishing company, Macfarlane, Walter & Ross, and lives in Toronto, when he isn't writing in Venice or visiting his parents in White Rock, B.C.

**Books in Canada:** *This is your third book, and all of them investigate the criminal mind, to some extent. Crime and gambling were central to Always Tip the Dealer; Stung is a nonfiction account of Brian Molony, the assistant bank manager who embezzled millions of dollars from the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce in order to pay his gambling debts; and ROW Tears of the Moon is actually written from the point of view of a prisoner, Owen Wesley, who's been convicted of murdering his wife, Angela, and who keeps a kind of prison journal. What is it about criminals that attracts you?*

**Gary Ross:** Prisons fascinate me, partly because of their effect on the people in them, but also for their metaphorical possibilities, which is what I'm exploring in this book. The prison becomes the manifestation of Owen's inner life. One's life, I

believe, is one's active creation, and Owen has managed to invent a life of remorse and guilt and frustration and anger and unresolved relations with various people. A life of constriction.

**BiC:** *Even before he finds /d&in prison.*  
**Ross:** Yes. In a sense, his life is a figurative movement toward greater and greater constriction, and suddenly there he is, literally constricted, saying I don't understand why I'm here, convicted of murdering someone I loved. I didn't do it, it's a false conviction. Eventually he's in solitary confinement, which is constriction increased to the point of immobility. He's in a little cell, the worst cell in the worst place on earth, an old, antiquated, awful prison.

**BiC:** *There are times in most people's lives, I think, when solitary confinement would not be the worst of all places to be. But you want to be able to control it, I suppose.*

**Ross:** That's it. That's the secret. You have to choose it. Or at least, realize that you have chosen it by the way you've lived your life. While he is in the hole, Owen realizes that, whether you know it or not, every thought, every action, is a de&ration of

intent, a message from the past to the future: what you're going to be, who you're going to be, where you're going to go, what you're going to do. If you know it you take control of it. In his delirium, he thinks of the barriers between him and where he wants to be, and he goes through them. The doors of his cell, the electronic gate at the end of the corridor, the prison grounds, the unauthorized zone, the 20-foot walls, the coils of razor wire at the top of the walls, the guard towers — that what's between him and where he wants to be. And no one's going to put him there but himself. That's the fulcrum of the book.

But prisons are also interesting because they're such pressurized environments. They are tightly controlled places and yet anything can happen in them. People act in very raw, basic ways, and that's a compelling environment from a novelist's point of view.

**BiC:** *How did you research the prison? The language in the book seems to me to make use of authentic jargon — keep-lock, regulation issue, hacks — but in a very casual, familiar way. The prisoners drink a homebrew called pruno, for instance, but you never stop the narrative to explain what pruno is. At times I wondered whether you'd actually come into possession of a real prisoner's journal.*

**Ross:** Well, that's flattering, but no, it's an invention. I have spent a good deal of time in many prisons in Canada and the US. When I travel, I often visit prisons. When I was driving across upstate New York, for example, I ended up in Attica, and went to the prison there. I said to them, "I'm doing a book. Will you show me around?" And they did. When I was at *Saturday Night* I was going to write a story about Kingston Penitentiary. I never did the story, but I did do a lot of research for it. And of course the whole thing was refreshed when I was researching *Stung*, because Brian Molony was just getting out of prison when I first got involved with his story. I spent a great deal of time in the Kingston area, at the

prisons he'd been in — Joyceville and Bath, specifically — absorbing the places talking to people who'd been inside with him, correctional staff and so on.

**BiC:** *In Tears of the Moon, if prison is the metaphor for self-imprisonment, what's Owen's crime? Lack of self-knowledge?*

**Ross:** Yes. Own's larger self-deception is that it's all happening to him, that he's in no way the agent of his own life, that what happens to him is because of his absent father, or his being fired by his boss. His transformation involves coming to the exact opposite way of seeing his life — and I think Ron, the prison psychiatrist, is the catalyst for that. I wrote the therapy material by paying a friend of mine, a therapist to act the part of a prison psychiatrist. I explained the premise of the book to him, and I went to visit him every week. He would be Ron, and I would be Owen, and we stayed in character for the entire hour, and I taped the sessions. Now, almost none of what's in the book is a direct transcription of those tapes, but it was a wry helpful exercise because I was able to study the types of questions he asked, and the neutrality he maintained, to chart Owen's progress toward self-realization.

I" some ways thii is a novel about therapy, because what therapy does is help you to take control of yourself, let you realize that you are where you are because of the

way you think, the things you've done. At 39. I'm beginning to see that one's whole life is a construction, a construction of one's will, one's imagination, one's desire, one's energy — that the more of those things you put out, the more you steer yourself and create yourself. Ron expresses this to Owen at one point by saying he doesn't mean to discount the effects of things like racism, abuse, poverty, and so on. But how do you sort out the people who make their way through life from those who are at the mercy of life? It is a question of will, of creating your life in a very literal existential way.

**BiC:** *The title refers to a kind of pearl; Owen gives Angela a string of pearls and they become a recurring theme throughout the book. Owen is like a pearl — a thick shell formed around a central imperfection.*

**Ross:** Well, the way the book got its title is this: I'd begun writing it without knowing what its title was, and happened to see a program on television about pearl divers off Sri Lanka. The commentary mentioned that their word for pearl translated as "tears of the moon," and recounted the myth in which the earth and the moon were once one, they were separated, but always circle in sight of one another, never able to get closer, held in place by some gravitational force and so "ever able to break free from one another. Pearls are the moon's tears

that have fallen to Earth. And that seemed to me the dynamic between Angela and Owen. It also connected with the imagery of what a pearl is the way beauty is created out of something that is the opposite of beautiful, something insidious and repulsive.

**BiC:** *You mentioned that this is a novel about therapy. How did you mean that?*

**Ross:** Owen achieves his self-knowledge with help. He has the sustenance of his brother, who visits him without fail. That's a very important thing to someone in prison; I thii of the debate now about moving the old Laval prison up to Port Cartier in northern Quebec, a model prison in terms of facilities but 850 kilometres from Montreal. I suspect most prisoners would prefer to be in a hell-hole close to their families. Owen's also sustained by his relationship with Val, another inmate, who simply accepts him. And his breakthrough is p&p&d by his sessions with Ron. Ron helps him enormously. Owen at one point asks why Ron is not out helping ulcerous executives or sedated housewives. Why does he drive through those gates every day and listen to prisoners? Ron says it's what he does best, and he's paid to do it it's a job. But he also says he's interested in conscientizing, if that's a word, those forces that make us do what we do, and make us think we're doing something else.

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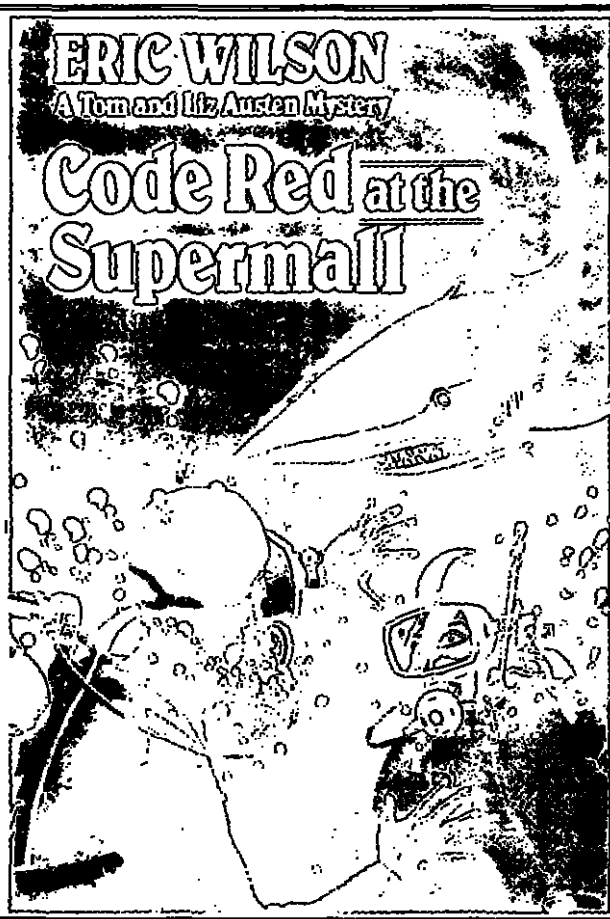
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**BiC:** Which is also what a novelist is interested in.

**Ross:** Yes. I suppose it is. The other thing that Ron says is that it seems to him that life is infinitely mysterious, and that this mysteriousness is what causes so much pain and anguish. And you can either deny life's mysteriousness, pretend it isn't there, fall into a kind of unmysterious life — just put blinders on and go through it — or you can embrace it.

**BiC:** But isn't that what therapy is against? Isn't the goal of therapy to demystify life?

**Ross:** In a sense. But to do that is to open yourself to larger mysteries. You never get to perfect self-understanding, you never completely break out. But the process of trying is very important, and that's what Ron wants Own to do.

**BiC:** How long did it take you to write *Tears of the Moon*?

**Ross:** A long time. Six years. I started it right after *Always Tip the Dealer* and was nearly finished it when I was approached by the lawyer representing Molony. Molony was then about to get out of prison, and had decided that he wanted his story told. A great many misperceptions had grown up around him — for example, that he had a couple of million dollars stashed away — he was about to have a child and was beginning to consider the long-term implications of what he had done. Penguin was going to bring *Tears of the Moon* out last year, but decided to set it back a year to take advantage of whatever success *Stung* might have. And I'm glad they did, because it gave me a chance to make some changes to *Tears* after working on *Stung* and learning more fully what prison is all about.

**BiC:** Did you think of *Tears* as a book about transition, and then decide to plan it in a prison, or did you set out to write a prison novel that developed into a novel about transition?

**Ross:** I sat down and started writing and wanted to see what came out, is more like it. I had a vague, broad sense of plot when I started, but that was it. I had the family background, Own's relationship with his father, who was a union organizer, and with his brother, and with Angela, and how that fit in. It just happened that the present tense of the novel is in prison. It also seemed to me to have a dramatic possibility — prison is a highly charged, irrational place, and so you can never tell what's coming. It's not like an advertising office, which is where Own works before Angela dies.

**BiC:** *Stung* is nonfiction and *Tears* is fiction. Did you learn anything from writing one that helped you with the other?

**Ross:** I tried to write *Stung* as if it were a novel. That is, I tried to exploit the dramatic possibilities at every turn, and there were lots of them. I wanted it to be very readable, to engage the reader with the narrative flow. I found it infinitely easier to write

nonfiction than fiction, easier to tailor research than to invent line after line. If you go out and do the work, talk to everybody, tape everybody, and get all the documentation, then the story and the characters are there on your desk. You just have to line them all up, and decide what should and shouldn't be there.

Having written fiction helped in the writing of *Stung*, because I was aware of how to structure things dramatically, how to exploit dramatic possibility. On the other hand, working on *Stung* taught me some thing about fiction. What I intend to do in my fiction now is to do even more intensive research. I researched prisons, I researched, in my own life, therapy, in order to write *Tears of the Moon*.

**BiC:** One of the things I liked about *Stung* was its attention to detail. Molony didn't just light a cigarette, he lit a Marlboro; he didn't just ass a match, he used a book of matches from a certain motel outside of Atlantic City; he didn't just turn on a radio, he turned on WCOW and listened to Waylon Jennings. And this kind of detail has carried over into *Tears*.

**Rosa:** Verisimilitude versus research, yes. In the case of fiction. I'm working on a new novel now — it's roughly half written — about two kids who grow up together, are best pals. One becomes a cop and the other becomes a criminal. The reason I'm held up writing is that I got to the point where the guy becomes a cop, and I didn't really know enough about what it's like to be a cop to carry on confidently. Working on *Stung*, I got to be close to a number of policemen, who were very, very helpful to me, and who let me right into their lives, and I suddenly realized this is how you create a cop. You research copdom before you sit down to invent it. That was the lesson from nonfiction that I think I can bring to fiction.

**BiC:** And now you're working on a screenplay of *Stung*.

**Ross:** Yes. Ted Kotcheff is supposed to direct the film, and has been engaged to work with me on the screenplay. My own emotional investment was in the writing of the book, so I'm looking at writing the screenplay as a paid educational experience. If I hit the jackpot — that is, if the film ever gets made — wonderful. Meanwhile, I'm learning what that world is all about. The idea is to stick as closely as possible to what actually happened, so I'm writing the screenplay by condensing or simplifying certain things that I had the leisure to explain in the book. But I'm sticking to the story. Now, who knows how many intentions the screenplay will go through? Brian Molony may end up being Tom Cruise with a cocaine habit driving a white Corvette. But as I'm writing, I see the real Brian Molony. So far, it's been a pleasant and instructive exercise. □

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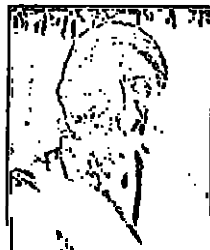
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# My little chickadee

Louise de Kiriline Lawrence writes of the web  
within the web, the interdependence of all living things'

By Pat Barclay



I KNOW OF no occupation so fulfilling as that of being a watcher." wrote Louise de Kiriline Lawrence in 1976. "The present is dominated by the natural stage and all the senses are focussed upon the amazing events that are constantly taking place." Yet when I finally catch up with her in a North Bay, Ontario, hospital, after a 1,100-kilometre drive and countless phone calls, this watcher par excellence is convalescing from a bout with the summer heat and is fast asleep. All I can see is a pair of white-socked feet and a cap of snow white hair above a face that looks, in repose, too gentle to belong to such a very strong lady.

At 94, Louise de Kiriline Lawrence is quite possibly the most remarkable woman in Canada. Certainly she is a remarkable nature writer. This spring Natural Heritage Press, which owns the rights to Lawrence's many books and magazine articles, reissued the first of her "watcher- books, *The Lighthouse Nest* (174 pages, \$12.95 paper). Strikingly illustrated with black-and-white drawings by Thoreau MacDonald, it describes a year in the life of a black-capped chickadee. Though Lawrence wrote it in 1945, *The Lighthouse Nest* has not dated, because it is unique. Read in conjunction with *To Whom the Wilderness Speaks*, the collection of nature pieces that Lawrence published in 1981, it will persuade even the congenial cynic that its author can actually understand and interpret the language of birds.

Lawrence named her black-capped chickadee "Peet," after the sound he made to signify "hello".

I fell in love with Peet the moment he curled his firm little claws around my finger. . . . That elfin grip was like a handclasp of friendship from another world. . . It

opened the gates to an undiscovered world, the fascination and grace of which I had never dreamed.

As the reader meets Peet's companions and shares in his griefs and joys, he or she can be forgiven for wondering whether Mrs. Lawrence just might be making some of it up. The solid body of scientific information contained in *To Whom the Wilderness Speaks*, however, soon dispels any doubts. On one occasion, for example, beginning at 3:00 a.m., the author spent 14 hours recording the songs of a red-eyed vireo (there were 22,197 of them) and then announces that the performance of the bird was remarkable! No wonder Lawrence has won so many distinguished awards, from the John Burroughs Memorial Medal in 1969 (the first Canadian among 44 winners) to an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Laurentian University.

Whether she is writing for the general or the more specialized reader, a strong vein of philosophical wisdom runs through all Lawrence's work. Speaking to a North Bay audience in 1970, she remarked:

The web within the web, the interdependence of every living thing upon the other and upon the whole of the environment. these, I believe, are the outstanding realities. They form the integrated script according to which the drama of life is enacted. evidenced alike in the blurred wingbeat of a humming bird, in the weed at my doorstep.

Lawrence built her "doorstep" on a 10-acre plot at Pimisi Bay, about 49 kilometres east of North Bay, Ontario. There she and her second husband, Len, lived for nearly 50 years, in the compact cabin that Peet the chickadee knew as "the lighthouse nest." It's an idyllic setting among tall white pines, small gardens, and glimpses of the bay between the trees. At a discreet distance stands the "guest cabin" where favoured visitors were accommodated. Another cabin held the huge quantities of birdseed with which Louise attracted her feathered visitors. Outside every window there's a feeding station and often a birdbath. When I visit the place, in August, it's like entering another world. I admire the Lawrences' beautiful home, browse through Louise's library, wander the well-kept bails, and all the while I can feel the ghosts of small birds watching from the trees. Of the real thing, there's not a peep. Where is everybody?

Waiting for another visit from Louise, probably. Though she and Len now live in a North Bay hospital, Louise still makes the short trip to Pimisi Bay whenever she gets the chance.

North Bay *Nugget* reporter Cindy Nuttall, who accompanied Lawrence on a recent visit, recalls that "When we came in off the trail, the birds started to sing! The place came to life when she was there. She stopped to listen and she said to them, 'I am here! I am here!'"

In *The Lighthouse Nest*, Lawrence explains that she "learned [Peet's] language. . . and soon we could hold long conversations with each other." This accomplished woman also speaks Swedish, Danish, Russian, French, and English. "Learning other languages opens up your perceptions and understanding," she says simply. Born a Swedish aristocrat in 1894, she became a Red Cross nurse and married Gleb Kirilin, a White Russian army officer, in 1917. Their tragic love story, which they acted out against the backdrop of the Russian Revolution, is poignantly told in *Another Winter, Another Spring* (1977; republished 1987). After Kirilin's death, Louise came to Canada as district nurse for Nipissing, Ontario, travelling by dogsled in winter and being placed in charge of the Dionne quintuplets by Dr. Dafoe in 1934. That experience persuaded her it was time to return to her first love, the appreciation of nature that she had learned from her father; soon after that, she began to write.

Louise de Kiriline Lawrence is content. "I am very satisfied with my life," she told a reporter in 1986. "It has been a marvellous life in so many ways." Her words recall those of the Old Pine in whose branches Peet finds shelter in *The Lighthouse Nest*: "When my time comes I shall fall without regret. Until then I stand." □

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## Cold comforts

By D. French

### LIVING ON WATER

by Matt Cohen

Viking (Penguin), 240 pages, \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 52167 5)

THE TITLE of Matt Cohen's new collection, *Living on Water*, is an apt one. The characters in the nine stories are definitely not on the Champagne Cruise: their mean slices of life are served up with a chilling indifference. Even the liquor is unreliable, although heroin is presented as predictably lethal.

In "lives of the Mind Slaves" Norman is feeling the encumbrances of age. He's 32 (32!) and his six-year-old Ph.D. has become a non-transferable ticket on the academic gypsy caravan. A move to Vancouver, the discovery of basketball, and the picked-up pieces of a relationship with Elisabeth lead him to define his malaise as "something in my blood has gone to sleep".

The story has its own soporific chronicle of an earlier escapade, tracing the overly familiar affair with a student, her pregnancy and abortion. (And why do so many writers repeat this story? Do they think the behaviour is remarkable? *Attractive?*) When Norman's oceanic, near-fatal moment is almost immediately experienced as research for a publication to guarantee him a tenured position, the wit of the moment is cold comfort to a dulled appetite.

Cairo adds no flavour to "Remember Me to London": the foreign location serves only to isolate Janis and her upset tummy, making her easy prey for Mark, a married American with abusive tendencies. Mark is allowed his infidelities, since a car accident and plastic surgery left his wife beautiful but alcoholic (not to be confused with the wife left beautiful but neurasthenic after plastic surgery following a car accident in Marilyn French's *The Bleeding Heart*). Mark is able to convince Janis it is her destiny to be a victim, but it's another woman who suggests that tranquilizers are a good way to blunt the passivity, which is presented as irrevocable.

Options lack generosity in

these stories; choices are made between lesser bads. "Racial Memories" searches for living space between the seeds of anti-Semitism and the over-ripe response of a sign lettered NAZI JEW KILLER. Transcendence is not on the menu, and moments of passion contain their own endings. The "collapsed prodigy" of "The Zeidman Effect" does get a second chance at greatness after years of mediocrity, yet his vision of the future suggests a warmed-over version of the past, the stalesness of survival.

In Cohen's fictive world, just to survive is no small potatoes. The most exuberant act of growth is the multiplication of cancer cells. Leukemia is (datedly) referred to as a cancer in "If You have to Talk," and the "white knights" of the over-productive blood are cleverly paired with the "white nights" of insomnia. David runs for his health and the positive action is described in a negative reverse — "exercise kills toxins" — with the toxins accepted as a given. A equally casual accord is given to a scriptwriter with leukemia, whose producer is named Yvan Youngblood. Life is random, and only the very narrow range of possibilities allows coincidence.

Paolo, in "The Romantic," suffers from *bovarysme*, the longing to be a participant in a colossal romance. The promise of his early life fades, however, and it is as a semi-alcoholic journalist that he tastes the bitter fruits of squalid affairs, his heart diseased in more than the organic sense. His story is told by Dr. Weinstein, whose own romantic impulse is summed up in the equation *to kiss and be kissed is to exist*. It's a meagre recipe for survival, lip service to hunger being satisfied and no more. Only the quest for passion is passionate; the *bovarysme* becomes all-consuming. Perhaps not surprisingly, this is the point where the heroin comes into the picture.

In the title story, "Living on Water," the marriage of Maurice and Eleanor runs hot and cold with a fluid clarity.

For all their stringy toughness, the stories are very well done. Cohen is in control. If his personal vision is relentlessly grim, his method of presentation is measured and exact: the reader is not

manipulated into depression, but convinced of its validity as a response.

And yet, one wonders at this use of authorial privilege. The focus on life's aridity and disenchantment, especially so far removed from the real horrors in the environment of pollution and politics, begins to seem a bit smug, perhaps even condescending. (What's a good wine for the middle class? "I don't know *how* to be happy.") By limiting the richness of his characters' lives, Cohen also limits the flavour of the stories: the palate doesn't discriminate between bitter herbs.

It's not necessary to provide first-class seats for the passage the characters make through their (and our) lives, but it would be nice, once in a while, to let someone get a free ride on a pink duck. □

## Liberace and our prime minister

By Christopher Moore

### THE OXFORD BOOK OF CANADIAN POLITICAL ANECDOTES

edited by J. T. McLeod

Oxford, 352 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 19 5406672)

EDITOR Jack McLeod tells us he omitted two anecdotes for every one included in *The Oxford Book of Canadian Political Anecdotes* — just to avoid having a "tome" of 800 pages. This seems a "odd" stricture on a book that aspires to be a standard reference. *Columbo's Canadian Quotations*, surely the model for works of this kind, has 800 pages and is all the more authoritative for them. Tome us no "lite" tomes, Oxford.

The 260 pages that publisher and editor allow themselves are filled with good and funny and often bizarrely revealing stories. There are wonderful tales from the golden days of high Victorian Ottawa, frequently involving some statesman "with a quart of wine visibly concealed about his person." The stories are almost as good and rather more pointed as we move towards the present:

anecdotes of Mulroney are consistently hostile. Turner ones mostly dull. AU are nicely arranged and concisely introduced, and the editor chooses his sources skillfully: Creighton but also Peter Waite, Richard but also Sandra Gwyn, Hansard but also a whole series of antecedent anecdotarians.

There is much to delight here, enough laugh-out-loud and "just let me read you this" stories to make even Simon Reisman mellow — at least until he and his ego discover that neither of them rated a mention. But while what's here is good, the book is haunted by all those anecdotes in the 540 missing pages.

There's an anecdote to capture Trudeau's cool hauteur as he describes MPs as "nobodies fifty yards from Parliament Hill." (Oddly, it is told as if discreditable to Trudeau, though surely the only law in his definition was the 50-yard rule.) But now that the nobodies must apologize when they vote *no-confidence* in their own leader, what we need is an anecdote to explain those mindless hockey-arena extravaganzas where leaders are chosen for them. That one might end, "Well, Elmer and I are voting for Turner because he looks like a winner."

We get C. D. Howe's famous "What's a million?" But as tax "reform" gets ever further from the Carter Commission's dictum, we really need someone from the Business Council on National Issues savely to explain why a dollar isn't a dollar and is getting less so.

We discover that when the United Farmers of Ontario took power, their slogan really was "stable government." It's nice to know a party with the initials UFO once ruled Ontario — but where's the anecdote to explain what planet Sinclair Stevens comes from?

Space limitations permit few nods to provincial and local political styles or minorities. Amor de Cosmos makes it, but Peter Lougheed doesn't. We find out how women became persons, but there's not a single anecdote to suggest that native people (Crowfoot? Dan George? Harold Cardinal?) exist in Canadian political life. Lord Dufferin gives a very confused account of the last spike, but there's nothing from the manic Van Horne — or from Pierre Berton! National politics

dominate, and in Ottawa the pecking order is strict. Some of the brightest Parliamentary repartee involves two MPs called Charlton and Lafortune, but good stories of nobodies i" and OUT of Parliament are inevitably crowded out by stories about the big names and their "lore colourful aspects: the bib"-lous John A. the crystal-balling Mackenzie King, John Crosbie.

One story has Lester Pearson being self-deprecating about a hotel marquee that read "WELCOME LIBERACE and Our Prime Minister." This collection has the same wobble of confidence. The preface confesses disarmingly that no Canadian wit can match a Churchill or a Kennedy. ("fact the Churchill and Kennedy examples given are trite and tired, likely to impress mostly those who believe that only foreigners have enough star quality to become anecdotes. Oxford's slim Canadian anecdotes, modestly leaving out most of its favourite stories sometimes seems world class in the way of a Toronto real-estate promotion, that is, aspiring to polite imitation of how they do things in London or New York.

John Crosbie would doubtless say that if there were a need for this book, London or New York would have done it for us anyway. But the scourge of literati and encyclopedists is unlikely to read it. He doesn't even read his own legislation.

Now there's an anecdote for the second, enlarged, edition. □

## Where the ducks go in winter

By John Goddard

### IN SEARCH OF J.D. SALINGER

by Ian Hamilton

*Randorn House, 222 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 394 53463 9)*

IAN HAMILTON knew he was taking a sleuth's job when he decided to write a book about the life and work of American novelist J.D. Salinger, author of the brilliant, audacious classic, *The Catcher in the Rye*.

For more than 20 years Salinger has lived as a hermit in Cornish, New Hampshire, about a three-and-a-half-hour drive southeast of Montreal, refusing all interviews, ducking all photographers, and locking up everything he writes. His contempt for academics, publishers, and literary critics is legendary, and there was

no reason for Hamilton to think Salinger would welcome a full-length biography. Or was there?

Hamilton notified Salinger, who wrote back saying he had already suffered so many intrusions on his privacy that he could endure no more of them, but he didn't suppose he could stop Hamilton from writing the book.

Hamilton studied the letter carefully. It was as frigidly impersonal as it could be," he says, "and somewhat too composed, too pleased with its own polish for me to accept it as a direct cry from the heart." He showed it to one or two of his more sardonic literary friends, who interpreted the letter as, "Please go ahead." Hamilton was keen to do so, observing that Salinger "was famous for not wanting to be famous," and fair game for biography provided rules of propriety and good taste were observed.

oot of decency, Hamilton decided not to bother Salinger's ex-wife, children, or sister, and picked 1965 as the cutoff date for his research: the year Salinger withdrew from public life. But another side of Hamilton was eager to probe, a side he acknowledges in the form of a separate character in the book, one split from Hamilton's personality, much as Salinger's characters seem to be from his.

The biographer and his sleuthing alter ego visited Salinger's former neighbourhoods and schools to dig up old acquaintances, letters, and writings, bringing all the information to bear on Salinger's development as a writer. A well-crafted narrative pulls the reader along, and while the book is tasteful and scholarly, it also offers much intimate detail on the life of one of the most original American writers of the century.

His father, Solomon, was a well-to-do meat-and-cheese importer in New York who expected his son to become a meat-and-cheese importer as well, and young Jerry's lack of interest in the business became the focus of father-son tensions. His mother had been an actress, an attractive and gracious woman. *The Catcher in the Rye* is dedicated solely to her.

One of the most surprising chapters tells about Salinger landing on Utah Beach as a soldier in the D-Day invasion of the Second World War. He marched all the way to Paris, entering through the Porte d'Italie and ending up at the Ritz Hotel where he met Ernest Hemingway. Within a few months Salinger was in a hospital suffering some kind of breakdown,

from which he emerged married to a Frenchwoman on the medical staff.

Hamilton, who is British, established his reputation in America with a 500-page biography of poet Robert Lowell, published in 1982. He says his interest in Salinger began at age 17, when he came across *The Catcher in the Rye* in a used book store in Darlington, County Durham, and bought it on the strength of its outlandish opening sentence. The book taught him "that literature can speak for you, not just to you," he says. "It seemed to be 'my book'." He discovered later he was perhaps the one-millionth adolescent to skulk around pretending to be Holden Caulfield, the novel's narrator/anti-hero, since the book appeared in 1951.

Holden continued to fascinate Hamilton the mature scholar and critic, as did characters from Salinger's other published works, which include *Nine Stories*, *Franny and Zooey*, and *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: As Introduction*. But during the course of research, the biographer's infatuation with the author seems gradually to have diminished. Who forever generous and unjudgmental, Hamilton leaves the impression that J. D. Salinger would not be a pleasant person to know, any more than Holden Caulfield would.

Salinger sued Hamilton over quotations from early letters, forcing Hamilton to make changes that delayed publication of the book. The lawsuit brought Salinger a slew of publicity as well, almost guaranteeing the biographer's success. □



## The Big Easy

By Kenneth McGoogan

### DESIRELESS: A NOVEL OF NEW ORLEANS

by Thomas York

*Viking (Penguin), 292 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 81940 9)*

IN 1966, when I was hanging out in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district knowing better than to trust anyone over 30, an aging

poet from New Orleans (a would-be guru who was all of 34), told me about the Seventeen Scale he'd devised to measure writers. Only the greatest writers and poets, he declared, the ones who had "realized Duality" and experienced rebirth, could hope to become Seventeens. They were True Artists.

Most writers were Sixes, Sevens, Eights, or Nines. And it wasn't simply a matter of craft. A Nine could be as skilled a wordsmith as a Seventeen, but because he hadn't reconciled the Opposite sites in all their guises, he couldn't say anything profound. Ten was the turning point. A superb craftsman could become a Nine, but he couldn't get into those double digits unless he realized Duality.

*Desireless: A Novel of New Orleans* by the late, great Thomas York, recently brought the Seventeen Scale back to me to all its psychedelic splendour. York, who died last January in a car accident, was never destined to become a famous novelist — a celebrated Nine. His six novels are complex and demanding, rich in language, allusion and ideas, but not even *Trapper* (1981), that monumental novel of the North, is more richly rewarding, more profoundly spiritual, than *Desireless*. This is an enigmatic tantalizingly suggestive work, which celebrates the crazy, metaphysical dance of Yin and Yang, Eros and Agape, Christ and the Devil, and insists on the centrality of rebirth: to be saved, the hem must die and be born again.

York, an earthy yet erudite man, wrote his doctoral thesis on Malcolm Lowry. *Desireless: A Novel of New Orleans* recalls Lowry's masterpiece *Under the Volcano*, not only in theme, but also in texture and story-line. James Antoine Girard is the 33-year-old scion of a Deep South plantation family. Plagued by "a vague sense of an appointment, pending or missed," Girard, who has already failed in one attempt at suicide, has come home to New Orleans to die: "Having died once, and after that the treatment (at the state nuthouse), his only desire this time around was to die desireless."

Directionless, tractionless, debauched, Girard drifts around a steamy New Orleans redolent of his problematic past. A" old acquaintance pays him to recruit an ex-girl-friend named Valerie — once Miss Black New Orleans, now down and nearly out — for a snuff film.

The novel safely in motion,



York flashes back to Girard's childhood, showing us how it gave rise to an unhappy adolescence and a despairing adulthood. As a boy, Girard watched his faithless, domineering mother drive his father to divorce, bankruptcy, and suicide. He has new friends or forgotten and his own life, he believes, has been dominated and controlled by three fierce viragos — the mother he both loves and hates; his older sister, once a beauty queen, now a U.S. senator; and his beautiful wife, Lee Anne, a prancing Southern belle not unlike his mother.

As a college student, a football player on the road to stardom, Girard rebelled by entering the "Big Sleep," spending 16 hours a day in bed — every day. When that failed to drive away the women, he tried alcohol, promiscuity, and finally suicide. His mother had him put away in a mental hospital, assigned a sadistic guard to "take care of him," until he escaped. Now, inexplicably, he's back. . . .

York uses language like a poet, and has an exceptional ear for dialogue. Here's Valerie after Girard, returned, suggests that she's "a black hole" he fell into and is still climbing out of: "Hogwash! You been in so many, you done got confused. Your black hole weren't me. Maybe it were th' river, or maybe your own mind. I'm th' only thing normal ever happened to you, and where did it get me? I'm th' one in the hole" — she held up both hands to call the kitchen to witness — "th' same black hole I was in."

The atmospheric effects, the evocations of New Orleans, are stunning. Here's the city as Girard sees it: "Cesspool, sump hole, miasmal swamp that it was, everyone in New Orleans ate oysters and drank bourbon and stayed up all night and in rut the year round. Eve' the roaches and rats grew bigger here, reproduced more often. . . . 'The Big Easy,' they called it: a suppurating lesion, an open sore, a river, turbid and dark. And he had come back, not to resist it, but to flow with it: down the river of regret, through the delta of desire, to the gulf of oblivion, why not? He felt himself being sucked dry and drained, nerveless and juiceless, a bone without marrow, a stone. . . ."

On one level, *Desireless* can be seen as treating the battle of the sexes and coming up with some decidedly unfashionable perspectives: Girard ends up murdering a mother figure, on another, deeper level, *Desireless* is a metaphysical allegory (York was, after all, a

United Church minister — if an exceptionally "likely one.) Girard is a Christ figure — 33 and ready to die — whose search for salvation has a curiously Buddhist cast. I" the end, Girard finds life in death, dying desireless in the district of Desire — and how's that for enigma?

It's tempting to see this novel as eerily prophetic — as a final testament, a last message of hope from a man who in this life had completed his work. This much can be said with certainty: York was well into those double digits: A Seventeen. □

## Being and nothingness

By Joan Barfoot

### FASTYNGANGE

by Tim Wynne-Jones

Lester & Orpen Deansys, 288 pages, \$15.95 paper (ISBN 0 88619 160 2)

IN *Fastyngange* we have a woman with a mysteriously disastrous domestic history, who leaves behind (or does she?) her home city of Toronto for a trip to Somerset England. There she is drawn to a tumbledown castle called *Fastyngange*, whose only inhabitant is a nameless nothing — a deep, dark, tempting, talking hole with a consciousness all its own, if not much conscience.

Or perhaps the hole isn't quite me, the castle's sole occupant. There appear eventually ghosts as well, or if not exactly ghosts, manifestations of those who lived during the ages of the castle's history, and who plunged down the shaft to not-quite-instant deaths. They menace the visitor. Alexis, in fear she will steal it from them. Whichever of course she intends to do, for — after learning that her troubled ex-husband once had an encounter with this very hole — it occurs to her that it might be the very thing to cure him.

*Fastyngange* is a ghost story for grown-ups. It's also a love story of sorts, as the main (human) character, Alexis, absorbs all sorts of horrors with the aim of restoring and coring her ex-husband (or herself). And *Fastyngange* may also top a particularly grown-up terror: is there a line between sanity and madness, and can you be absolutely sure at any moment which side of it you're on? Do you really know that what you hear and see is what's being said by whoever you're looking at?

The novel's plot, of which there is a good deal, would sound even more foolish than most plots do

when they're synopsisized. If only because there's such a lot of to-ing and fro-ing that may not really be happening. Then there's the sizeable cast, and the fact that in *Fastyngange* nothing is what it seems. Since that is the author's intention — the blurring of time and space and the barriers between animate and inanimate are among the book's more captivating elements — response to *Fastyngange* probably depends more on a reader's own taste than is the case for a good deal of fiction.

I should confess, at this point, that my own taste does not normally run to the fabulous and terrifying — but I can be lured. I was reminded, reading *Fastyngange*, of times when I have been. With John Fowles and, say, *The Magus*, when I was willing to follow all the tortuous twists of time and plot and character only wondering, sometimes in irritation, what mind game Fowles was going to try on next. Or Doris Lessing and, say, *The Four-Gated City*, with her explorations of madness/sanity and my willingness to dive into the matter right along with her.

I resist *Fastyngange*, however. I am not absorbed, willingly or unwillingly. I become cranky about it and, worse, bored. It seems self-consciously obscure, needlessly, heavily mystifying in some places and blushingly obvious in others. The writing, with its unfantastic words and rhythms and occasional preciousness, doesn't seem to reflect in style the book's fantastic story.

On the other hand, there are delightful exchanges between the wonderfully articulate, sardonic, ironic, dangerous hole and other characters, especially the drunk who curls up beside the hole in an alley to listen to the story. The self-described "forgettery," the place where people toss their memories and their lives, the thing, or no-thing, that speaks to people's loneliness and their

alienation." the hole is not only the narrator of this tale, but a wonderful character.

Nearing the end, one thinks, well, it'll be interesting to see how all this is resolved. And it does conclude, although in what strikes me as a disappointingly 20th-century, psychotherapeutic sort of way, so that what wonder there is disappears down the hole (Which, Toronto residents take note, is now apparently situated in an alley just off Queen Street) What I can't decide is whether my sense of tedium is the fault of *Fastyngange*, myself, or an unfortunate unchemical reaction between the two. True fantasy fans may well be spellbound □

## Death in the garden

By Rupert Schieder

### CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE

by Rodney Hall

Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 214 pages, \$23.50 cloth (ISBN 374 118 892)

OPENING WITH the police investigation of a deathbed confession, *Captivity Captive* seems to be heading for the crime fiction shelf. Conforming in the rules of that genre, the narrator keeps the reader waiting until the last chapters to learn the truth about the murderers and their motives. In the meantime, however, Rodney Hall has involved the reader in other, diverse, far more complex concerns. Diversity and complexity are not surprising in a work by this 55-year-old Australian.

Rodney Hall has been a professional actor, performing musician, writer of music-dramas for radio, film critic, university teacher, and travelling lecturer in foreign affairs. Since 1962 he has had 26 books published in Australia and abroad, including 11 collections of poetry, two biographies, art criticism, a study of social services and the Aborigines, and four novels. His thii novel, *Just Relations*, won Australia's top literary prize, the Miles Franklin Award, for 1982. Recently he has been in Canada as the recipient of the Canada-Australia Prize for 1986.

The relatively few pages of his fourth novel, *Captivity Captive*, are packed with evidence of these diverse and complex concerns. Rodney Hall combines the historical, the legendary, and mythic with his fertile imagination and invention. Appended to the novel are historical notes giving the





sparse details of his three sources: a monument in a cemetery in southern Queensland to the three Victims of a horrible tragedy perpetrated... on December 26th, 1898," the headlines in the *Townsville Chronicle* the following day, and a 1977 book on the still "unsolved" mystery"

The novel includes references to the history of the Australia continent: the "blacks," as the first-person narrator calls the ancient Koori people, the immigration, here chiefly from Ireland, the settlers' shift from Tasmania north into Queensland, the clearing of the thick bush and the contact with the Aborigines, the hanging of Ned Kelly, the return of the "exploited" colonial troops from the First World War up to the rise of the "faceless, new men" of the 50s.

In the final sentences of the appended note, Hall says, "AU else is my invention. . . . The character of the persons involved, their physical appearance, the setting, conversations, motives, and confessions are fictitious." And it is through Hall's wide-ranging invention, his fertile imagination, and his "robing, penetrating insight into human nature, particularly in its bleakest, blackest aspects, that the three victims and the rest of their family come to exercise, during the relatively brief reading time, an obsessive power over the reader.

The narrator, Pat Murphy, assumes the role of family "historian," "to celebrate — significant, ominous verb — "our little world." The legendary aspects of this world are indicated by the sign posted at the entry by the narrator's grandfather: Paradise. It is, however, a savage paradise, presided over by Pa and Mum, two giants, themselves "victims of an unwanted, unnatural fertility." They wield their power over their 10 sons and daughters, Mum by her "mulish obstruction" and Pa by his "menacing rage" and "crippling [literally] violence." Even if the word *dominated* did not appear, the resemblance to certain southern U.S. writers would be inescapable. The captivity of those who cannot escape the jealous tyranny and dominating, perverted love of these parrots ends in double incest. The resultant murders shatter the suffocating power of the presiding giants of this "labyrinth," this "Paradise."

Rodney Hall the poet is evident from the first page of the novel, with the image of the crow flapping in the eyes of the lying confessor, to the last, with the analogy between the narrator and St.

Patrick. He is evident, too, in the relation implied between the blood sacrifice of the Aborigines and the incest and ensuing murders, and in the compression of the form and the density of the style. There are passages in which the language becomes too self-conscious, drawing attention to itself by its startling ingenuity. In other passages Rodney Hall the thinker intrudes, loading the central characters with a weight or significance that they cannot support. Hall needs the larger scope and the larger cast of his more successful thii novel. *Just Relations*. There his eccentric, grotesque figures, who bring to mind those of Jack Hodgins, come (somewhat) nearer to being able to accomplish Hall's ambitious — often to — ambitious — purposes. Here, depending on the resources of the first-person narrator, Hall has tried to compress too much, virtually a paradigm of Australia's settlement and growth, into about one-third of the space of that previous novel. □

## Divertimenti

By I. M. Owen

### SINS FOR FATHER KNOX

by Josef Skvorecky  
translated by  
Kaca Polackova Henley  
Lester & Orpen Dennys, 288 pages,  
\$14.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 88619 195 5)

IF YOU ADMIRE Josef Skvorecky, as I do, you'll of course want to read this book. It's a sequel to *The Mournful Demeanour of Lieutenant Boruvka*, and if you admire that book — as I don't very much — you'll probably be pleased with this one.

The short story is usually an unsatisfactory form for detective fiction. (G.K. Chesterton's Father Brown stories are an exception: Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, I maintain against the world, are not.) The overriding necessity of setting forth the plot clearly, complete with all the necessary clues, leaves little room in "short story for the elaboration of character and atmosphere that marks distinguished detective novels and distinguished short stories; the story is reduced to a puzzle and not much more. If it's well conceived, that can be fun, but it barely makes it as literature.

In *Sins for Father Knox*, Skvorecky makes the best of this by openly presenting his 10 stories as games. The title refers to Monsignor Ronald Knox, the

notable Oxford figure and man about literature who in 1929 issued 10 commandments for detective writers. Thus there are two challenges to the reader in each story: identify the criminal, and determine which of the Knox commandments has been broken. Near the end of each story, Skvorecky pauses to address the reader directly, announcing that all the clues are now in and we should be able to solve the problem for ourselves. And in an appendix he gives 10 "ab-solutions," pointing out the sins in all the stories.

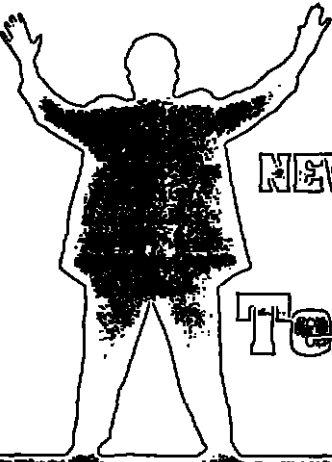
*The Mournful Demeanour of Lieutenant Boruvka* struck me as amusing but slight; this book is perhaps a little more amusing, but eye" slihter. And to" much of the amusement comes from a gig-gly, Peeping-Tom approach to sex that exactly suits the adolescent' Danny in *The Swell Season*, but not the middle-aged Lieutenant Boruvka or Eve Adam, the over-35 nightclub singer who appears in the first story as a prisoner whom Boruvka believes to have been wrongly convicted of murder, and in the rest as a gifted amateur detective.

Unlike the earlier hook, this one was written after Skvorecky

left Czechoslovakia, which is perhaps why eight of the stories — all but the first and last — take place in other countries. Eve Adam goes on an international tour that takes her to Sweden, Italy, New York City, upstate New York, San Francisco, and the Queen Elizabeth on the return voyage from New York. As is the way with fictional detectives, she is fated to stumble on a crime wherever she is.

Lieutenant Boruvka and Eve Adam share a quality common to the great detectives of fiction and lacking in the Watsons and the Scotland Yard bunglers, not to mention Lord Peter Wimsey: a firm grasp of the obvious. Here let me record my disagreement with Alberto Manguel, who last year in these pages objected to the first story in *The Mournful Demeanour of Lieutenant Boruvka* on the ground that the solution was too obvious. In fact it turns on essentially the same point as three of the most famous stories in the genre, Poe's "The Purloined Letter," Conan Doyle's "Silver Blaze," and Chesterton's "The Invisible Man": the fact that stares all the characters in the face but only one of them sees. And Skvorecky gives this idea an extra

# World of One



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comic twist by making the entire story consist of the efficient Sergeant Malek's voluble explanation of the evidence he has laboriously gathered, while Boruvka keeps trying to interject the obvious point that renders all the sergeant's hard work superfluous.

*The Mournful Demeanour of Lieutenant Boruvka* had three of them very good at writing English prose. The least bad was Kaca Polackova Henley, who has done the whole of this book. Again her work is adequate, but it still reads like a translation, which is especially troublesome when the characters are supposed to be native English-speakers speaking English. I trust the next volume will be done by Paul Wilson. □



## Desperate remedies

by Sara Wade Rose

### IN THE SLEEP ROOM

by Anne Collins

*Levy & Orpen Dennis, 320 pages, \$16.95 paper (ISBN 0 88619 198 X)*

A LOT OF press ink has gone towards covering the seemingly endless cause of the "mad movement," the ex-patients of the Allan Memorial Institute in Montreal who discovered that their 1950s electroshock treatment, induced insulin comas, and sensory deprivation therapy were paid for by the US Central Intelligence Agency. Since they filed the case in 1980, the nine plaintiffs have received no satisfaction either from the CIA or the Canadian government, which seems more intent on appeasing the American government than protecting its own citizens.

Anne Collins, who chronicled the great Canadian abortion debate; in *The Big Evasion*, has pored over transcripts and interviewed several of those patients — as well as the wife of the doctor who "treated" them — to put together *In the Sleep Room*, her

account of the sad story behind the lawsuit. At midcentury, Montreal's Allan Memorial Institute was at the forefront of Canadian psychiatric practice, considering mental illness as a disorder to be treated rather than a madness to be feared. Its first director was Scottish-born Ewen Cameron, once part of the psychiatric team that judged whether Rudolf Hess was fit to stand trial at Nuremberg. Cameron's first act at the Allan was to unlock the doors and send many of the inmates home after treatment, convinced that a hospital for the mentally ill should allow them to function as much as possible in ordinary society. His colleagues caught up with his enthusiasm and believed in his methods. And as those methods developed, none of them believed in questioning "the Chief," as Cameron was called, until it was too late for his patients.

Intent on carving out a Nobel Prize-winning discovery in the treatment of schizophrenia, Cameron decided that portions of patients' tape-recorded conversations with staff psychiatrists — mostly those that contained revelations of some kind — should be played back to them. Not once, not twice, but endlessly. The woman on whom he first tried the treatment had a violent breakdown. Cameron's reaction was "I did not think that the playback was completely responsible for this but there was no doubt, to my mind, that it was largely responsible. I now began to experience that pleasant anticipatory feeling of having got my hands on something that did something." He called it "psychic driving." What he had discovered, of course, was rudimentary brainwashing.

Cameron refined his technique by instructing his staff to play the repeated revelations to patients during a chemically induced sleep that sometimes lasted as long as 30 days. In almost all cases, the patients resisted the message at first — it might be as mild as "your parents love you" — but after six or seven days began passively to accept it. Small wonder that after Cameron published his findings in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* in 1936 he was approached by a Colonel James Monroe of the New York-based Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology. Was Dr. Cameron interested in some grant money from his mysterious foundation? He certainly was. And that is how the CIA came to fund the brainwashing of so many unwitting Canadians in the cold-

war race to conquer the human mind.

Strange to say, *In the Sleep Room* makes the CIA connection seem of little importance. The true horror of the story lies in what the psychiatric profession in its infancy was willing to do to the trusting in the name "I treatment" Peggy Edwards, now the senior outpatient nurse in the psychiatry department at Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto and a former ward nurse for Dr. Cameron, says of those days. "We were sort of imbued with the spirit. We had this sense of privilege . . . that he was on the verge of a discovery and that we were going to be there with him. So when he started things like his LSD experiments, his psychic driving — we all just accepted it. When one looks back at it now it's kind of horrifying." More chilling still was that Cameron's tactics were largely accepted by his professional colleagues, and Collins ably chronicles the sort of medical machismo that led this to be so.

When he realized that he was wrong, Cameron was professional enough to admit it — if only professionally. In February 1963, four years before his death from a heart attack, Cameron told the American Psychopathological Association in New York City that he had found psychic driving to be a blind alley. The patients upon whom it had been practised were left depressed, uncomprehending, incontinent, the wreckage on a beach when the tide has gone out. It is indeed small wonder, as Collins concludes, that many of them are suing the CIA, because Cameron himself is no longer alive to answer to them. □

## Those new blue genes

By Norman Sigurdson

### GENETHICS: THE ETHICS OF ENGINEERING LIFE

by David Suzuki and Peter Knudtson

*Stoddart, 384 pages, \$28.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7737 2152 5)*

IT IS NOW a cliché to say that the scientist has become the priest of our modern age, but there is a good deal of truth in that perception. Just as the majority of people in the medieval world did not bother themselves with niceties of theological debate, trusting instead that the priests were looking out for their best interests vis-

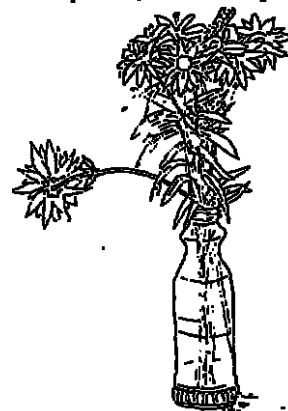
à-vis the cosmic forces that controlled their destinies, we today place our trust in science. Yet few of us ever take the time to work out for ourselves exactly what it is that these mysterious men and women in white lab coats should be doing on our behalf.

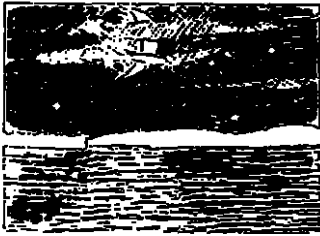
Nearly every one among us has some sort of opinion on the government's latest taxation policy or the latest court ruling in a celebrated case, no matter how ignorant we are of economics or jurisprudence. Inevitably though we allow sensitive decisions on scientific priorities to be made with little or no public debate, blithely putting our faith in the modern maxim, "If it can be done, let's do it." Only when things go wrong — acid rain or holes in the ozone layer — do we take notice, and then turn again to the scientists to repair the damage.

*Genethics* (the title is a "recombinant" one, splicing together genetics and ethics) is then a timely and important book that strives to tight this wrong, offering the layman a "opportunity to reach informed conclusions on what the limits ought to be for the burgeoning science of genetics. This is a guide, as the authors say, "to help individuals through the uncharted, often treacherous waters of genetics and morals."

The authors, David Suzuki, Canada's foremost popularizer of science, and Vancouver-based science writer David Knudtson, show that the time to make the decisions on how the fruits of a new technology should be utilized is when that technology is in its relative infancy. The new field of genetic engineering has the potential to change not only how we live our lives, but who we are. Now is the time for society to decide what ethical limits should be placed on research and experimentation using this powerful new tool. In short, it is up to us to impose our own moral world-view on our priests.

To this end, the authors present





their own "ten commandments" in the form of ten "genetic principles" that should guide us towards a moral consensus on where we want work on genetics to proceed. The first of these principles is the most basic: To grasp many of the difficult ethical issues arising from modern genetics, one must first understand the nature of genes — their origins, their role in the hereditary process of cells and the possibility of controlling them."

For most of us that is more easily said than done. The first third of the book is a primer on genetics — DNA RNA, chromosomes, meiosis, mitosis, the works. This portion of the book may prove heavy going for many readers, partly since the authors have striven not to talk down or oversimplify, and partly because the prose is plodding and uninspired. This does not read like Lewis Thomas or Carl Sagan, but like the introductory biology text most of us skimmed in college, which is why we are so ignorant about science in the first place!

By the end of the first five chapters the persistent reader should be able, if not to grasp fully all the intricacies of "the dance of the chromosomes," at least to get the gist of things. Each of the following eight chapters explores a particular issue in genetics, and propounds another genetic principle, illustrated in "moral fables." The authors generously allow that those who find the first five chapters too "technically demanding" may skip ahead and wade straight into the murky depths of these moral quagmires.

Most of the genetic principle 3 involve a refutation of the fallacy that if something is technically possible it should be attempted. Biological warfare, for example ("a misapplication of genetics"), is morally unacceptable, as is the "tinkering with human germ cells" that can affect heredity in unknown ways. Research, say the authors, should be limited to work on "somatic cells" that are not passed on to future generations. The authors also warn us to be on guard not only against intentional manipulation of genetic molecules but also that it is our duty to "minimize environmentally in-

duced damage to our DNA" from radiation and pollution.

The authors' final genetic principle takes a bow to the latest intellectual fad, New Age holism. We must look for answers to our moral questions regarding the new genetics not to western science or Western philosophy but to "rich, cross-cultural realms that embrace other ways of knowing." These include "the ancient writings of Buddhist and Hindu scholars, the sacred texts of Islam and the world-views of American Indian peoples." Conspicuous by its absence is any mention of the ancient writings or sacred texts of Jewish or Christian traditions. Perhaps our new priests, even while embracing the New Age, do not like to be reminded of their so recently vanquished predecessors. □

## Northern horizon

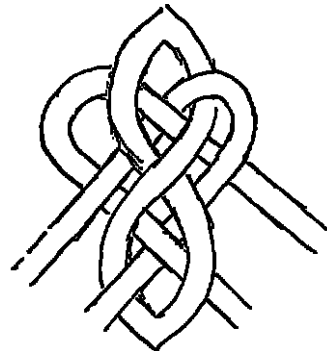
By M. T. Kelly

### "THE ORDERS OF THE DREAMED": GEORGE NELSON ON CREE AND NORTHERN OJIBWAY RELIGION AND MYTH, 1823

edited by Jennifer S. H. Brown and Robert Brightman

University of Manitoba Press, 266 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88755 139 4)

NINETEENTH-CENTURY fur trader George Nelson presents a modern reader with a living picture of an ancient boreal world: the spiritual universe of the sub-Arctic. This was a world as alien from Nelson's world as a Martian's (as it is from our own). Yet no matter how confused Nelson's writing gets, he is able to make us feel the reality of what he describes, from the tensile strength in the saplings Indians used in shaking-tent ceremonies — the spirits really did seem to twist the trees — to the outrage and fear of someone convinced he is



bewitched. Nelson makes us believe in, or at least share his doubts about, native religion. Here is a winter world of extreme and grinding weather, so unlike the green summer wilderness of canoe trips, cottages, and much of the Canadian imagination. In *The Orders of the Dreamed* a reader senses the low sky, the cold, the stones that speak, and the "gloomy regions" of the North lit by flashes of supernatural lightning.

Nelson's 1823 letter to his father describing Indian religion isn't literature, like Samuel Hearne's classic *A Voyage From Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772*, but it wasn't intended to be. Hearne walked 3,000 miles across the barrens, then took his journal and reworked it into a book Nelson's document was dashed off, and it shows. In spite of the division of the text into paragraphs and subjects by editors Jennifer Brown and Robert Brightman, Nelson's writing feels rushed, confused, as if he had so much to tell that he kept forgetting where he was in his narrative. This is a reflection of both his personality and his circumstances: he was isolated thousands of miles from his home, surrounded by an ocean of land and an alien people, constantly worried not only about having enough paper but also about getting dog enough to eat, his periods of intense activity interspersed with monotony. Yet in spite of his handicaps and his own prejudice, sexism, and feelings of cultural superiority, Nelson is as open as a man of his time could be. Brown and Brightman have handled the issue of Nelson's ethnocentricity with tact and scrupulousness. *The Orders of the Dreamed* contains an essay "On the Ethics of Publishing Historical Documents" by Emma LaRocque, who comes from a Plains-Cree Métis community in northeastern Alberta, a community that was still, in the 1950s and 1960s, living and reciting many of the myths Nelson discusses. There is also a personal response to Nelson in a fine essay by Stan Cuthand.

Nelson's feeling for native people and for his environment is intense, so intense that we can lose his insight in the flow of his writing. But if we are attentive he gives us a great deal. In "Conjuring at Lac la Ronge, December 1819," Nelson describes an environment of uncanny quiet in which the marvellous is never far away. Here the winter sky may "change au of a sudden

and there will fall a very smart shower of snow attended with a terrible gust of wind." As Nelson reports, "the weather was then so beautiful and destitute of all the usual signs of bad weather" that it is clear "dreamers" or "the dreamed" (spirit helpers) are at work.

Nelson's document continues in that vein; we get caught in the onrush of his prose, of his confusion and compassion, his disdain for native people, and his insight. His writing inspires awe, fatigue, wonder, and a primordial fear that can be as stark as the environment the myths reflect. Here is a mental world that was the product of a landscape and climate that affects us still, whether we like it or not. *The Orders of the Dreamed* is a valuable and important document; it is also haunting. □



## Stuck on him

By Nancy Wigston

### NORA: A BIOGRAPHY OF NORA JOYCE

by Brenda Maddox

Hamish Hamilton (Penguin), 589 pages, \$35.00 cloth (ISBN 0 241 12385 2)

### CAMILLE: THE LIFE OF CAMILLE CLAUDEL, RODIN'S MUSE AND MISTRESS

by Reine-Marie Paris

translated by Liliane Emery Tuck  
Henry Holt and Co. (Beaverbooks), 258 pages, \$42.95 cloth (ISBN 0 8050 0582 X)

NORA BARNACLE ran off to the continent with James Joyce in 1994, remaining with him, mistress and wife, until his death in 1941. Nom's role in anchoring the genius of her peripatetic lover/husband (they finally married in London in 1931) was crucial to his stability; he was well aware of his dependence on this "tough, unpolished, rootless provincial girl... a

Catholic girl without a Catholic conscience" — as Brenda Maddox describes her in this incisive biography. Yet Nora Joyce has suffered from unremitting bad press, especially from those who knew her only as an appendage to her genius husband. The culture groupies who hovered around the author of *Ulysses* in the final decades of his life were dismissive of the former chambermaid from Galway, miscasting her as a near-illiterate who cared only for the income her husband's books would generate.

True, she would boast that she couldn't finish *Ulysses* — but neither could countless others, Yeats among them. She knew much of Joyce's poetry by heart, had the standard education for a child of her era (she left school at 12), and spoke two or three languages besides English with varying degrees of skill. And, more important, Nora Joyce stood like the calm point at the heart of the chaos — emotional and financial — that swept around her husband as long as he lived.

In her introduction, Maddox tells us she began her book liking Nora and finished it in awe of her. The result is a worthy testament to her subject: meticulously

researched and beautifully written, Maddox's book delivers both a sensitive understanding of the central characters in the Joyce family drama and an intelligent reading of Joycean fiction. Life and work were for Joyce inseparable: after all, here was a man who stated that "imagination is memory." And if his own memory didn't deliver the goods, his wife's would. More than mere ballast for his soaring mind, Nora Joyce provided her husband with the living incarnation of the Ireland that he wrote about from his position of silence, exile, and cunning.

This red-haired, low-voiced, tall, witty, and resolute woman, who took in washing when times were bad and stayed with her husband at Europe's grand hotels when the money was good, emerges as the soul behind her husband's art and life. "Jim," on the other hand (as only she had the privilege of addressing him), emerges as an unbelievable mooch, a chronic drunk with — to put it politely — a pronounced cloacal obsession. A petty domestic tyrant with the malignant self-absorption of true genius, Joyce yet had the sense to love someone who could give as good as she got. The charms of their story — and there are many

— stem from the evident love they had for each other, to which countless scenes from ordinary life — parties, dinners, celebrations, singing, and conversation — bear eloquent witness.

Like those who really knew Nora, we are left with the image of a gregarious, generous, intelligent woman, who weathered the upheavals of two world wars and life with James Joyce. (The two Joyce children were not so strong; loved rather than reared by their parents, Giorgio was a hopeless dipsomaniac and Lucia schizophrenic.) The position of muse/lover to artist-genius is always prickly, often thankless. The woman's thoughts, language, her very being are fodder for the man's work: some, like Frieda Lawrence, survived this treatment; others, like Zelda Fitzgerald, did not. Nora Barnacle Joyce survived, and with style.

Not so tough, or so lucky, was Camille Claudel, mistress of French sculptor Auguste Rodin. A sculptor herself — and Rodin's student — Camille had a relationship of 15 years with her mentor, during which his own work was revitalized. She produced masterworks of her own, which are lavishly illustrated in this attractively produced book, written by Reine-Marie Paris and translated by Liliane Emery Tuck.

A few days after her father's death in 1913 her brother, the poet and playwright Paul Claudel, arranged for Camille's forcible removal from the Paris studio where she was living in squalor, obsessed with the belief that Rodin and his agents were copying her work and making millions from her ideas. She spent the next 30 years in an institution for the insane, confined forever to the provinces, her artistic achievements virtually forgotten.

Camille's biographer, herself the granddaughter of Paul Claudel, charges that Rodin was the catalyst for, if not the culprit behind, Camille's tragedy. This seems unarguable, since their alliance provided her with an entrée into the world of success from which she was excluded by her ensuing bitterness and mental instability after the break with Rodin.

But the question of Rodin's responsibility finally remains vague; we can't assign the blame for insanity to romantic failure alone. (Interestingly, a similar situation occurred with Lucia Joyce, who fantasized a romance with Samuel Beckett, her father's young admirer; for a time the Joyces blamed Beckett's rejection



for their daughter's collapse.) The letters between Rodin and Claudel are missing, and Camille had few confidantes, so it's hard to know exactly what occurred between them. There were rumours of children, of abortions, but Paris is unable to provide the facts, which doesn't prevent her from sentimental speculation. "The question of children must be at least viewed as an added wound in poor Camille's side," she writes, and concludes that "her maternal instincts were cruelly thwarted," when there is no real evidence.

Paris's fondness for purplish prose, combined with the lack of hard data, is frustrating, but some facts emerge: Rodin cared for Claudel and sincerely tried to promote her stock with the powerful critics of the day. The fierce resentment of Rodin's success, which Camille developed to the point of obsession, seems rooted in professional rather than emotional jealousy. After she broke with his style and developed an "interior" approach to sculpture, she had many admirers among her peers but few if any patrons. Poor and isolated, she went mad.

There is much documentation of the sad years of Claudel's incarceration. She was seldom visited by her family, and never by her mother: Camille's situation was pitiful indeed. Her pleas to be allowed to leave went unanswered, although she was adequately cared for; after Rodin's death, her mother became the object of her persecution fantasies. Camille Claudel was senior to Nora Joyce by 20 years, but opportunities for women had scarcely improved in that time. That the Irish rebel endured and the French rebel did not cannot be glibly explained. Perhaps Nora Joyce was simply, like Molly Bloom (for whom she served as a model), one of those women who, in Brenda Maddox's words, "use their strength to bear their fate, not to shape it." □

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1028 Bannock St., Denver, Colorado, 80204 U.S.A.

## Jasmine tea with gin

By Mary di Michele

### STONE BLIND LOVE

by Barry Callaghan

Exit (Stoddart), 115 pages, \$11.95  
paper (ISBN 0 920428 51 9)

JOHN CAGE WRITES that proverbs should be examined with skepticism and their opposites reinforced; so that instead of "a rolling stone gathers no moss," we have "he doesn't let the grass grow under his feet." Cage's variation on the expression is not a simple inversion, but rather an extension of the meaning of the saying by deconstructing the allegory implied, so that "stone" and "moss" are revealed as "he" (or man) and "grass." I begin a review of Barry Callaghan's new collection of poetry thus because I believe that, in this book, Callaghan is trying to do something similar with the conventions of love and death, with myth and mimesis. Not to deconstruct, but rather to add more layers, to make that rolling stone gather moss, to allow the grass to grow under our feet.

In the notes at the back of the book, Callaghan describes where and how these poems began: in 1987, as he was looking at the old stone walls of Jerusalem and then, back in Canada, when he was on his way to the races listening to Tom Waits: "His song went one way, mine another. Such is racing."

Song has no typography; these poems do. The poems have a "look." Their lines vary in length and number but conform in shape. There is always a sense of structure, of the constructed, in the poems, and this structure is in ironic contrast to the images of fragmentation that riddle the book. The disintegration of the world seems sexually induced: "the moon lay cracked open/ on the floor/ a spot of blood in the yolk." Stone does not signify immortality, as one might expect; instead we read how "No stone is static, or perpetual," how stone wears a "crown of earth."

Callaghan is playing against conventional associations with

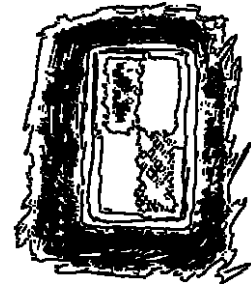
stone. In "Sesephus the Stone King" he merges the existential with the Judeo-Christian, the stuff of salvation with arcades and drugs, humour and terror: "What's terrifying is the gods will come again, / and the narcs, too." This poem is written in street language rich with nuance and double entendre: "It's all up hill from here on in" says the King of crack, merging in that word associations with cocaine, Christ, the female sexual part, and the original sexual fissure quoted earlier from "The Sleepwalker." The existential crisis that Camus charted in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" is just another black joke played out by a drug dealer.

The language play is skilful. Such play often complements the images of fragmentation: "a silt of severed notes, / roe of the Dark-town Queen/ row row your boat gently," breaking down semantic structures of syntax, foregrounding instead the sounds of words. This language play may be dark — he rhymes "sun" with "cosy oblivion" — or ironic — "Our world is dew;" he said, / "and here comes the sun." (Echoes of the Beatles tune in the last line simply underscore that irony. "Here comes the sun, little darling/ and it's all right" — as transcribed from my memory.)

The strength of this book is in its complex and layered word-play and imagery, in its balancing of language steeped in both civilization and the skeet. Its weakness lies in its dramatic representation of the mother. "Somewhere There's Music" works well, and not only because I usually hear this song in the female voice of Ella Fitzgerald, but because the mother's lines are convincing: "You couldn't see into him, / you just got this lustre" captures beautifully a woman's sense of attraction and frustration with impenetrable male, certainly as attractive, as elusive, as the mermaids were for Prufrock. That men are mysterious to women is an acute observation from a male poet (Callaghan seems to be using music in much the same way as a film-maker uses a soundtrack of popular songs, that is, not as literary echo so much as a framing device.)

Everything I have noted so far reveals the intelligence of the author. How the poems fail is by excessive artifice. At times the language labours but the poem remains murky, gasoline in the water; it doesn't catch fire. For example, "Window In the Water," an otherwise lovely lyric, is

marred, not clearly realized. It's a mistake to "pen the poem with the line "Alone with herself" (it's hard to be alone with anyone else there) and then have her address the son without so much as a stanza break. At times the voice is obscured. At times the music is so loud you can't hear the dialogue. "Hollow In The Heart" has too much language and imagery from Tom Waits lyrics to be convincing as the voice of the mother. The image of confetti in the hair belongs to the man who puts his clarinet under the bed in Waits's "Tang." Till They're Sore" (the musician father also leaves his instrument under the bed in the Callaghan poems.) My problem may be that I know the songs, and the images seem misplaced. I hear the soundtrack. Moreover the line "In the land of the blind/ the one-eyed/ man is king" is also used by Waits and not distinguished by italics in the mother's speech. So the typo "his" instead of her in the third line of Callaghan's poem is not surprising. The gender of the voice is as wrong in this poem as it was right in "Somewhere There's Music." It is not clear who is speaking; the voice seems recorded over. It strikes me as inauthentic. I hear a lot of gravel in her voice. I hear echoes from Waits's album *Raindogs* throughout the collection. Yes, the mother spikes her jasmine tea with gin but, in "Hollow in the Heart," the poem itself seems to" much under the influence. It's not echoes. I hear then, it's echolalia. □



interment, if not outright apotheosis, so it's sort of funny, and very Canadian, to see a writer like Merna Summers — praiseworthy but not prolific or especially well-known — hitting the shelves with her selected stories.

Summers is neither young nor a neophyte; she's 55 and her first story was published 15 years ago — but she hasn't exactly written a great deal. Her first collection of stories, *The Skating Party*, appeared in 1974, her second and most recent *Calling Home*, in 1982. AU told the two books contain 12 stories. Nine of the 12, and all but one from her first book, make a return appearance in *North of the Battle*. The question, I suppose, is why, and the answer is probably marketing.

Douglas & McIntyre have tricked out the book with some dramatic cover art — a painting by Anne Savage — a spiffy design, and the latest shades of pink and green — the colours of upscale shopping malls in the late 1980s. And why not if it helps move a few books? The two earlier books are out of print. Summers's stories are very, very fine, and she deserves a wider audience.

At least one of the stories, *The Skating Party*, has the weight, the feel and the impact of a classic. With its clever structure and its pointed ironies, it seems bound to turn up in innumerable anthologies. A tale of fate, free will, and the ruthless nature of passion, it's told by a woman looking back at her 15-year-old self (it's also a strange tale of innocence lost). As a teenager she was puzzled by her Uncle Nathan who never married. One summer day he tells her why. Years before, he fell in love with a beautiful young woman, only to find she was married. He tried to be sensible and marry her equally beautiful sister, but found that love refused to bend to reason. His discovery came at a skating party held on a small lake, when both his fiancée and the woman he loved fell through the ice. Nathan triad to save them both but could only grab hold of one. The decision to save one and not the other haunts him for the rest



## Winter's tales

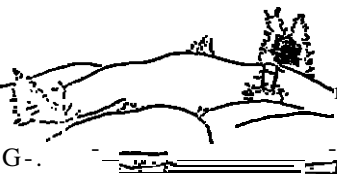
By Brent Ledger

### NORTH OF THE BATTLE

by Merna Summers

Douglas & McIntyre, 196 pages, \$12.95  
paper (ISBN 888 945 906)

FOR A WRITER, the publication of a "selected stories" is usually the first step on the road to literary

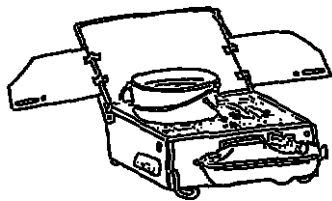


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of his life, but it's **Summers's point** that it **really** wasn't a decision. He had **no choice**. Fate and passion ruled the moment.

It's a **shocking conclusion**, and one that in its emotional impact is typical of Summers's work. She writes **tough, clear-eyed stories about power** and the **rotten** things people do to each other in the **name of ego**, instinct and **survival**. With few exceptions she **eschews flashy technique** for clear **prone** and an emotional impact that has **nothing** to do with **titillating, trendy, or outré material**. There's **passion** but **no sex** in these stories, the **violence** is mostly emotional, and the **backdrops** won't send **Judith Krantz** scurrying for **alternative locations**.

Most of the stories are set in **rural Alberta**, in the **small fictional town of Willow Bunch**, somewhere north of the **Battle River**, about **150 kilometres** east of **Edmonton** (**Summers grew up** in the **area**, in **Mannville**, Alberta.) **The action** is confined to the **1930s** and **'40s** (though **very little** of that fabled wartime glamour **seeps through**), and it invariably **takes place** within the bosom of a large but unexceptional family. **Odd mothers**, pairs of sisters or brothers, and scores of bachelor



**uncles constantly** recur in these pages.

Summers works wonders with **her humdrum material**, creating **miniature portraits** in pain, loss, and injustice. In **"Bachelors"** she takes the case of **two bachelor brothers** who have **lived** together all their lives — one's **63**, the other **65** — and **reveals the cold kernel** of loneliness at the **core** of the relationship. **The brothers have sparred for years**, jostling for supremacy (one owns their house, the other the **land**) but **when one tries** to push the other too **hard**, his brother leaves, putting **this sibling** in the **unenviable position** of deciding **between** power and love, the home he loves and the **brother** he needs. **The way** in which Summers **methodically** reveals the one **brother's passive manipulation** and the other's **painful self-deception** is a model of **dramatic exposition**.

But for all her narrative ability it's **Summers's characters** that make these stories. Whether it's the **mother who deserts her children** in **"The Blizzard"** or the **woman wounded by gossip** in **"Portulaca,"** Summers's **characters** are real and their **predicaments** painful, giving **Summers's stories** an almost **novelistic** size, weight and resonance. Certainly the penultimate story, **"Calling Home,"** has enough **interesting characters to fill a novel**. Summers resolves the central **conflict** neatly enough but leaves one **wondering** — happily — **what** became of the **alcoholic sister**, the **coldhearted brother**, and the lady who **loved** funerals. **The cover blurb** says **Summers** is writing a **novel**. I'm not surprised.

There is only one **outright clunker** in this collection, **"Ronnie So Long At the Fair,"** a story so bad that it seems to have been **written** by another author. **Some** of the other stories have their problems, notably **dragged-out** endings, but these are **minor** compared to the riches Summers offers. These **stories** are the real **McCoy** — **gritty**, tough, and **very, very moving**. They deserve **all the clever packaging** — and **repackaging** — they can get. □

## Sixteen to the bar

By Ray Filip

### SWINGING IN PARADISE: THE STORY OF JAZZ IN MONTREAL

by John Gilmore

Vehicule Press, 322 pages, \$16.95 paper (ISBN 0 919890 87 3)

**THIS IS** a hallelujah of a book that **recaptures the tempo** of the times when **nightclubs** and **"blind pigs"** were **stacked on top of each other**, and the city boomed with **boogie** and **booze** and **barbiturates** and **barbotte and brothels**, and **sleep** did not **exist as long as there was** one last customer listening, or one **last impaired dancer swaying**, or one **more saxophone crying** to be heard.

After five years of **research**, **Gilmore** has compiled a **nostalgic** study that leaves **you searching** for **superlatives**. He **traces the roots of jazz** in Montreal back to **Harry Thomas**, a white pianist at the Regent **theatre who accompanied** the silent movies. **Thomas** has **recorded "Delirious Rag"** (a **tune cowritten with Montrealer Willie Eckstein**) in New York for

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the Victor Talking Machine Company. Three months later on February 27, 1917, in the same Victor studio, five white boys from New Orleans known as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band recorded "Livery Stable Blues." Their whinnying trumpets heralded the jazz craze as the 78 rpm disc sold over a million copies.

The black beginnings of "jazz" in Montreal go back to 1697. The first "negro cabaret," the Recreation Key Club, opened its door on St. James Street just south of St. Antoine near the CPR and Gnd Trunk Railway. Montreal became the centre for hiring and training porters. The men needed a place to spend their money after hours. So by the 1920s, the "sporting" nightlife, bolstered by blacks from Harlem escaping Prohibition, grew around Windsor station.

Music and alcohol flowed, conducted by government regulations. Jazz pioneers such as Slap Rags White and Millard Thomas moved up to Quebec from Chicago. Racism was less brutal in Canada, and the lucre was divine. Employment could be found on the three ferries that crossed the St. Lawrence as well as in the customary dance hall, vaudeville theatres, and nightclubs.

The roost popular black jazz bandleader in Montreal during the 1930s hailed from Niagara Falls. Myron Sutton and the Canadian Ambassadors often played in the Ontario bush for miners and lumberjacks who "never saw coloured people before." I Sudbury, Sutton was shown a rope that he could pull if the miners started fighting. The rope lowered a chain-link screen down in front of the stage to protect the musicians from flying chairs and bottles."

Montreal was the birth\* of such world-class talents as Maynard Ferguson (the horn on the soundtrack to *Rocky*), and Oscar Peterson. Peters' loved to show off his fast sixteen-to-the-bar demon runs so much so that his friends nicknamed him the Brown Bomber of Boogie-Woogie.

We read about the Johnny Holmes Orchestra packing Victrola every weekend with 800 people lining up for hours to get in and jitterbug. Steep Wade's death from heroin addiction. Charlie Parker at the Chez Paree, guitarist Nelson Symonds and the fall of the Black Bottom, the "B-flat suits" of big band musicians and how the boss at the El Morocco bad installed a railing to hide

their many-coloured socks, which often did not match the one on the other foot.

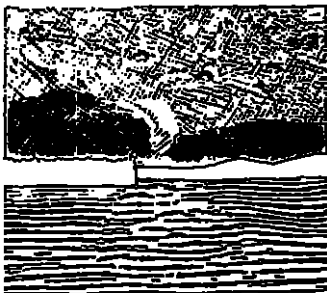
Strippers were less demanding. "You play 'Harlem Nocturne,' and when I take off my top you play 'Night Train.'" Pianist Maury Kaye, son of a synagogue choir-master, reminisces about working in gangster-controlled clubs.

The town was generating money like a printing machine. It was very healthy in terms of economy, commerce. I don't know about spiritually or morally, but who cares? Everybody was happy and everybody was making a lot of bread, and nobody was hurting. The fifties was a very healthy time to the city.

The Drapeau-Pax Plante clamp downs on vice eventually put an end to 40 years of C-notes from heaven. Television and taped music dealt the death blow to live "entertainment factories." In the '60s, jazz became politicized. Groups such as L'Infonie granted interviews standing on their heads in yoga postures and prophesied that the band "would grow to 333333,333 members in thirty-three years — at which time they'd perform in a huge crater in the Nevada desert." Instead, the herd broke up forming a smaller ensemble called Jazz libre: equated with Québec libre, since the musicians operated from a artists' commune at Ste. Anne de la Rochelle in the Eastern Townships where they cocreated free-form pieces and a manifesto proclaiming the farm they had rented for one dollar a year as "Le Petit Québec libre."

The whole crazy story of sinful syncopation in Montreal is illustrated with memorabilia such as sheet music of two compositions by Jean-Baptiste Lafrenière: the first known ragtime pianist in Montreal; or a 1936 promotional flyer of Duke Ellington and his band playing a New Year's Eve concert at the Forum for the general admission price of \$1.50.

Memories, and good books, are made of this. □



## Eve and Adam

By John Oughton

### THE JESSE JAMES POEMS

by Paulette Jiles

Polestar, 96 pages, \$10.95 paper (ISBN 0 919591 21 3)

### SERPENT (WRITE): (A READER'S GLOSS)

by Betsy Warland

Coach House, 128 pages, \$10.95 paper (ISBN 088910 346 1)

### BIASED ANALOGIES

by Shaunt Basmajian

Antihos, 56 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 920798 03 X)

THREE NEW BOOKS by Canadian poets offer very different writing styles and gender identifications. Paulette Jiles, who took home three awards including the Governor General's for her last collection, examines the careers of Frank and Jesse James from their points of view. Feminist poet and editor Betsy Warland tries to forge a new language and mythology for women. And Toronto poet Shaunt Basmajian writes in the voice of a street-wise and slightly jaded 'ethnic' male in *Biased Analogies*.

*The Jesse James Poems* is a collage of poems, photographs, court transcripts, newspaper clippings, advertisements, and Wanted posters of the James era. Although Jiles is a native of Missouri (as were the Jameses) and thus can plead a special affinity with her subjects, any such Canadian book about American outlaws is going to be compared with Michael Ondaatje's brilliant experiment, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. And even the award-winning Jiles, despite her sure technique and occasionally inspiring leaps of imagination, suffers by that comparison.

Her Frank and Jesse James are intriguing characters, but somehow they lack the stink of gunpowder and blood that Ondaatje's Billy exudes. Jiles writes best when she works with imagery from nature, with metaphysical ideas, and with the internal voice of a character contemplating fate. Transmitting the actual emotions of a killer seems too much of a stretch for her, however.

Despite my reservations about the book's limits, it can be recommended for the energy of its language, its perception and wonder,

and its wonderful design and artwork by Jim Brennan. If it reads more like her previous book *Celestial Navigation* than a thoroughly convincing take on the James gang's life and times, it still offers a "exciting ride."

Betsy Warland's *Serpent (Write)* bears the subtitled warning "A Reader's Gloss" Like Jiles, Warland uses collage; but here the elements she pastes together with her own poetry are quotations from many different texts: those by other feminists, medical descriptions of sex, conception and birth, dictionary definitions and word derivations, psychological theories, comparisons of the urges men feel towards making love and making war.

Warland's ear for puns and allusions and her techniques of exploding concealed meanings in words by adding hyphens and brackets, as in her title's *(Write)*, keep her assemblage moving. Frank scenes of lesbian love add some juice to ponderings on the source of the word *clitoris*. Starting with Eve and Adam Warland overturns the myths that define the traditional male and female roles; in fact, each segment of her book is called a "turn." Somewhere she refers to a "man-made manologue." This collection is a womanologue, a river of language that entertains and incites argument while cleaving determinedly to the feminine (b)ank(h). Male readers may feel ignored and condescended by her words; but at least she gives something interesting with which to argue or agree.

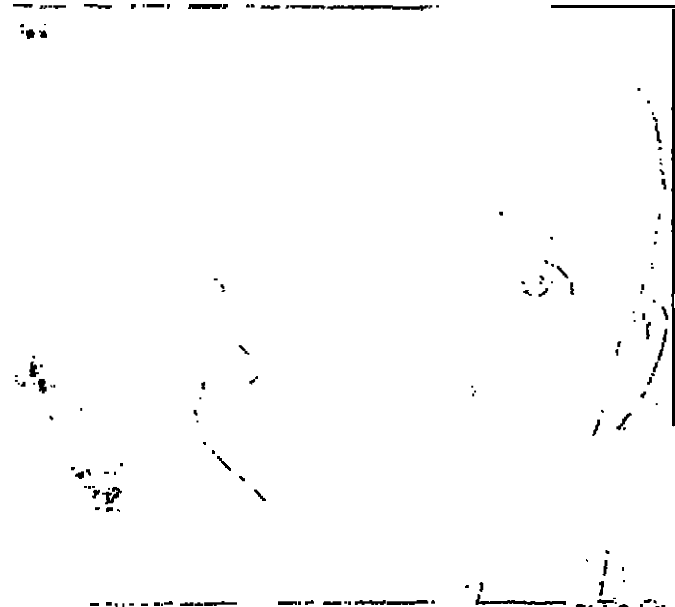
One advantage of the collaging technique is that its levels create depth. The reader can move around, read with different intensities, get a different impression on returning to the same text. Shaunt Basmajian's *Biased Analogies* could "see a bit more depth." Basmajian writes from his own persona, in a basically vernacular tone, about the large and small issues affecting him. He sticks to lower-case, short-lined poems that avoid any pyrotechnical displays.

Consequently, the poems in this collection seem honest and unpretentious, grounded in the guts of daily living, but a bit predictable. The best poems here go straight to the point, skewer it with a simple metaphor or statement, and get off the page quickly. Some of the others wander a bit, or lie there flatly. At times they're like meeting a street person who pours out his life story to you in 15 minutes; you respect his experience, but can't help wishing for more poetic inventiveness. □

# Odyssey of Oskar

Rick Salutin's first novel is an important book with a richly various plot and masterful writing through and through

By Doughs Hill



Rick Salutin

**MICHAEL HOFFMAN'S** *Ice* (Vantage, 124 pages, \$15.95 cloth), is a short novel with little to recommend it. Hoffman's story of Robert Jordan, a man at odds with the world — among other antisocial acts, he kills his baby daughter to stop her crying — is shallow and unappealing: it's rather like a mediocre made-for-TV movie that provides some action and some issues but doesn't really do anything with them. Hoffman dumps his characters' personalities on the reader, with little insight into background or motivation. The prose is stiff, the dialogue is unlikely, the structure is ramshackle. An altogether unrewarding hook

**The Masks of Rome**, by Caroline Llewellyn (Collins, 311 pages, \$22.95 cloth), serves its audience better. This is a specimen of the romantic thriller, and it performs its task of entertainment quite competently. The plot centres on a young Canadian woman, an apprentice art conservator named Kate Roy, who becomes tangled in a conspiracy involving

political terrorism, international finance, art forgery, and a secret Masonic order. There is romance, too; both an American journalist and an Italian aristocrat attend to Rate's considerable charms. For a killer, it has a bit too much talk and explanation, and events threaten to become more than slightly improbable, but on the whole Llewellyn has her chosen genre down pat. **The Masks of Rome** is good clean fun, which, I assume, is what it intends to be.

From Rome to about as far West as a Canadian can get — the Pacific side of Vancouver Island. **The Watery Part of the World**, by Gladys Hindmarch (Douglas & McIntyre, 144 pages, \$10.95), is the story of Jan Henderson, a young Vancouver woman who ships out as messgirl for a week-long voyage on a coastal boat carrying freight and passengers to the isolated ports between Cloose and Zeballos. Jan has some experience of the sea, and of men (an ex-lover is part of the crew); she seems rather unprepared emotionally for her role, rather

self-pitying and depressive, a bit of a loser. But the life and events she describes are vivid.

Hindmarch is practised in short fiction: her novel is a series of linked stories or episodes, all in San's first-person voice. The author has chosen to blend dialogue, description, and stream-of-consciousness together into paragraph units, and the device usually serves well to record the blur of sounds and sights, the ripe richness of the land, and the swirling power of the sea (it's not bard to follow, though occasionally a diligent reader may spend time unravelling the speakers in a paragraph only to discover nothing much is going on therein.) Sometimes the prose becomes a bit self-consciously breathy, but on the whole Hindmarch's brand of impressionism is effective.

The novel certainly presents a fully realized world. Shipboard routines and emergencies, male-female encounters, booze and tobacco, the exotic locale — all these surfaces hold a reader's attention. But there isn't a lot of inner life to *The Watery Part of the World*. At its core, not enough happens: long on experiential detail and sensation, the novel is somewhat short on illumination or insight, short on significance.

Rick Salutin's *A Man of Little Faith* (McClelland & Stewart, 296 pages, \$24.95 cloth) is a novel of uncommon power and passion. This is the history of Oskar, who caught the legendary last train out of Nazi Germany before the darkest night of history fell: there is enough narrative energy here to propel several books and enough provocative thinking to start a dozen arguments. Salutin tells a fine story; he also provides a framework for questions about belief and doubt, spirituality and secularization, and the dreams and ironies of contemporary Diaspora Jewry. If this weren't enough, he also manages a relentlessly funny/serious analysis of the shortcomings and accomplishments of Canadian culture.

Oskar, when we meet him, is in charge of a religious school at a prominent Reform temple on Toronto's Bathurst Street. He's a loner (his family all died in the camps) on a lifetime quest for friendship and brotherhood. His identity, the narrator tells us, "lies less in who he is than who he refuses to be." Though he's a survivor of the Holocaust he will not let that label define him. Through Oskar's angry confrontation with his fate, in battles both humorous and tragic, Salutin niters au me ironies and paradoxes of being a

Jew in postwar Canada. The character he creates, the man who "still thinks a proper human life is committed," even if he isn't sure what to commit it to, is a novelistic triumph, full of contradictions, anxieties, lusts, love, and sympathy.

The novel's episodic structure charts Oskar's progress from the early 1960s on, with flashbacks to his childhood and adolescence in Germany before the war. He arrives in Canada in 1940, lands in Toronto after a time of internment in Quebec, meets a prospering real-estate developer who gets him a teaching job at the Pillar of Fire Temple. Oskar's energy and originality soon take him to the tap of his profession: along the way he develops a reputation for iconoclasm and downright craziness that makes his life seem, to observers, a series of comic turns and mythic incarnations. Salutin's odyssey of Oskar, which covers the ground from Israel in the 1930s to the American student revolts of the 1960s and well beyond, is effective for both its personal insights and its historical sweep.

The narrator who rehearses the story and comments upon it is one of Oskar's former students. His voice is firmly detached, self-consciously analytic and objective, at times dogmatic, only infrequently preachy, often extremely funny. The novel's dialogue positively sparkles; it's sharp and polished, and there's not a word out of place. The character of this narrator is offstage most of the time, but when he puts in an occasional appearance, he's as judgemental about himself (and as unsparring) as he is about Oskar and Oskar's normally small, sometimes suddenly expanded world. If the book is part fictional biography, part meditation on history, it's also a delightful memoir of its narrator and of growing up Jewish in '50s Toronto.

The significance of *Oskar* lies in his understanding of how we deal with what we cannot escape — "the refusal of our past to be history, and of history to pass." Salutin is profoundly sensitive to the experience of modern Jewishness and the complex questions it raises. This is an important book, with a richly various plot and masterful writing through and through. To the handful of contemporary writers who have combined intuitions about North American Jewish cultural and political issues with compelling narrative skills — Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, Mordecai Richler, for starters — add Rick Salutin. □



## OUR NATIVE LAND

APPLAUSE for John Goddard ("Forget Not My World," May) for recording the nonsense of insensitive patriots "celebrating" this country's native heritage during the Olympics. With wit-ting like Goddard's, more people may have their eyes opened and finally demand justice for native Canadians, the real patriots who have loved the land longer and more deeply than any of us!

J. Finley  
Calgary

## ROMAN RUINS

IN *The Written Word* (April), I. M. Owen claims English is not a Germanic language, and that without Latin grammar we "throw out" almost everything written in English since medieval times.

Owen presents no evidence: both claims are false. In its basic sentence pattern and in its most-used words, such as *I, is, man, mother, father, life, death, world,*

*sea, house, bread,* English remains Germanic.

When schools began teaching English more than four centuries ago now, teachers rewrote Latin grammar slightly to use it for English, apparently without bothering to ask whether that grammar describes English accurately or helps anyone "see or understand English intelligently; it doesn't

Why not? With Latin, we need to classify words by their endings. English has few such endings; those few often prove ambiguous. Instead, English depends on its basic subject-verb-object sentence pattern; Latin grammar ignores such patterns. As a result, Latin grammar misrepresents English and confuses students, as Solomon Barrett, Jr., discovered as early as 1823, and Charles Carpenter Fries did by 1952: see Fries's book *The Structure of English*.

Instead of trying to describe English as a degenerate Latin, which it has never been, why not use an accurate grammar

which shows how to understand the possibilities of English, and so ask and answer connected sets of usefully specific questions?

Robert Ian Scott  
Saskatoon

## I. M. Owen replies:

I didn't claim that English was not a Germanic language; I said it was. Nor did I say it was a degenerate Latin, or any other kind of Latin. I merely pointed out the obvious historical reasons for the very large Romance element in Middle and Modern English; to my mind the blending of Germanic and Romance elements is what makes English the strong, subtle, and eloquent language it is. Whether I'm right that for 400 years English schools taught Latin grammar and not English, or R. I. Scott is right that they taught an English grammar based on Latin, it comes to the same thing: this is the grammar that most writers of English have used.

Word order has nothing to do with the case. *Of course* in highly inflected languages like Latin — or Old English — meaning is not dependent on word order, and *of course* in languages that have lost many of their inflections like Modern English — or French — it's the word order that tells us which noun is the subject of a sentence and which is the object

It isn't clear to me what the opponents of "prescriptive Latin-ate grammar" wish to substitute for it. The story I told in my April column suggests that the answer is "Nothing." A few days after this letter arrived, I was talking to a distinguished writer who taught English in a Saskatoon school. When the authorities discovered he had been telling his pupils about nouns and verbs, subjects, predicates, and objects, he was told to stop it at once.

I'm not an expert in linguistics. Are there really any major grammatical differences among the Indo-European languages?

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# CanWit no. 132

By Barry Baldwin

SINCE William Shatner is Canadian, it's high time Captain Kirk was allowed to timewarp back to his native land in the 20th century.

So, title and scenario, please, for *Star Trek 6*, e.g. *Spock of the Arctic*. Maximum 150 words, deadline October 25. The prize is \$25.

## RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 130

OUR REQUEST for epigrammatic verse about Canadian literary personalities brought down a deluge of atrocious verse (we're happy to report). Alex McEwen of Ottawa wins a *Books in Canada* sweatshirt for the following entry:

bill bissett thinks its no disgrace  
to write his verse in lower case  
or evn langwidj to dbase  
in orthographic steeplechase  
yet readers caught in his embrace  
may find his style quite commonplace

### Honourable mentions:

#### Tea tie foe fun

I smell the blood of a Canadiun  
Bred in the Bones of a Whopping Tale  
Robertson Davies burns his mail.

— D. Burnlees, Hepworth, Ont

The west coast harbours Bill Kinsella  
That very well-known writing fella  
Those baseball novels-it's so groovy —  
Will soon be Shoeless Joe, the Movie.

He tells tales too of red man Silos  
Ermineskin who's no more guileless  
Than Frank Fence-post, his wild side kick;  
The two of them are tough to trick.

He also writes of big Mod Etta  
Who weighs same as a string quartetta;  
Siting in her chair tree-trunk,  
Shell cure you if you're feeling punk.

Like Louis Coyote's pickup hock  
Kinsella's brain is never stock.  
Baseball, Indians, are hi text —  
Whatever will he think of next?

—Lois Grant, Calgary

## SOLUTION TO ACROSTIC NO. 16

The Old Man... was looking at the cupola, the prisms of colors made by the stained-glass windows representing the evangelists. Angel heads... were smiling in the gilding. Peace flowed from their eyes and ran down the walls to adorn the solitude of the Old Man on his knees.

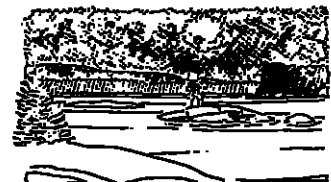
Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, *The Grandfathers* (Harvest House)

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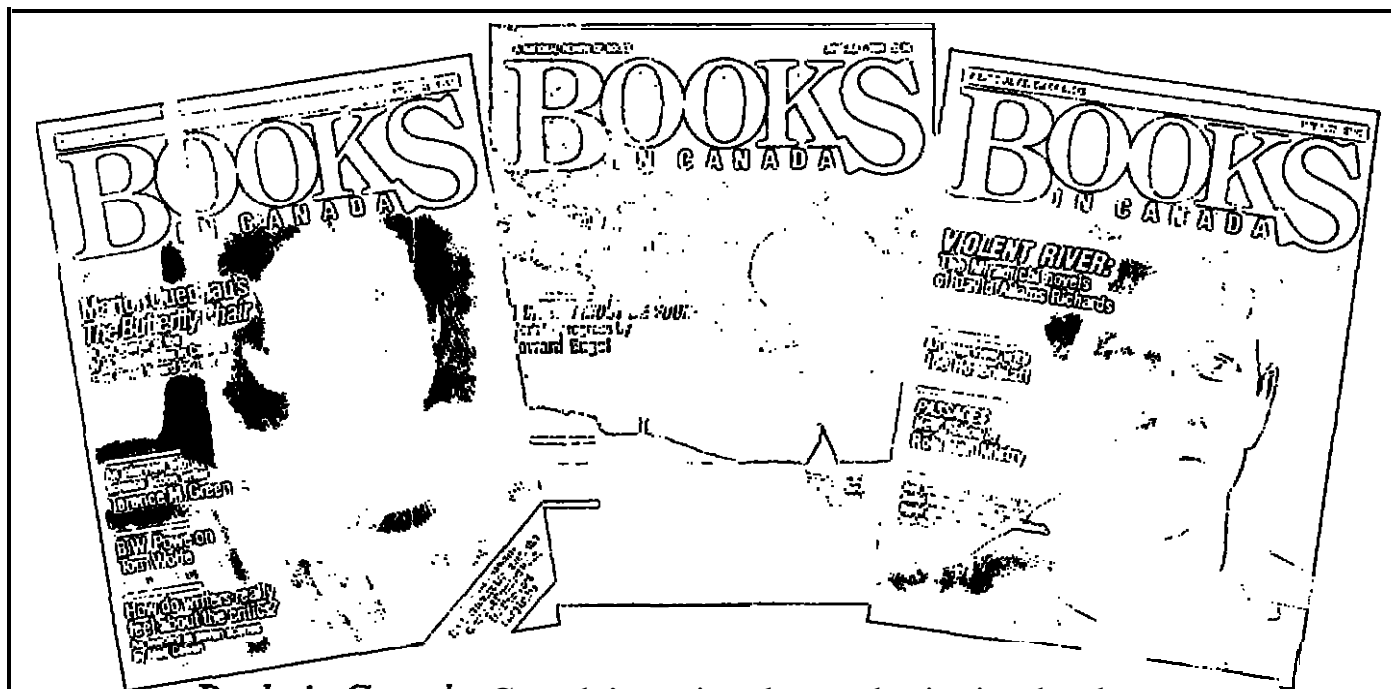
THE FOLLOWING Canadian books have been received by books in Canada in recent weeks. Inclusion in this list does not preclude a review in a future issue:

All in the Same Boat, by Fiona McCall and Paul Howard, M & S.  
Angela's Airplane, by Robert Muntch, illustrated by Michael Martchenko, Annick Press.  
The Anne of Green Gables Cookbook, by Kate Macdonald, illustrated by Barbara Di Lella, Seal.  
Attention Deficit Disorder: Hyperactivity Revisited, by H. Moghadam, Detsell Enterprises.  
Auroras: A History in Pictures, by W. John McIntyre, Boston Mills.  
Autonomy and Schooling, by Eamonn Calan, McGill-Queen's.  
The Bald Eagle, by Jon M. Gerrard and Gary R. Borioloni, Western Producer Prairie Books.  
Baumgartner's Bombay, by Anita Desai, Lester & Orpen Dennys.  
Ben Johnson: The Fastest Man on Earth, by James R. Christie, Seal.  
Beyond the Surface: Photographs by Irma Elbich, Firefly Books.  
The Bible and the Church, edited by A. J. Duck et al, Kindred Press.  
Black Light, by Ismael Boksh, Jespersen Press.  
Bless Me Too, My Father, by Katie Funk Wiebe, Herald Press.  
Blue Sand, Blue Moon, by Mark Abley, Cormorant Books.  
The Callisto Myth from Ovid to Atwood, by Kathleen Wall, McGill-Queen's.  
Canada's National Aviation Museum, by K. M. Molson, National Aviation Museum.  
Canada, NATO and the Bomb: The Western Alliance in Crisis, by Tom Keating and Larry Pratt, Hurig.  
Colonial Identities: Canada from 1760 to 1815, by Bruce G. Wilson, National Archives of Canada.  
Contact Prints, by Philip Kreiner, Seal.  
Cornerstones: Rural Churches of Southern Ontario, by John Delhulse, illustrated by Catherine Delhulse, Boston Mills.  
Could You Stop Josephine?, by Stephane Poulin, Tundra.  
Daniel, by Bruce Rice, Cormorant Books.  
December Six/The Halifax Solution: An Alternative to Nuclear War, by Lesley Choyce, Puttersfield Press.  
Education Measurement and Evaluation: A Laboratory and Exercise Manual, by Claudio Violato and Anthony E. Marini, Detsell Enterprises.  
Era of Emancipation: British Government of Ireland, 1812-1830, by Brian Jenkins, McGill-Queen's.  
Fat Chance, by Donna Steinberg, Eden Press.  
The Fine Art of Murder, by Anthony Quogan, Collins.  
Fitzhenry & Whiteside Book of Quotations, edited by Robert L. Fitzhenry, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.  
Free Trade and the New Right Agenda, by John W. Warnock, New Star Books.  
Freedom, Democracy, and Economic Welfare: Proceedings of an International Symposium, edited by Michael A. Walker, Fraser Institute.  
Friends in High Places: Politics and Patronage in the Mulroney Government, by Claire Hoy, Seal.  
Frozen in Time: Unlocking the Secrets of the Franklin Expedition, by Owen Beattie and John Geiger, Western Producer Prairie Books.  
Gifts of War: Poems and Photographs by Larry Towell, Coach House.  
The Guerrilla is Like a Poet: An Anthology of Filipino Poetry, edited by Robert Majzels, Cormorant Books.  
Habitable Planets: Poems New and Selected, by Patrick White, Cormorant Books.  
Holy Grail Across the Atlantic: The Secret History of Canadian Discovery and Exploration, by Michael Bradley, Houslow Press.  
The Human Sciences: Their Contribution to Society and Future Research Needs, edited by Baha Abu-Laban and Brendan Gall Rule, U of Alberta Press.  
I Have to See This!, by Richard Thompson, illustrated by Eugenio Fernandes, Annick Press.  
Infected Christianity: A Study of Modern Racism, by Alan Davies, McGill-Queen's.  
Jack, by Chris Scott, Macmillan.

Jeffers' Skull, by Garry Radson, Cormorant Books.  
John Glasco's Richer World: Memoirs of Montparnasse, by Philip Kokotilo, ECW Press.  
Julie's Tree, by Mary Calhoun, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.  
Kootenay Journal: Number One, edited by Donna Macdonald, Polestar.  
Land of the Midnight Sun: A History of the Yukon, by Ken S. Coates and William R. Morrison, Hurig.  
Libra, by Don DeLillo, Lester & Orpen Dennys.  
The Luck of the Scottish, by Gordon Main, Island Lights Co.  
Mary Belle Barclay: Founder of Canadian Hostelling, by Evelyn Edgeller, Detsell Enterprises.  
The Memoirs of General Jean V. Allard, UBC Press.  
Miacmac Legends of Prince Edward Island, by John Joe Sark, illustrated by Michael Francis and George Paul, Ragweed Press.  
Middle Powers in the International System: No. 1, The Middle Powers and the General Interest, by Bernard Wood, North-South Institute.  
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The Mother's Book: Practical Ideas for Parenting, by Lenore Andres and Pat Van Nes, Kindred Press.  
My Family Vacation, by Dayal Kaur Khalsa, Tundra.  
A New Kind of War, by Anthony Price, Macmillan.  
Nothing Sacred, by George R. Walker, Coach House.  
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A Tangled Web, by L. M. Montgomery, Seal.  
A Taste of Blackberries, by Doris Buchanan Smith, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.  
Teddy Rabbit, by Kathy Stinson, illustrated by Stephane Poulin, Annick Press.  
The Weather Factory: A Pictorial History of Medicine Hat, by David C. Jones et al, Western Producer Prairie Books.  
To My Father's Village: The Last Days and Drawings of William Kurelek, Tundra.  
To Samaritand and Back, by Roma Gelblum-Bross, Cormorant Books.  
Trade Unions and the New Industrialisation of the Third World, edited by Roger Southall, U of Ottawa Press.  
The Way We Were, by Ken Bell, U of T Press.  
The Wizard of the Pines and other Magical Tales, by Patrick Paul Brennan, illustrated by Nancy Mayhew, Gal-Gard Design & Publications.  
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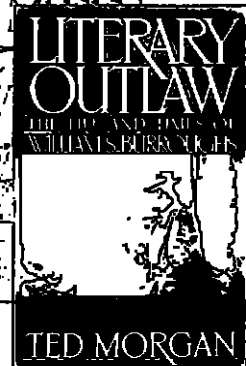
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