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# Long live Salman Rushdie

ON FEBRUARY 22, at a packed press conference in Toronto organized by International PEN and the Writers' Union of Canada, Graeme Gibson read a statement denouncing the Ayatollah Khomeini's death threat against Salman Rushdie as "an unprecedented act of aggression against individual citizens and an outrage to societies." The statement, signed by a long list of organizations, including the Association of Canadian Publishers, the Canadian Authors' Association, the Canadian Library Association, and the Canadian Booksellers' Association, ended with a message of heartfelt support to Salman Rushdie and his family "in this traumatic time." The sense of shock and urgency among those present was palpable — as was the general feeling of disappointment with the government of Canada, which had reacted to the extreme provocation in its usual cautious, blundering, inarticulate fashion.

An unexpected speaker at the press conference was the representative of the Iranian Political Prisoners' Support Committee. Gibson, as chairman, introduced him without giving his name and asked the news cameramen and photographers not to film him in closeup. It was dangerous for him, and the other Iranians present, simply to be there; more dangerous still to speak.

He seemed nervous, a little awkward in English, but not frightened. He spoke softly, and the room became very still. Yes, he said, we should take the death threat seriously. "The government in Iran has imprisoned, tortured, and murdered many poets and writers who dared to speak against Islam or the government. They have banned many books — the works of Darwin, even the most respected scientific journals. And now the Ayatollah is seeking to unite his supporters in the aftermath of Iran's defeat in the war with Iraq."

One of the reporters asked whether the most effective action might not be to threaten violent retaliation.

"Khomeini will not be threatened. They are fanatics. They believe that if they are killed, they are going to heaven, literally. If they kill somebody by mistake in the prison they tell the family, 'If he was guilty, it was right that we killed him. If he is not guilty, well, he's gone to heaven.' The best response is to express

support for the democratic liberal people in Iran who want to change the government."

The Ayatollah's threat and the violent responses to it among Muslim fundamentalists were not seen by the Writers' Union or PEN as a problem of censorship: "It far exceeds any reasonable definition of censorship by its threat to human lives."

Yet questions of censorship are not if relevant. A few days after the press conference, Books in Canada spoke to Stan Persky, a writer and teacher from Vancouver, who is co-chairperson of the political action committee of the Writers' Union. He was in Toronto to take part in a televised debate on the Rushdie controversy. We asked him what the writers' reaction had been to the Rushdie affair.

"We were fearful, sharing the terror Rushdie must be feeling, outraged by the utterly pale response of the Canadian government furious that Canada Customs was once again sticking its glue feet through a writer's work — but it did become clear that certain questions had been raised that required a strong response. First of all, we do not accept that a work of literature can be banned. the

voice of a writer silenced; that an Ayatollah Khomeini can threaten a citizen of another country and practise out-and-out religious terrorism. We don't accept that, and we can't remain silent. To be silent would be to be complicit.

"My own immediate response was — well, the two main characters of *The Sot & c Verses*, Gibreel and Saladin, are both figures greatly given to dreaming, and I was visited by a waking dream of my own. What the dream said was that we writers have a pact. That in times of emergency, when the very practice of writing is threatened, we agree to abandon the custom of individual identity, and the usual protections. We all assume the burden of the one under threat. I am Salman Rushdie. I accept co-responsibility for *The Satanic Verses*. If our words give offence, that at most is a matter for regret, not retraction.

"In the past 350 years, we've been coming to some conclusions about how to live together. Suddenly we find ourselves having to argue the Enlightenment all over again with the Ayatollah. We're prepared to do it — I speak for the Union — and we'd better be prepared to do it, or what we're allowed to say will shrink, and the unspeakable will envelop us in silence. So we'd better be prepared to defend our democratic faith. We say that every citizen is sovereign and free speech is absolutely necessary. That's why writers react so strongly when the arts, everything in the arena of public speech, is threatened. And we say absolutely, 'Don't mess with that.' We say that to the mullahs, the rabbis, the cardinals, the Parents Against Permissiveness, we even say it to our feminist sisters.

"Our government seems unable to distinguish between an occasion for quiet diplomacy and an occasion to defend fundamental freedoms. Clark finally withdrew the Canadian chargé d'affaires from Tehran, so he eventually did the right thing. And in a sense the right thing is the main thing. But compare it, for example, to the response of the West German foreign minister Hans Dietrich Genscher, a conservative, who pulled his ambassador and said, 'This is a signal designed to preserve civilization.' Or the reaction of François Mitterand, who said, 'Any dogmatism that expresses it-



Salman Rushdie

PHOTOGRAPH BY FAY GOODWIN

self through violence to curtail freedom of expression is, in my view, an absolute evil." There you see people who have some sense that a certain grandeur of rhetoric is required to respond to the monstrosity of what we are faced with."

As we went to press, the deadline ordered by Khomeini for Rushdie's death, March 15, was still to come. Rushdie was in hiding, under heavy police protection somewhere in Britain, where we fervently hope he will be safe. The protests and riots in Islamic countries continue. In letters to the editor and the columns of newspapers, the battle continues to rage, and a great range of opinions is being expressed by Canadian Muslims. *The Satanic Verses* has indeed offended many devout Muslims, but voices are being raised against extremism and intolerance.

Abdullah Hakim, iman of the Jami mosque in Toronto, was quoted in the Toronto *Star* on February 23 as saying he was horrified by the portrait being

drawn of the city's 100,000 Muslims: "Threats on government ministers or bomb threats against bookstores have nothing to do with the teachings of Islam or the feelings of the mainstream Muslim community." Mehdi A. Shallwani wrote in the *Globs and Mail* on March 1 that "Islam's fundamental lesson is tolerance. There is no room for terrorism or vengeance. It is imperative that Muslims all over the world react rationally rather than emotionally to this matter."

Tolerance and mutual respect are vital in an increasingly multicultural Canadian society. Conflicts in other countries must not be made the occasion for racism, religious intolerance, or the suppression of free speech. The author of *The Satanic Verses* has quickly come to symbolize — in his very person — both the strength and the vulnerability of our democratic freedoms.

In the words of a button circulating in Vancouver, "Long live Salman Rushdie." — *The editors*

whether it's even worth it to get out of bed. There is nothing of Albert Camus's moral agony, no choice to be made between competing elements of existence for a stake in the truth. In Chomsky's prose there is nothing of John Berger's excruciating struggles to claim the texture of human intellection from its — and his — inarticulate natural state. Chomsky's universe is morally unclouded and logical. His judgement of friend and foe alike is direct and absolute.

Not that I've said so far is meant as a criticism of the general brilliance, or even the accuracy, of Chomsky's analytical insights, or of the correctness of his many pronouncements about the evil of American imperialism. As far as I know, they've only carried him into one major error. That error, however, was an extremely serious one. Chomsky supported the Khmer Rouge government of Cambodia long after nearly everyone else in the world (including everyone on the political left except the Maoists) had recognized the Khmer Rouge as a brutal Stalinist lunacy that not only lost control of its murderous impulses on a mass scale, but never had a coherent method in the first place.

As an analyst of Cambodia, I was deeply angered by Chomsky's support, and I followed his cavilling retraction from his original extremist position very carefully. He withdrew in the manner of a military force withdrawing reluctantly from a territory it had occupied — strategically, and without any substantive admission of error or show of vulnerability or remorse. His fall-back position was revealing and perhaps typical. The Khmer Rouge psychosis of 1975-79, in his revised opinion, was purely the product of the brutal U.S. bombing of Cambodia that ended in 1973. At no point did he attempt to account for the excesses of the regime itself, which were indisputably also a product of the Leninist model of political organization and authority. The U.S. bombing may have created the Khmer Rouge cadre, but the paranoiac (and Western-trained Marxist-Leninist) vanguard clustered around Pol Pot told them what to do, and how.

ALL THIS is by way of preface, to explain why I came to Chomsky's *The Culture of Terrorism* (Black Rose) somewhat warily, looking for the logical sleekness and partiality that is his trademark. I know that I'll probably agree with most of what he says, but I'm determined not let his brilliance fool me into collusion with an exclusionary vision of the world. The book under scrutiny. *The Culture of Terrorism*, is a penetrating analysis of American foreign policy and practice in Central America and it should be read. The

# To the careful reader

The Culture of Terrorism is a penetrating analysis of American foreign policy and practice in Central America. It should be read. The question here is what Chomsky's overbearing rhetoric and daemonology are excluding and/or &-eating

SOMETHING about Noam Chomsky has bothered me for a long time, though I haven't been able to pin it down. To begin at the beginning: he's brilliant and articulate, both as a linguistic theorist and as the most strident and persistent critic of American foreign policy over the last two decades. He's a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a member of the National Academies of Science and of the Arts and Sciences. He's currently an Institute Professor at M.I.T. where he teaches linguistics and philosophy — the house communist, apparently. In short, Noam Chomsky is everything short of Santa Claus. He has every recognition and honour the United States can offer to an intellectual

But I don't quite trust him. That's heresy, I know. A blue-ribbon panel at the CBC selected him to present the 1988 Massey Lectures, for God's sake. What possible uneasiness could I legitimately have?

Have another look. His judgements, even in his early writings on linguistic

deep structures, carried the extremist's air of utter certainty, as if their sheer brilliance and horsepower swept all other possibilities before them prior to articulation. Whenever I read Chomsky, or listen to his talks, I get the impression that I'm in the presence of a man who has never known a moment of confusion, a mind that has never been caught in a contradiction or a contrarium. His discourse is always sleek and effortless and perfect, a kind of living rebuke to all other views of reality and all other methods of securing it. When Noam Chomsky awakens in the morning, he knows exactly where in the universe he is, and what he's going to do in — and to — the world. He knows exactly where American policy is at, and how it's different from that of the Soviet Union or China or North Vietnam. He knows exactly where his leotards are, and whether he's going to put on green or black or red ones.

Other powerful minds in our century haven't had it so easy. There is nothing in Chomsky of, say, Samuel Beckett, who has to decide every morning

question here is what Chomsky's overbearing rhetoric **and daemology are excluding** and/or creating.

The first thing I discover is that **the** subject of this book is not quite what the title suggests. I always thought terrorism **was** a non-partisan phenomenon, forged in the crucible of the early part of this century **and** fine-tuned by **Nazi** Germany: **and** that it really took off in the atmosphere of the Cold War and of the covert social and political impoverishment of the **Third** World that has been **taking** place just as much of it is **gaining** apparent political independence. **Chomsky**, I find, is **talking** solely about the state terrorism inherent in U.S. foreign policy, focusing **chiefly** on recent U.S. attempts to destabilize Nicaragua. It's **an** interesting subject but the book's **title** is still misleading.

I read his preface, as I have taught myself to, not as a statement of his intentions but as **an** exercise in rhetorical management Chomsky, like any other logician, is a master at shaping the contest of his discourse by **setting** the terms **in** rhetorical concrete. The preface and introduction to **The Culture of Terrorism are masterpieces** of rhetorical and **logical** distortion.

Let's take the first paragraph of **the** first essay and examine it sentence by



sentence. Here's the **first**: 'The scandals that erupted **in** the Fall of 1996 **and** the reaction to them **cast a revealing light on** the political system **and** the intellectual culture **that** interprets **and** maintains it' The 'scandals' are the **Irangate** revelations: Oliver North and friends were found to be **selling** arms to **Iran** and diverting the money **to** the Nicaraguan Contras — with or without **the** knowledge of President Reagan. My view is that these were not scandals **but crimes and that** rather **than** erupting, they slithered. Likewise, I'm unconvinced that there was **any kind** of coherent reaction to them at all, other than the kind reptiles **have** to threatening movement, and that **they** revealed very **little** about **Amer-**

**ican life** except that it's a **long** time since Watergate.

But despite **the** loaded nouns and the fudging adjectives, that sentence has nothing on the succeeding one:

As we **shall** see in detail below, these events demonstrated that the United States remains dedicated to **the** rule of **force, that** political elites agree and indeed insist that it must remain so, **and** that, furthermore, the commitment to violence and **lawlessness frames** their self-image as well, barely concealed beneath **deceptive** rhetoric

This is **an** interesting sentence. It **be-**gins with a "**don't-argue-with-me-because-I'm-going-to-bury-you-in-facts**" admonition, and then **proceeds** to paint the **entire government** structure of the United States as a series of interconnected **mafias**, consciously dedicating themselves to mayhem and **crime. I'm no fan** of the United States, but this does seem a bit **excessive**. Further, if I agree to that description, I've committed myself to a Standard **Total View (STV)** of the United States as a **daemonic** purveyor of more or less total evil There are some **rainy** days when I might believe this; but Chomsky has hung a curious rider to it I really **can't** abide — that the Americans know they're evil, **and** that they cultivate it **behind** a rhetorical screen.

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# the Seventh Gate

Keith Ross  
Leckie



At this point, Chomsky's third sentence tightens **around** my brain like a steel strap: **These conclusions can readily be drawn from the actual record, if we face it honestly and without illusion.** Now, **Chomsky and I are of course in favour of facing things honestly and without illusion, and so are you, right? That being the case, we should by now be gathered atop the rhetorical wave, ready to crash down among the heathen dishonesties and creepoids and draw our conclusions from the "actual record."**

I'm going to stop here, without even finishing my analysis of the paragraph, and do a *mea culpa*. This is pretty bitchy stuff, and it isn't fair. I'd be the first to

admit that it's impossible to write anything without rhetoric. But page after page of Chomsky's writing is **crudded** with this sort of one-track-minded rhetorical persuasion. If we isolate the writer **himself from the factual materials** he (**mercifully**) offers up in bulk, he's as **neurotically fundamentalist** as Herbert **W: Armstrong's ghost writers.**

So, there are two **things** about Chomsky I don't like. I don't like being **manipulated**, whether it's the McDonald's Corporation or **Noam Chomsky** tuning my head. **There's** no real dice, except maybe that it's even less **pleasant** to be manipulated by your allies than by your enemies. Most of us are **aware** of the

motives of the **McDonald's Corporation**: they want us to head down to the golden arches for a **McBLT** and **they'd** like us to order the large **fries** while we're down there, because **that's** the item that they make the greatest profit from.

But what about Chomsky? Doesn't he **trust** us to **figure things** out on the basis of the **analytical figures** and **facts** he **presents**? Apparently no+ He slings his rhetorical net across each **and** every page, and his argument is a closed universe of discourse that is almost **Oedipally** focused on a single strain of **malfesance — U.S. foreign policy.**

The second thing I don't like is the fundamentalism implicit in that single focus. **It misses** too many **things**, such as the malfesance of Russian, Chinese, and even **Sandinista foreign policy.** It also ignores the factors of stupidity and incompetence, which, as far as I can see, are a more consistent strain in American foreign policy than the **organized** conspiracy of evil maniacs Chomsky believes are running the show. I may be blinding myself **with** my dislike of fundamentalist thinking here, of course. But my reason for disliking **fundamentalists** is a sound one: they always believe in the absolute intelligence of evil, and **in** the equally absolute vulnerability of good — except their own.

I'd argue that it's the other way **round.** **Evil** is stupid and **incompetent** and good is by nature intelligent and **sanguine** — and generous. What **I'm** saying, **I guess**, is that I may just be **irritable** at having truth **force-fed** to me—it makes me **suspicious.** I'm not **trying** to **ram** any of this down your throat, which is a courtesy **you'll** never get **from Noam Chomsky.**

I agree with Chomsky that the **American** economic and foreign policy **apparatuses** probably are the chief **threat** to continued human **survival** on this planet — which is a **high-falutin** way of saying that I agree **with** his belief **that we're** the bad guys in this world. But to **present** those apparatuses as a coherent and self-consciously evil **monolith** is a **gross exaggeration** of **reality** and a breakdown of intellectual method. However bad the U.S. has become, it still ain't **Nazi** Germany, and it isn't **Stalinist** Russia. If it were, **Noam Chomsky** would have been silenced a long time ago. Come to think of it, if **Chomsky** were a Nicaraguan, the **Sandinistas** probably would have shut him up **by** now too.

I'm not **asking** Chomsky to shut up. I just want him to clean up his act a little, admit that there are some questions he doesn't have the answer to, and to **respect** the intelligence of his readership more. Meanwhile, do read **The Culture of Terrorism.** But read it very, very carefully. —BRIAN FAWCETT

## Ken Adachi 1928-1989

**SOME TIME** during the night of **February 9th, 1989,** Ken **Adachi** took his **own** life. Just exactly why he did isn't clear, and never **will** be. Successful suicides leave behind only the darkest kind of impenetrable silence. One can speculate **and** second guess them, but **that's** all.

The ostensible cause was an incident in which Adachi plagiarized a 1982 **Time** magazine article for his January 21 book column in the **Toronto Star.** Plagiarism is a **fundamental** journalistic (and intellectual) crime for which there we usually explanations but never **excuses.** The curiosity in **Adachi's** case is why he did it at all. He was an **intelligent** man **with** an **original** mind. He **pi-** rated only three paragraphs, and his **editing** of them **was** an improvement

**over the original.** The **balance** of the **article** was his own; and it was well thought out and written, as were most of his book columns.

By **now,** most of us have heard the various **rumours** and theories **sur-** rounding his death. It would **serve** no **purpose** to repeat them here. Within them lies a world of pain that Ken chose, in **his final** act, to make private **permanently.** Out of respect, it should be none of our business.

**What** is our business is this: **losing** a public reader of Ken **Adachi's** courage and skill, **even** in disgrace, is a major loss to Canadian writing. He was a kind and generous man, and his **thoughtful** reviews **will** be **missed.** He, and the **re-** views, will be hard to replace. Silence isn't **always** golden. — **This editors**



# Word magic

Why would a car turn  
into a driveway?

By I. M. Owen

**CONCRETE:** The *administration has no concrete recommendations. This was a concrete accomplishment.* In these two sentences *concrete* evidently means "specific" or "definite," and I find that this sense is recognized in current dictionaries, even in the *Concise Oxford*, though it doesn't appear in the *OED* or its recent *Supplement*. But in ordinary use (as opposed to the philosophical use, which is more complex) a *concrete object* is one that has material, tangible *reality*; some thing that can be kicked, like the stone with which Samuel Johnson refuted Bishop Berkeley. Let's *confine* the word to this *meaning*. If you *want* to indicate that a recommendation is or *isn't* specific, or an accomplishment *definite*, those words are ready to hand and generally understood. To borrow one that *has* a different *generally* understood meaning just adds to the *growing* fuzziness of modern *communication*.

**PRIOR TO, FOLLOWING:** *None of this group of MPs was in the House prior to 1984.* I recommended changing *prior* to *before*, or — perhaps better in this sentence — *until*. The editor I was talking to asked why. Well, I said, I just didn't like it: but I promised to write about it

*Prior to* and *following* are simply *pre-tentious* substitutes for *before* and *after*; "those simple and familiar words are quite capable of doing their own work," says *Gowers* in *Plain Words*. *Fowler* says that *prior to* "is incongruous ... except in contexts involving a *connexion* between the two events, more essential than the simple time relation, as in *Candidates must deposit security prior to the ballot.*" This is a bit subtle for me, but I *suppose* he means that *prior to* is all right when there is the *notion* of a *pre-requisite*; however, *isn't* that notion *fully conveyed* by *must*? In *matters* Of usage I don't often disagree with *Fowler*, and don't often say "never." But here I will do *both*: never use *prior to*.

As for *following*, since it's not a *preposition* but a *participle*, normally used *adjectivally*, it tends to attach itself to the subject of the sentence, with rather odd *effects* sometimes: *Following Brian Mul-*

**FIRST PERSON SINGULAR:** Another *evansion* of the first person that I might have mentioned in the *January-February* issue under the heading *ME, MYSELF, AND I* is the *journalistic* habit — or is it a *rule* laid down in schools of journalism? — of *substituting a reporter for I or me; the minister told a reporter that. ...* When I used to visit England often I found it *first* startling, and then refreshing, to *find* by-line writers in the *London press* actually saying *I* and *me* right out there in public on the front pages. Canadian papers, please copy.

**OBTUSE:** A reader *thinks* I was *wrong* to *assume* in the December issue that the reviewer who *called Marshall McLuhan obtuse really meant obscure*.

The meaning [of *obtuse*] is not necessarily or only "stupid." My dictionary gives a wider *range*. Indeed, I *think* it has *come* into use as an *adjective* from its *use in geometry*. An *obtuse angle* is the opposite of an *acute angle*, and these two adjectives have *migrated into other usages*. "Acute" in literature means sharp, pointed! right on, etc. "Obtuse" is the *opposite: diffuse, not easily focused, blunt hard to understand, etc.* There is often no precise meaning to words in our admirable English *language*.

This is a noble and generous effort to give the reviewer the benefit of the doubt, and Pm all for being kind to reviewers; but it doesn't convince me. It's true that *obtuse* and *acute* come from Latin past participles meaning "blunted" and "sharpened" *respectively*; hence the use in geometry to describe angles greater or smaller than a tight angle. In *this* sense both words arrived in English with the *first* translation of Euclid in 1570. But *obtuse* in the *figurative* sense "stupid" first appeared in *print* in 1509.

In modern dictionaries that define the predominant current meaning of each word first, the *sense* "stupid" is regularly in this position. (The same is *true* of the *sense* "intelligent" for *acute*.) Now look *again* at what the reviewer actually said: For *someone obsessed with communication, McLuhan is notoriously obtuse in print. In other words, he often* failed to communicate hi he was:

*scure*, not *obtuse*.

**SO-CALLED:** *The so-called newly industrializing countries (NICs).* An editor very properly *changed* this to *the newly industrializing countries (NICs), as they are called.* When it comes before a noun, *so-called* usually indicates that the speaker or writer is contemptuously rejecting the designation: this *so-called genius*. To avoid *misunderstandings*, we should *restrict* it to this use exclusively, so that we won't *say* the *so-called newly industrializing countries unless* we mean either that *these* countries have been secretly industrializing for many years or that they actually *have* no industry at all.

There is a use of *so called*-following a noun and without a hyphen — that doesn't carry the connotation of doubt: *the snowshoe rabbit, so called from its large, heavily furred feet.*

**INTO:** This is such a common word that an ordinary *in* often exerts a magnetic attraction on a *following to*, producing *an into* where *it's* not wanted and usually has a ludicrous effect: *the Toronto-born producer ... settles into dinner in her hometown (Jay Scott in the Globe and Mail).* A messy way to treat a meal. This trap is especially dangerous with the verb *turn*: *the car turned into a driveway; I turned into a department store.* □

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# BRIEF REVIEWS

## FICTION

### MURDER IN A COLD CLIMATE

by Scott Young

MacMillan, 240 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9907 2)

SCOTT YOUNG's first crime novel is a thoroughly enjoyable tale with an unusual hero.

Matthew "Matteesie" Kito-logitak is an RCMP inspector (the only Inuk of that rank) temporarily seconded to the federal Department of Northern Affairs. When a small plane disappears near Fort Norman, NWT, with a pair of suspected drug smugglers and their payoff aboard, Matteesie, in the area to visit his aged mother and connect with a sometime girlfriend, is asked by the RCMP commissioner to investigate the affair. The next day, a prominent Metis spokesman is assassinated in Inuvik, with Matteesie for a witness. The two events may be related. So the intrigue begins, and builds through an expertly paced plot to a satisfying conclusion.

Young lets Matteesie tell the story, and he's an attractive narrator, easy to listen to but able to ask hard questions. His voice is serious and sensible, laced with humour or anger as the occasion demands; he pulls the parts of the complicated case together believably, introduces Native ways unostentatiously, fills the reader in on personal details smoothly. The result is a fully imagined character who makes the other members of the cast plausible and gives authenticity to an exotic setting and atmosphere.

— DOUGLAS HILL



### BEST KEPT SECRETS

by Pat Krause

Coleau Books, 144 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 919926 84 3)

PAT KRAUSE's new collection of stories, *Best Kept Secrets*, opens with a quotation from "The Women In The Family," by Judith Krause:

*After breakfast, the women in the family take their coffee and sit in the sun on the wide stone steps. . . .*

*The women talk incessantly. Even the ones who aren't there make their presence felt.*

The 12 stories that follow are indeed domestic dramas, dealing with small or not so small moments in the lives of an entertaining series of characters trying to survive in the family, the country, the world. Most of the stories are propelled by a gentle undercurrent of humour: Krause clearly feels great empathy for these people and treats their secrets and their tragedies with respect.

The two strongest stories in the collection are the more serious ones, the first and the last. The first, "Best Kept Secrets," is the story of a young boy, David Nathan Kauffman, who is severely beaten with a baseball bat by the "big boys" at school because he is a German. David suffers permanent damage, "severe chronic idiopathic epilepsy," and never recovers. Many years later, the narrator, an adopted cousin, finds David in an institution in Calgary. His seizures have become so severe that he is strapped into a king-size crib with padded sides:

Part of his limbs are encased in plaster. His right arm and left leg lie bent, like wishbone halves, on top of the yellow thermal blanket. . . . His forehead bulges and plunges. His nose is flattened to wet holes. Bubbles of blood-flecked spittle lie on gnawed lips. His chin is a stubbled bruised hump

slashed with stitched crevices. . . . There is nothing to say. Nothing to do.

There is no use praying to a Saviour who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me." . . .

I kiss his cheek lightly. It takes all of my courage. I want him to die. I want to kill him.

Just a pillow, pressed softly on his face, held there, until his fight is won.

The senseless destruction of a child by other children is horrific and haunting.

The final story, "Webs," which received honourable mention in the *Prism international Fiction Competition*, is a fascinating story based on an actual experiment performed by the author's father, Dr. Allan W. Blair, at the University of Alabama in 1934. Dr. Blair allowed himself to be bitten by a black widow spider in order to monitor the effects. The story is strong, but the ending is predictable and almost trite, providing a too-easy answer to the complex issues raised in the story.

The other stories are not as memorable and often fall similarly short, taking the easy way out so that in the end they seem simplistic in both structure and content. My final impression: the collection seems pleasant enough, but minor.

— DIANE SCHOEMPERLEN

### COMING UP FOR AIR

by Lesley Choyce

Creative Publishers, 85 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 920021 55 7)

LESLEY CHOYCE's fifth short story collection, *Coming Up for Air*, may or may not recall George Orwell's 1939 novel of the same name; however, it certainly recalls this Nova Scotia author's own previous lively and humorous fiction.

Usually Choyce presents coming-of-age stories — most notably in *Billy Botzweiler's Last Dance* — but on this occasion he provides an examination of adult life, including



two coming-of-old-age tales. There are nine stories, set mainly in Nova Scotia, with blue-collar and white-collar characters — not to mention a fellow with a black collar (he frequently wears a neoprene wetsuit to surf in the North Atlantic).

For the most part things do not turn out too well for Choyce's cast of grown-ups. A 62-year-old bricklayer who loves his work can no longer continue at it after an injury to his hands; and a British soldier, back in 1776, is obliged, despite his moral qualms, to help drive Acadian peasants from their homes. So it's a considerably sterner Lesley Choyce than we are accustomed to. A shame, because he is at his best when treating life as a joyful game rather than a hideous imposition.

Still, his usual playfulness surfaces often throughout the book, particularly in "Unadvertised Specials" (which could be re-titled "Birth of a Salesman"), a hilarious revelation of discount-store philosophy. The Caledonia Mall Woolco represents "the very fibre of our culture. . . . the White Sale seems like a re-enactment of *Ben Hur*." Lesley Choyce's fantasy life remains in excellent health.

— JOHN PARR

## LANGUAGE

### DICTIONARY OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND ENGLISH

edited by T.K. Pratt

University of Toronto Press, 192 pages, \$30.00 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 5781 0)

IN 1979, T. K. Pratt, a professor of English and linguistics at the University of Prince Edward Island, sent letters to

500 islanders whose backgrounds or jobs gave them special access to P.E.I.'s rich oral heritage. Questionnaires were also sent out to senior citizens, followed by two field-work surveys covering the entire island. Finally, other dialectical dictionaries and more than 900 diaries, letters, and other literary sources (especially, notes the editor, the novels of L. M. Montgomery) from the island's public archives were consulted.

The result is a superbly readable dictionary that reverberates with the real living language of a people and yet is scholarly enough to satisfy the most ardent wordmonger. The obvious comparison is with the Dictionary of Newfoundland English (DNE); with 873 entries it is much shorter, but wading through it is every bit as much fun as swimming in the 600-page DNE. One of the DPEIE's best features is the lengthy quotations it gives in support of each word, many of them from taped interviews, that add up to a kind of oral history of the island's main occupations — lobster fishing, potato growing, fox farming, and Irish mossaing. Thus we get under *chowder*, for instance, a definition — Irish moss mixed with other matter in order to raise the weight and price — followed by a series of quotations from mossers: "Some fishermen make a moss chowder before they sell it so they will have a heavier load and get more money." Elsewhere we learn that chowder was generally made from moss mixed with "shoestring," a kind of eel grass. (In Newfoundland, a chowder is a concoction of black spruce boughs and molasses, taken to prevent scurvy.) In neither dictionary is it thought necessary to give the original or OED definition of the word — a thick fish soup, derived from the French word for cooking pot, *chaudière*.

The dictionary proper is followed by an essay in which Pratt discusses the origins and usage of many of the dictionary's entries. The main

language sources are not surprising: English, Scottish, Irish, and Acadian, with some Miic thrown in for flavouring. What is surprising is that individual words are not confined in their usage to the ethnic group of their origin: "Whatever their origin," Pratt found, "most words are diffused in the general population." As examples, Pratt hacked five Scottish words — *scra*, *skithers*, *spouty*, *stirk*, and *stob* — and found that they were in broad use throughout the island, not just among islanders of Scottish ancestry: 17 per cent of the Acadians polled used *scra* and *spouty* as part of their regular speech. These and other observations, along with the dictionary itself, make the DPEIE a worthy addition to the growing family of regional wordbooks from the Atlantic provinces: the DNE, Lewis Poteet's *South Shore Phrase Book*, and Pascal Poirier's five-volume *Glossaire Acadien*.

-WAYNE GRADY

## POETRY

### OLD ENEMY JUICE

by Phil Hall

Quarry, 80 pages, \$10.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 919627 92 7)

ALL CORNINESS aside, Phil Hall cares 'about this barbed-wire world of ours. *Old Enemy Juice*, his eighth collection; tries to come to terms with all sorts of aches and shudders, everything from sexism to suicide. "Our disappointments/have become. our shields," he writes and then proceeds to drop as many defences as he can, often shocking us with the nakedness of his compassion.

The first section of the book 'is about men with women: lovers, ex-husbands, abusers, friends. Experimenting with different men's lives. diifferent versions of himself, Hall's poems are short and surreal, sometimes just a step away from weird. Almost every one of them contains a gasp, a glimpse for the male reader of his own manhood' distorted in a funhouse mir-

mr. Hall inspires recognition and responsibility.

Further into the book there is an explosive long poem called "The War in Ontario," an attempt to grasp ewiththe hatred he felt for is own 1%-ther, a man who "... hunted/down my mother and killed her/ in legal ways," a rage leading to a final section of poems, entitled "Proof," that pokes through the rubble of a half-ruined society with a razor blade in one hand, a heart in the other.

*Old Enemy Juice* is the quirkiest, wisest work that Hall has written, an often thrilling blast of fiery air. Melting hearts and thawing minds, Hall has even earned himself this mid-career epitaph: "A syllabus of suicides turned him into a scrapper/ He backed out with his songs up like gloves."

-BARRY DEMPSTER

## SOCIETY

### WHOSE MONEY IS IT ANYWAY? THE SHOW-DOWN ON PENSIONS

by Ann Finlayson

Viking (Penguin), 278 pages, \$26.95  
cloth (ISBN 0 670 82282 5)

ANYONE attempting a popular book about pensions faces a daunting task The issues are dry and complex and the very root of the matter is a prospect most of us avoid: the certainty of aging.

Ann Finlayson, as ignorant as most of us when she began, has clearly mastered the subject She has not, however, made it come alive. She begins by examining the background of the Canada Pension Plan, its many flaws and the abortive efforts to reform it. This occupies the first third of the book, and it's hard going. A few more case histories would put flesh on these

dusty bones.

There is more life in Finlayson's attack on the private pension industry. At issue is who benefits and who suffers from inflation, and who really owns the money that has accumulated in the private pension plans Which are now the biggest pool of investment capital in the country. Clearly, many employers think they do.

As inflation erodes the value of the benefits these funds have undertaken to pay, it swells the funds themselves. These days a typical fund earns six per cent more than it is obliged to pay out. Instead of keeping faith with employees by using the surplus to restore the value of benefits, many employers give themselves "a contribution holiday." Some have made huge withdrawals. Some have wound up pension plans, paid off their obligations, and pocketed the surplus:

Because regulatory control of such abuse is slack, and because many unions reflect their members' apathy on pension issues. this plunder will continue if we let it

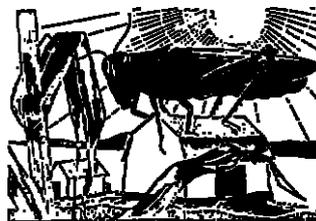
L. LAWRENCE JACKSON

### WHENCE THEY CAME: DEPORTATION FROM CANADA 1900-1935

by Barbara Roberts

University of Ottawa Press, 246 pages,  
\$24.95 paper (ISBN 0 7766 0163 6)

THIS STUDY of the deportation practices between the years 1900 and 1935 of the Department of Immigration (which operated during those years under a variety of names) is quite timely in the light of the department's new immigration bill, which provides for "forced repatriation" of refugees whose claims are deemed to be unacceptable. As Barbara Roberta makes clear in her detailed analysis. Canada has a long and inglorious history of using deport&tion to enforce a selective immigration policy. She contends that deportation was used as a means of ridding Canada of immigrants, including those who had attained



citizenship, whom members of the government bureaucracy would rather not have let in in the first place.

Roberts, now a professor at Concordia University in Montreal, describes herself as a "self-imposed political exile" who came to Canada from the United States in 1970. In this study she focuses mainly on the (often illegal) deportation of "radicals and dissidents" during the period in question and the systematic deportation of the foreign-born unemployed during the Depression.

She does not paint a pretty picture. Deportation orders were generally politically motivated, decided in secret without judicial intervention, and the result of bureaucratic Bat among a small group of faceless and unaccountable functionaries. Although scrupulously researched (using many of the department's own documents) the book is hindered by Roberts's pedestrian writing style (especially considering the incendiary nature of her charges) and the lack

of an index.

— NORMAN SIGURDSON

### WOMEN ON WAR

edited by Daniela Gloseffi  
Simon and Schuster (General),  
391 pages, \$16.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 671 66781 5)

STRONG SOCIAL consciousness rings from every page of this collection of essays, speeches, prose, poetry, and personal testimony. But in the face of a weapons industry that uses the term "collateral damage" to refer to the human casualties that would result if a nuclear war broke out, a little peace jingoism is probably a good thing.

Not that it's all rhetoric. There are dullnesses, and selections so brief as to raise the suspicion that they were included merely for the sake of fattening the list of contributors. It is, without padding, an impressive assembly of internationally known writers, activists, and political figures: Marguerite Duras, Toni Morrison, Anna Akhmatova, Oriana Fallaci, Isabel Allende,

Helen Caldicott, Winnie Mandela, and more. Generally, the most compelling pieces are the personal testimonies, which are not written by "names." The least affecting, with some exceptions, are the poems. Though it's a poet — Carolyn Forché, an American who has spent time in El Salvador, Beirut, and South Africa — who offers one of the most thought-provoking selections, an essay examining her role as "the poet from the privileged world" who "writes about" the suffering of others. The truth is, the readership of this book (including me) is likely also privileged, able to read 'about' the effects of U.S. nuclear testing on residents of the Marshall Islands, the devastation of counter-insurgency wars in El Salvador and Afghanistan, the brutality of apartheid. Forché doesn't see those deadly isms, Eke militarism and racism, as part of an abstract, evil (male) System, but as part of all of us in "the privileged world."

I have gripes about *Women on War*, its inclusions and exclusions. But they fade when I read Grace Paley's poetic fiction, or Carol Cohn's stinging and authoritative inside account of nuclear-arms strategists, or the story of a survivor of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. They fade in the bright ring of what really are "essential voices" in these dangerous times.

— BARBARA CAREY

### HOMETOWN HEROES

by Paul Quarrington  
Collins, 292 pages, \$26.95 cloth (ISBN 00 217919 9)

THERE ARE MANY great sports legends in this country, but the Canadian National Hockey Team that won the 1987 IZVESTIA Tournament in the Soviet Union and then, after some questionable personnel changes, came in fourth in the Calgary Olympics is not among them. And yet, by focusing his shrewd storyteller's eye and familiar wit on the subject, Paul Quarrington has fashioned an entertaining and revealing account of the struggles of this team.

Quarrington sets out to be the kind of sportswriter he has long admired. When "the game is a bad one," he writes,

the sportswriters spin their cigars slowly and are sad. Sometimes the game is a good one, and the sportswriters place their palsied fingers on to the heart of something. In both cases, sportswriters go to the typers and produce poetry.

However, by the time Quarrington has gotten to know the team, learned and recounted each player's story, rejoiced with the players in victory, drowned with them in defeat, and jogged miles with their coach, Dave King, sportswriters have collectively become a "brainless creature" awaiting the team at the airport moving "Eke something out of a horror movie, trampling small children that got in its way."

Quarrington's travels with the "Nats" becomes as much a journey of human discovery as an exposé of a sports team. Talking to Claude Vilgrain, the only black player on the team, he unearths a long tradition of racial discrimination in hockey. He realizes, that there is 'no way a white play% of Claude's talent and size would have been so completely overlooked by the NHL.' He also puts to rest the picayune comments of baseball "pooofs" and others about hockey's limitations, concluding that the Emits of time and space in the game actually heighten the excitement. Unfortunately, they intensify the violence as well. Conversely, the level of bonding Quarrington finds on the team is beyond community, "at a level most of us can't fathom . . . these boys all single cells of a greater being, linked together telepathically." The poetry that Quarrington, at the outset, found in some sportswriters, he himself produces here. "What matters to me about hockey," he unites, "is that to play it well requires both intelligence and skill, mind and body, and when a young man plays it well he is full of grace and glory."

— JOSEPH KERTES

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# A thinking man's life

*Rick Salutin's first novel is the story of Oskar, the savage and bemused observer of life, faith, ideas about the ways we change and the ways we don't, post-war Toronto, his fiends, his rivals, himself, and history (his own and the world's)*

**T**HE WINNER of this year's W. H. Smith/Books in Canada First Novel Award is Rick **Salutin**, the Toronto journalist and playwright. His plays include the well-known 1537: *The Farmers' Revolt* and *Les Canadiens*; both won Chalmers Awards. He has published articles and cultural commentary in many Canadian magazines; he is a regular columnist (as "The Culture Vulture") in *This Magazine*. His biography of Rent Rowley, *The Organizer A Canadian Union Life*, appeared in 1980, and a collection of his journalism, *Marginal Notes: Challenges to the Mainstream*, was published in 1984.

**Salutin** didn't begin to write until he was 28. He studied theology at Columbia University in New York, intending to become a rabbi, then withdrew from the seminary and became involved in left politics. Returning to Canada at 28, he discovered theatre, history, and a Canadian political consciousness that was to provide the propelling energy of his writing. In 1985, he began work on *A Man of Little Faith*.

Why did he turn his attention from theatre to the novel? "I'd been writing prose, mostly journalism, for years, ever since I'd begun writing, in fact. I found that the journalism was becoming more and more 'fictional' - it had scenes, dramatic action, characters, dialogue. Friends pointed this out to me and said, Why don't you just get on with it?"

"I'd been out of theatre for some time. The kinds of plays that are most produced are not the kind I want to write, the kind I have written in the past. The theatre here doesn't have

the resources available for the plays I'd like to write.

"In the theatre, too, a writer can hide behind his characters. I liked the direct voice I had always used in my journalism. The appeal of the novel is that you can speak directly to the reader."

He is at work on another novel, and he has, he says, 'eleven or twelve more sketched out in my mind.'

Here are the judges' comments on the six short-listed novels:

**Nigel Berrisford:** The standard this year was so uniformly high as to make it almost impossible to choose between such excellent contenders. I have picked *A Casual Brutality* by Neil Bissoondath as my choice for best first novel, though I found the choice ex-



PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL ORENSTEIN

Rick Salutin



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The National Library of Canada is a federal institution located in Ottawa, whose main role is to acquire, preserve and promote the published heritage of Canada for all Canadians, both now and in the years to come. The most comprehensive collection of Canadiana in the world — books, periodicals, sound recordings and other materials — can be found at the National Library.



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Canada

tremely difficult as the novels of Janice Kulyk Keefer, Joan Clark, and Rick Salutin were also of such a high standard as to make worthy winners in most years.

My choice for winner. A *Casual Brutality*, is a great first novel, written with tremendous assurance, which belies the fact that it's Bissoondath's first. The central character, Dr. Raj Ramsingh, looks at the crumbling, brutal world of his homeland with despair but understanding. A magnificent novel.

My second choice *The Victory of Geraldine Cull*, by Joan Clark. A great new Canadian character, Geraldine Cull, dominates this complex novel, full of memorable images captured by superb descriptive writing. The village of Niska leaps from the pages with one vivid description after another. Packed with interesting characters, this is a major novel.

Set in Spruce Harbour, Nova Scotia, *Constellations*, by Janice Kulyk Keefer, is a beautifully written novel about a collection of cultural misfits. The figure of Claire Saulnier is a real and complex woman and there are many convincingly drawn minor characters. My own favourite is the postmaster Delbert, who is omniscient about the lives of Spruce Harbour residents. A charming, well-written novel.

*Oskar*, the ugly but very appealing central character of *A Man of Little Faith*. Rick Salutin's novel, is a great fictional creation. The book is a tour de force of good writing and characterization. My only criticism would be that it's too crammed with ideas, dialogue, and arguments, and has a lack of continuity.

*January, February, June or July*, by Helen Fogwill Porter, is a perceptive and moving first novel, and very well written. It captures precisely the closed world of 15- or 16-year-old girls. The awful terror of a young girl who becomes pregnant is well realized.

*Electrical Storms*, by David Homel, is set in the '60s, and is full of drugs, sex, violence, and murder. This novel moves at breakneck speed. The dialogue is excellent. The book as a whole, however, is jerky and disjointed.

*Elisabeth Harvor*: My choice for the award this year is Rick Salutin's *A Man of Little Faith*. It's a whole and human book. Also a very intelligent and generous one — a book that in fact demonstrates with verbal wizardry the difference, in authorial voice, be-

hveen generosity and self-indulgence. In spite of a somewhat tired beginning (and also a disappointingly familiar final paragraph) the novel, once it hits its stride, has the joyful and artless feel of an extended anecdote (but an anecdote that is complex, tender, and innovative). **Salutin** is a wonderful **stylist**; we are never presented in his work (as we too often are in the work of many first-time novelists) with the reverent and sorry spectacle of the writer Being a Writer — on the contrary, *A Man of Little Faith* is a **fine** argument for what a **novel** of ideas should be able to do: create a buoyant relationship between information, emotion, rhythm, and language. The novel's story is the story of Oskar, a German Jewish refugee **who** not only doubts, but also doubts his own doubts, then rides over all these doubts to become a savage and bemused observer. Of what? Of everything: **faith**, ideas about the ways we change and the ways we don't, post-war Toronto, his friends, his rivals (in his case they are the **same** people), himself (another **rival**), his history (his own and the world's), as well as his "futile fantasy about being a historian — as a sort of personal stand against myth." There isn't much **figurative** language in *A Man of Little Faith* — its charm is rather in its perfect pacing **and in** the sorrowfully comic music of its prose: **still**, the images **that** are **contained in** the book are often original and precise, as in this brief description of Oskar spying on his **students** at the Pillar of Fire Religious School: ". . . he often slips into the old choir loft, which is screened from view by a grillwork like a lattice of dinosaur bones." It is this image of **Oskar** as someone childlike — someone who spies, envies, doubts, **hungers** — that forms a bond **with** the **child** in the reader (or at least with the child in **this** reader). In **fact** I was sometimes reminded, reading **Oskar's** story, of another great (and tormented and brave) doubter, Kafka, who wrote: "There are possibilities for me, certainly: but under what stone do they lie?" Picking up one stone **after** another, Oskar, more bravely than he knows, **lives** his **life**.

In Joan **Clark's** *The Victory of Geraldine Gull*, I really admired the physical sense of the history of things. For example: the description of the **art** teacher as she sits sketching on a kitchen chair at the edge of a gully, and of what **the easel is** made of. **what differ-**

**ent** uses things have been put to, what foods have been bought at the **Hudson's Bay** store, the contents of kitchen **cupboards**, etc. Also the way Clark demythologizes native people, but keeps a respect for them that seems human rather than **politically** correct. **Most** of the time, anyway. There **are** a few problems: I sometimes felt there was a certain **authorial** fastidiousness, particularly in the scenes **involving** the teacher **Willa Coyle**, and one of the **young Swampy** Cree men, Patrick Eagle. But the **imagery** in the book is impressive — **both** original and northern, as in this description of the white boas, **Pawley**, and his woman, out in a blind in the tundra, waiting for geese: "They watched them, hopping from foot to foot in the cold, their hands curled up in their sleeves like paws." Also the description of Sal Pawley's hair as "dull but curved up like a dog's tail. But in a **way**, it is also this love of Clark's for the world and her **fascination** with how **everything** is put together that works against a strong emotional build-up of feeling between the characters. Still, she **has** mainly, managed to keep her work free of the **taint** of ideological worthiness, and the sense of place she has been able to evoke in her **descriptions** of shacks and northern schoolhouses and the way the "current seems to slide rather than push, as if **slowed** by the warm sun," are often really fine.

Calling a book unpretentious is generally thought to **be** damning it with **faint** praise, but Helen **Fogwill** Porter's *January, February, June or July* is the sort of short, **modest** book that could give unpretentiousness a good name. The story is a familiar rite-of-passage story set in the poor **St. John's Centre** area of Newfoundland's capital city, but it stays so close **to its 15-year-old** protagonist that there were moments when I felt more absorbed in the world of the Novak family **than** I did in the worlds created by any of the other writers in this group. That the story is predictable is probably the greatest mark against it, and sometimes the marriage of **dialect** to words like "perhaps" and "mundane" and "**ludicrous**" seems odd, and occasionally **dialogue** is made to do work that could better have been done by narrative, but as the novel progresses it becomes more and more clear that Porter has a **fine gift** for making the ordinary **extraordinary**. Also, **although the story** at times **flirts dangerously** with sentimentality,

"Irresistible\*  
storytelling..."

RHODA LERMAN

# God's Ear

A NOVEL

"A **n** immense amount of Jewish learning and Hasidic lore [packed] into a novel that's moving, wise, and very, very funny... Lerman triumphs with the story of wish insurance salesman **inned** by his dead father **lost** into **ministering** to the **spiritual** needs of a **congregation** of losers and **crazies**. **logically** inventive **happergs**, misadventures with **thcals** (and with **his** father's **athetic followers**) and **mucffering** brought on by **desir** or a beautiful, **provocativ** **ighbour**... leads him to open **s** heart and attach **himse** to God.

— \*KIRKUS REVIEWS

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College Dictionary

the two love stories, the one involving Heather Novak and an **18-year-old** hockey player, and the **one** involving her dying grandmother and the grandmother's second husband, are very touching.

Neil Bissoondath's *A Casual Brutality* may be the most didactic thriller ever written. Because the first-person voice is so lugubrious **and** even in an innocent sort of way pompous, the initial impression is of a book whose author has worked very hard. Too hard, even. But the **melodrama** of the **structure** calls such a belief into question: doesn't melodrama as a structural choice always signal an unwillingness on the part of the writer to do the real work of writing? Over **and** over again in this book, Bissoondath walks away from a scene at the very moment we most need **him** to hang around and tell **us** what happens next. He is a clinical **writer** rather than an imaginative one — there's no **original** imagery in this novel. No seeing the world with the eye of a poet or child; there is instead a good deal of meticulous and even microscopic writing and sometimes, when it hasn't been too deliberately submerged in the text (to foreshadow a later event), this writing **can** be pow-



erful — powerful enough to make me feel that Bissoondath, at least in this stage of his **life**, could be a fine **non-fiction** writer. But is he ready to be let loose in the world of feelings? I have my doubts.

The problem is that Bissoondath moves his characters around in the novel like doomed little pawns. As for the five or six scenes that are **dazzling** as pictorial events, they work hardly at all as emotional events. Bissoondath, like many beginning novelists, suffers from lyrical and moral **overreach**, and as a result of it over and over **again** in this book we meet up with what feels like strategy, not tragedy.

I had **difficulty** entering the worlds created by David **Homel** and Janice Kulyk Keefer. The **Homel** book is the breezier of the **two** and because of this

I had an easier time getting through it. The Keefer book is much more **ambitious and cluttered**. I got **such** a **feeling** of words and information having been pelted at the page in a way that seemed to trivialize feelings rather than deepen **them**; and so many of the **characters** seemed so affected and **diddainful**. An example:

He is **sitting** with the Comtesse in her boudoir while Antoinette plays endless sets of **tennis** with the gardener in the **courts** behind the stables, courts tastefully screened from view by a thick juniper hedge. The old woman is **skeletally** erect in her bed. **indigo-coloured** spectacles over her near-dead eyes, **and** what remains of her flesh is swathed in batiste and antique lace, faintly **rusty** in places. He reaches forward to the night table to pour her a glass of ice-water from the crystal decanter — pour it **with** consummate skill, tact, deference — like a head waiter at a **five-star** hotel, Antoinette had once sneered.

Every time I opened this book I would feel a **terrible** anxiety, which I finally put down to **the fact** that I seemed to be **picking up anxiety** from the author herself. There's such a tone of archness to this book, and doesn't archness usually hide anxiety! There's a lack of trust, really — **trust** in the reader. I also feel that Keefer has handicapped herself by placing passages from Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* here and there in the narrative. Coming upon one of these thoughtful thoughts is like coming upon a spring of clear water **after hacking** your way through a verbal thicket.

Jack McClelland: Neil Bissoondath's *A Casual Brutality* has been highly praised by some critics, and perhaps he deserves all that praise, but I do not rank either his book or David **Homel's** *Electrical Storms* very high among the six novelists in this competition.

Rick **Salutin's** novel, *A Man of Little Faith*, had me thinking this is a superb playwright but not a great novelist. I think he should stick to the short story, a form he would handle very well. I found it extremely **difficult** to involve myself **with** his characters or even to believe in them.

Helen **Fogwill** Porter has a very special gift **and** a warm insightful feeling for Newfoundland, and I can well understand why *January, February, June or July* was included among the **finalists**. Having said that, I had some feel-

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ing that she had extreme difficulty stretching **this** out to novel length. I felt I should like to **know** much, much more about the principal characters.

The *Victory of Geraldine Gull* is another matter. This is a **first-rate** writer. In the **main**, I had the inevitable conclusion that she is better at the **short-story length** than as a novelist, but she writes with conviction and her characters **are** real. I may have been put off by the idiotic jacket design; publishers should insist that the designers have at least some idea of the content of the book. It is a very serious subject, and Joan Clark is a **first-class** writer, but I don't think the novel length is quite her strength yet.

The clear winner is Janice Kulyk Keefer and her book *Constellations*. She is a **gifted** writer, cares about her subject matter, **and** handles the novel length **with** great skill **and** ease.

Leon **Rooke**: Helen Fogwill Porter's *January, February, June or July* has **charm**, and there is considerable sensitivity in its portrayal of the gentle 15-year-old heroine whose experiences with her equally innocent boyfriend result in her pregnancy and the eventual aborting of both the fetus **and** her **first** love. The character's home life in St John's, her relationship with mother and sisters and a few **friends**, is vividly drawn and has many **endearing** moments. But dissatisfactions I had **with** the novel are not of a trivial kind. **The** work, aimed, as it **often** appears to be, at a teenage audience, is so overt in its sociology that one suspects at times the book is meant to be an instruction manual for sexually active young girls. Heather's actual surgical experiences seem in large part designed to ease the **minds** of teenagers unlucky enough to share this heroine's **plight**; **all** involved could not be nicer, and the end result is that Heather is reunited with her family, her community, and the **versifier's** world she adores. My larger complaint is that while the novel seemingly fits very much into the realistic mode (the characters drink Tang, eat **Kraft** dinners, and have as the height of their aspirations a job at K-Mart or **Woolworths**) much in these characters' lives has been so **simplified** that the novel dangerously veers towards the false report. Not to emphasize this, however. I liked the book; it's nice, **and** is imbued **with** genuine warmth.

I felt not nearly so **kindly** about Neil Bissoondath's *A Casual Brutality*. As

surely, the author has uncommon talent and will likely go on to write distinguished **fiction**, but this first novel is **far** from that. The novel's structure, **with** its arbitrary jumps from past to present, from Toronto to a besieged West Indian island in the Caribbean, is easy on the author but rather hard on us. Structure, though, is the least of this book's offences. Bissoondath overwrites. Ponderous introspection, in this novel, foams as freely as **draft** beer at your local pub. A good many **difficulties** might have been alleviated had the author used a third-person point of view, for that in fact is what his first-person voice is. Worse yet, we

**erode**; despite periodic recoveries, the stamina is largely gone. Keefer seems to sense this, and continues to offer up new **characters** and widen her horizon — she writes convincingly, for instance, from assorted points of view, intellectual to illiterate. But the novel has got away from her and **full** recovery is impossible. Her mistake, I think, was in choosing to load the novel's plot-impetus with the imported **character**, Bertrand, a *Français do France* — who came out of the air and could not bear the weight — rather than with **Claire**, who came out of the heart, and with full trust from the author might have provided us (in a tight, modern

---

***If faith, the author's, is what keeps  
a novel going from first page  
to last without side-stepping or  
pursuing blind alleys, or puffery,  
or leap-frogging to an unearned elm?,  
it is Salutin who has it. . . .  
The author's integrity is intact  
on every page***

---

learn on the novel's final pages that **the** wife, whom the narrator tolerated, and the son, whom he loved, were killed in the (island's) violent social upheaval that prompted the novel's telling in the first place. A novel must have **an** ending, and clearly this hit of news was reserved in order that there be one. It is simply not credible — this isn't related **from** a psychiatrist's chair, after **all** — that a narrator **who** remembers everything, including how his lips tightened against his teeth at the smallest altercation 30 years earlier, and who **offers** judicious explanation and analysis of all else entering his domain, trivial to significant, would not have had occasion through 370 pages at least to allude to the single tragic event that hurt him most. This is the entire novel undermined. **Raj Ram Singh**, we are told on the jacket, is a decent man; even in those sections where I believed in his existence, and where the **writing** was **skilful**, I did not like **him**.

Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Constellations* begins brilliantly. Oh boy, I thought, what a hook! But once Keefer removes herself from the point of view of the windswept Claire, whose 41 pages open the novel, its narrative drive begins to sputter, and finally to severely

novel rather than the old-fashioned, quite conventional one *Constellations* becomes) with a notable work of art. The novel wears itself out finally with weary undulation of **character** and **unfolding** of plot, a case, I expect of the **author** sighting her book's difficulties and unable to abandon the salvaging impulse. **This** is a **dreary** appraisal of the whole: forget the whole and you find **yourself** with **numerous pages** of **fiercely** good writing.

*The Victory of Geraldine Gull*: Joan Clark's children's work I have long **admired**, and I admire this, her **first** adult novel. Each of the characters in this northern environment is invested with authentic life, and generates our deepest interest. **They** are an assorted lot, **and** all are genuine keepers of the tale unfolding. The author's **sensibility** is **refined** and exact. We like her (**the** author): we like them. It is a very readable, and engrossing, book, though some mistakes have been made. **The** first is a tactical one, occurring midway, when the pivotal character — **"crazy"** Geraldine, the Indian woman responsible for keeping the novel's plot going — meets up **with** her long-lost son in a Winnipeg bar. (She had been down on her luck after a series of disasters, young, a **drunk** and a **prosti-**

tute; her infant child had been taken from her; afterwards, the son went on to become a revered Indian artist, she to become the "crazy" Geraldine of the title.) The coincidence of this reunion is repellent (and unnecessary — Clark felt she needed an explanation for how the mother, in the novel's true time, came to be in possession of the son's paintings —) but one forgives her. I forgive her too for sacrificing character to plot in the book's resolution (one envisions movie cameras revving) when all becomes too predictable, a swollen river inundating the village and all its occupants embarking upon the ark that Geraldine's redeemed husband has been constructing from the first pages. Until this ending, the plot serves well and is not nearly so fanciful as this bare outline suggests, though it is Clark's solid characterization, her politics, her clean style, and the narrative's lively movement that make *The Victory* a solid choice for this short list

David Homel's *Electrical Storms* opens with promise and intermittently that promise remains afloat, despite an accruing sense that the pages are "looking," as one character here says about another, "for something to nap

pen." What happens happens on page 52 when one of the friends in a Chicago teen group they call the Kensington Krazies is murdered, and the Krazies, led by the novel's narrator, are that crime's silent witnesses. The machinations following from that provide the story, a workable-enough one, though the story as rendered by-and-by becomes more than a shade implausible as characterizations deteriorate and, again, plot is allowed to dictate the players' performances. Homel's writing is often lively — he throws down a good many snappy lines-but the tale's superficial quality mounts. There is little subtlety in the narrative and, by the end, as the Krazies effect their own revenge on the murderer, one even feels that none was intended; despite the sex, the drugs; and the hippie '60s period it in part evokes, I closed the novel thinking of Al Jolson's black-faced rendition of "Mammy."

The classiest novel — and a classy one in whatever company — is Rick Salutin's *A Man of Little Faith*. If faith, the author's, is what keeps a novel going from first page to last without sidestepping or pursuing blind alleys or puttery, or leap-frogging to an un-

earned close, it is Salutin who has it, and though you might make this or that quibble about pace, about story, you are aware that you are in touch with a thinking man's life, and that the author rendering that life has given himself deeply to its creation and is making no unseemly blunders. If the novel doesn't have quite the intellectual grist of a Bellow or the heart's-reach of a Malamud, with whose work this can validly be associated, you know at the very least that you are in the same arena. True, one could ask for more variety in the presentation; true, one emerges not knowing as much about Oskar as one might expect in a 300-page work that so diligently pursues him. Even so. The novel is assured and purposeful, forged with stylistic vigour. The author's integrity is intact on every page. Among those works considered here, it is — despite the absence of ready plot and the somewhat closed corridors it pursues — technically the most accomplished. It is sophisticated writing in all respects; it excavates and illuminates the human condition, and exists as a genuine document of our passage. Nothing false about this report; *A Man of Little Faith* gets my vote. □

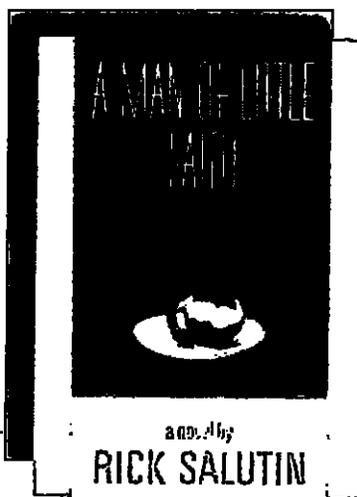
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# Pronouns on the Main

by Erin Mouré

On the sidewalks, such women & men ...  
**They** think they're haunted. ..  
**They** think their bodies bring back memories!  
 That's why they roll up those **magnificent** sweaters.  
 So **that's** why **their** loose pants are **rolled** up  
 at the hem. 0 ankles!  
**In a cold year some of them carry their lettuce in the**  
 smallest of bags. Some of them  
 have bought cheese. 0 the sidewalks!

0 0 0

A man **writes** a novel on a **cigaret** package.  
 In a **café & cinéma** a man writes down his only feeling.  
 Imagine for a minute the lines  
 hi mat sleeves are **purely** writing,  
 imagine the several pronouns "**she**" "**hers**"  
 "her". With these pronouns his novel is shorter!  
**Already** "she" has walked into  
 the 2nd chapter, the 3rd chapter,  
 (today is cold)  
 people drink coffee at the bar, **standing** up, in **glasses**.  
 The saxophone becomes **more** indistinct,

**outside** on the **sidewalk** women are passing.  
 & for all this, a **man** is nervous!  
 For this, he writes a novel!  
 Because he waits for her!

0 0 0

**But**, then. some of us have been  
 old already, & have grown up elsewhere.  
 There is **still** a little mud **from** the prairie river,  
 it is not unusual  
 There is nothing so much **that** it is  
 usual! Her bicycle being carried past  
 on a canvas to the hospital of the parking meter.  
 Because some of **us** are married,  
 & on the canvas is painted a blue sky,  
 upon such a **canvas** lies the bicycle, carried past **us**  
 with our bags of Saturday  
 from **Frenco & Waldman's**.  
 Each of **us** with some grain & vegetable  
 & fish!  
 Bring back the bicycle.. **I am too** much,  
**this** year, old. The blue sky!  
 I cannot walk yet  
 I have grown up elsewhere.

0 0 0

I am **looking** to the **Present**, as it is described  
 with hats, **with** flowers, the suicide in a green jacket  
**& haircut**, who has just got **this haircut**,  
 as **if famous**, who does not know she is a suicide.. .  
**hier** jacket & bag of Saturday **groceries**,  
 of pears & carrots, of 2 bananas & a piece  
 of requin, **sliced** from the belly

0 soft core of the shark, belly of the fish  
 sold to a woman who dreams of dancing  
**Who dreams** of **the arms raised in order**  
 to be dancing  
**& forgives**, immediately, **everyone**, & puts off,  
**with** her groceries, the **suicide** she  
 has not dreamed of  
 She has a **haircut** now.. . enough.. .

0 0 0

The **pronouns** cannot be counted,  
 their numbers are too much.  
**The** novel has already gone from the **café**. Finally  
 "she" **came**. **In** any case,  
 if a man is writing, if his **sleeves** are **writing**,  
 the "she" & "she" ..: when will **they** meet each other?  
 When will they meet each other  
 on this **definite** sidewalk.  
 After all, a woman passes,  
 her raincoat waiting for rain,  
 a woman **with** no groceries so she **can** remember.  
**Another** woman **with** no bag saying "**Warshaws!**"  
**"In broad daylight"** on  
 these squares "containing their history."  
**A line from Yannis** Ritsos, whose  
 picture **looks** south **in** the window of the **Typographeon**.  
 These **squares waiting** for the heat of summer  
 (today is-cold)  
**&** waiting for the light of feminine pronouns

The novel whose body brings **back** memories.. .  
**This** is why **they** wear their sweaters so easily!  
 As they walk by, they **turn** to each other, "**elle**" et "**elle**"  
 touching a sweater. Such a novel! Their hems **rolled!**  
 This is why **the** "she" in me cannot be cored!

## South West, or Altadore

0 or imperfect, fleeing minds.  
 The woman about **to** begin  
 her **walk** thm the desert, carrying  
 a **small** suitcase with **the words**  
**"Eleftherias Street,"** folded, Inside.  
 Already, I **am full** of such bitterness for my **life**.  
 I **am** young, & bitterness **is the** quarry  
 of **the** young.  
 The **street** is long, the **light** thin.  
 The brown of the grass, after so many,  
 the white of the fence, **sings**.

So cold.  
As if, the **prefiguration** of **snow**.  
The **drink** of light wine **hurting**  
the chest. **Tipota.**

2

**Those** of us who **remain calm**,  
**that is** to **say**, angry  
**Those** of us who are **enraged**,  
& thus can eat, holding the fork up  
**with** the food, pushing our heads  
forward, bid-like, **eating**

Those of us who have had enough  
Those of us **qui sont tannées**

**Eating**  
Forging the food into the liquid of the body  
The liquid so dense & pure  
there could be no end to tears  
should **we** begin them

**But we won't**  
Those of us who are 'displaced  
**from the measure**  
Those of us who **are** here tonight  
I bow to us **with all** my cutlery  
Beware **us**  
Those of us who **remain calm**

3

**Going** into what desert, south-  
west  
**Calgary Alberta**, or  
**Altadore**, 16th St & 36th Ave,  
the dead end & box apartments,  
the huge blinking light of **Safeway**,  
the concrete wall  
Going in to the desert  
**carrying the** suitcase, a weight  
**of dream**

Its silk empty  
The rabbit gun against the house wall, loaded  
Cold air & a view of mountains  
Bright sun on the **stucco** wall

4

The woman unfolding the page on which is written:  
**ΟΑ. ΕΑΕΥΘΕΡΙΑ**  
That's it, the **line**.  
**How** long can we live before we die.  
As **if**, all women, carry  
the light of the south-west: **doorsnowdoorsnowdoor**  
The noise of this.  
She gets up, out of her chair

once in every poem, adjusting the **slatted blind**  
to let the snow in.

6

**The cat** howls.  
The dessert on the table (compote de pokes) howls.  
The compote de pokes howls.  
The applesauce howls.  
The table is **starting**  
howling  
**I've** had it  
Shut up, **everything**

6

What you would take into the **desert** or,  
if not available, the mountains: a compass,  
**waterproof** matches, a groundsheet  
Hard **boots**, broken in. In **which**  
the past steps of the being

howl

7

The winds here **northern**  
The body with its fabled warmth lie up  
**we say**  
the **heart**. The worn **tree-line above** which  
the flat light of the avenue.  
The **mountains/desert finally**  
the same place  
The **shutting of the** house door  
**to go off & wage the self**  
against the hinge of a **single** word  
**Eleftherias.**

& stand up, our desert equipment **softened**  
Our **chests speaking** to us in a murmur  
Our **neighbours** who are carpenters  
We hear them at night in their finest dresses  
dancing **snowdoor**  
**after so** much silence  
Their gestures

at **the heart** of **Altadore**, inside us

6

Minstrels **returned** with their mitts off **from the cold**

## Loony Tune Music

**Oh** this loony tune music, the half **glass of vodka** on the table,  
**the dream table & me restless with the coffee & her smile in the**  
**smoky bar "we fell in love here" she tells** the other women that  
smile & those curls that make me **crazy** some days with the  
**coffee rolling in bed afterward rolling my head punched a bead**  
**into the pillow & arms from the lat pulldowns aching a bit,**  
not able to **sleep**,  
the poetic **line I can't** write physical **presence** demanding  
a **certain** attention, a **certain** flow across the page, why **lines**

anyhow it's all machinery the head pulled taut tarpaulin of the brain as if no metonymy just "basic experience" Cheryl says or "sound" Libby writes as if there could be that without mediation of the words, between my arm & her smile blond curls those curls & the curls upside down behind my blue eyes on the retina reversed again in the brain the image of that not presence or self but absence perfectly replicated, playing everything over, identifies me We fell out of love not in one cafe but everywhere upside down, she says The loony tune music Those curls

### Site: Loony Tune Music

I never thought I'd write a line about the woman's curls. The street where I see her, outside the cafe. Our falling in love has been dismantled by a cafe expansion. After we fell in love the cafe became a success, more artists came to drink their coffee & mad the papers. Filmmakers from out of town sat with musicians & talked of popular novels over tall green bottles. Where the café creates its mirror image next door & expands. It used to be a dry goods store there. She's standing out in the street talking about my raincoat, which she admires. If you stand out here long enough I, say someone will hug you. In the cafe, hundreds of glasses are raised, hundreds of lips are drinking. The small raised platform where our table was has been removed. Part of the design. The absence of our kisses. She in her raincoat too on the street outside.

### Site Correction: Loony Tune Music

The questioning of the poem leads to infinite fragmentation & loss of the lyric whole, unity, the writer's famous eye cast into the physical jar. Defusing the bomb's trajectory, witness as a concept is outdated in the countries of privilege, witness as tactic, the image as completed desktop publishing & the writer as accurate, the names are sonorous & bear repeating tho there is no repetition the throat fails to mark the trace of the individual voice which entails loony tune music in this age The street outside, a little raw with the cold, we meet & wave our arms, stomping our feet outside the cafe, glad to have met again & drink coffee, sometimes

The questioning of the poem is an uncovering of fragments already there, the lyric finality an erasure of the excess The visible whole composed of these infinite fragments & every one of them aches infinitesimal Why should you like it It aches she aches they ache Oh give up anguish & live. (she said)

*These poems are from Erin Mouré's new collection of poetry, W. S. W. (West South West), to be published by Véhicule Press in late 1989 or early 1990.*

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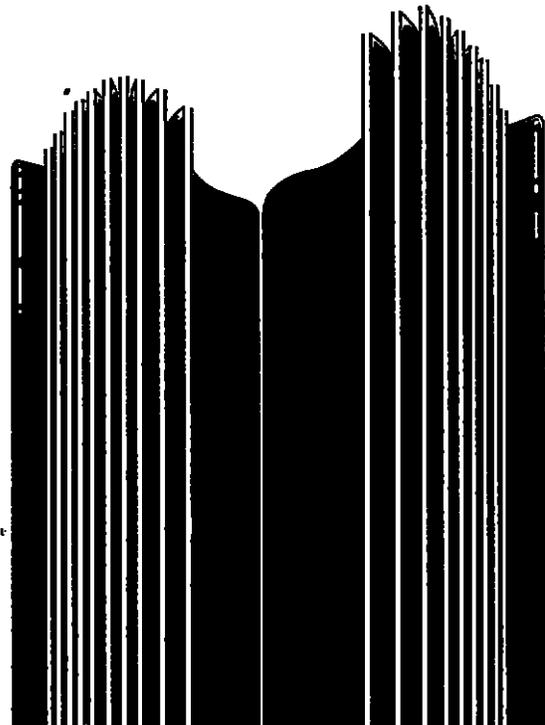
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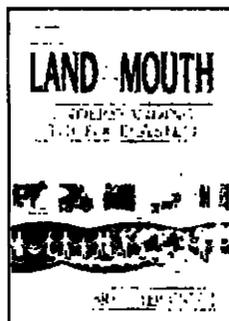
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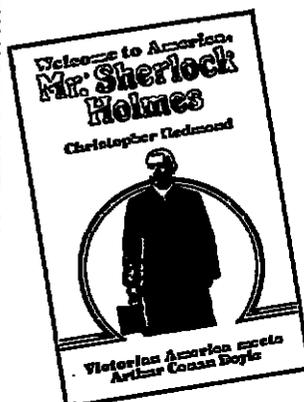
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# A world we had forgotten

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By Don Coles



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by Robert Finch

Porcupine's Quill, 93 pages, \$8.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 88984 124 1)

## BALTHAZAR AND OTHER POEMS

by D. G. Jones

Coch House, 85 pages, \$12.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 88910 333 X)

ROBERT FINCH's seventh collection is wise, energetic, elegantly crafted, occasionally merely charming, never less than blessedly literate. Take any three of the above descriptive terms, encode a scanner on their principles, pass it over the membership list of the League of Redheaded Poets, and see how many live ones you come up with. Five? At most, though I'll name you no names. But it's a pleasure reading Finch, and another lesson for one who, I mean meself, lazily tends to think that if he doesn't regularly see a name in Harbourlights it can't be worth knowing about. A foolish notion, for sure. One of these days I'll know so forever.

To begin at the doldrums end of this sea-and-lake-faring collection, you have the jaunty, thin-textured rhythms of "The Trade":

*When you step in the boat and the tiller  
is yours  
And a bosomy breeze is the shape of  
your sail,  
You are free on the swiftest of ambulant  
floors,  
You are launched on a venture no med-  
dler can trail . . .*

Not just the title reminds one of John Masefield, the rhythms do too. But Finch, even at his thinnest (and this is close to there), is better than that old schoolboy memory-work assignment: note the uninflated journeyman word "meddler," far too everyday for Masefield; and elsewhere in the same piece there's the line "A race with the great sloop of azure above," which is a typical-4 (if you'll abide the oxymoron) unpredictable Finch image, total 4 modern in its sensibility, fresh and generous and luminous.

Many quotable lines though not a one but is better in context. From "The Island," after a series of lines surely deliberately sparse in imagery, comes "The moon's discreetly enigmatic car" — a line bearing its classical provenance with as much tact as any master has ever owned, reminding me of Douglas LePan, also, curiously, of Philip Larkin (the line could be dropped into Larkin's "Love Songs in Age" alongside "Its bright incipience sailing above"). . . . High praise, both comparisons.

There is the lovely supra-Betje-manesque wit of "Chairmanship":

*All the world changes when we change  
our chair,  
The world we gazed at is no longer  
there,  
A world we had forgotten reappears,*

*Our thoughts are new if not our hopes  
and fears*

There is a mixed bag of Epigrammes; and there is a long and, I think, failed poem in rhyming couplets on John/Jack Donne. But let me end with the lapidary perfection, and I mean perfection, of "Neighbours," which the mutilated ghost of Thomas Hardy most be applauding from both its burial places:

*L.&stop a bit and chat  
Where we've so often stood  
Exchanging this and that*

*Others will play tomorrow  
At neighbours on tkis mad  
Under these trees we borrow*

D. G. Jones's sixth collection is called *Balthazar*, a title that brings Lawrence Durrell to mind and quite right he is to be thus brought, since these two writers have something in common. Much of what they have in common is or are nubile girls, an interest that is probably widely shared and which, in Durrell's case, may well have had something to do with the huge success of *The Alexandria Quartet* of everything, but something.

In Jones's case, this interest is displayed to most advantage in the 22-part title poem. It's delicate terrain, mined with perils; at its most sophisticated it is Nabokov country, closer to home it is also John Glassco country: way down-market from those it is the flimsy soft-focus land of a Balthus sketch — and I mean no offence if I say it is also, to a degree, that country for mature gents Nat Yeats once famously and resignedly alluded to. The aim, as a rule is to evoke the wispily sensual, the wittily decadent, the delicately elegiac, while steering high-mindedly past the voyeuristic, the obsessive, and, pointiest rock of all, the porno-cliché, and I think Jones survives most comparisons and almost all perils.

*. . . Clothilde  
who had dismissed him as a 'hmph  
artist' when formally*

*introduced by mother, oh  
weeks before, made a fresh entry  
swooning in the Louis Seize*

*Limbs adrift, lips parted  
her new breasts pouting  
from an overlarge peignoir*

*she was in the grip, clearly  
of some gentle succubus  
It was a classic pose*

*He cleared his throat  
but only tka dust motes moved  
perhaps more ardently . . .*

This is obviously very accomplished stuff, but there is more to this series than I have so far allowed you to know.

There's a criss-crossing of low-profile religious imagery and interjections in French and German, the former sophisticated and sensuous, the latter simplistic — *Gott im Himmel, Übermensch, judischen* — and error-strewn — *rückwärts (sic), kinderleidchen (sic)* — and I do not find this underlay of familiar Holocaust menace really convincing. It seems slight, almost glib; the mix was not a good idea. George Steiner has told us we

dare not invoke such great themes lightly. He is certainly right

Still, there is much skill on show here, comic passages of impressive sophistication, and occasional moments of a grave, unemphatic beauty: '

*Will the wind of the hordes  
upset you, Mädchen, your light  
frock, so little, a darkening  
field of flowers*

□

# In search of the story

*'To reveal all is to' erd the story,' Kroetsch says  
in one essay. So he tells us what he prizes among the  
deferred, the hidden, the secret, and the silent*

By George Bowering

## THE LOVELY TREACHERY OF WORDS

by Robert Kroetsch

Oxford University Press, 224 pages, \$14.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 19 540694 X)

IN CANADA we often write "poet-novelist" before a writer's name. We have to do this more than most countries do. Of course most of these poet-novelists toss off an essay from time to time. But we seldom feel that it would be sensible to write "poet-novelist&tic."

Margaret Ahvood writes reviews and makes the odd address to a group of elected representatives. A long time ago Michael Ondaatje wrote a little chapbook on Leonard Cohen: bp Nichol wrote in all three forms, but you had to take his word about which was which.

Robert Kroetsch was successful first as a novelist. Then he became the first novelist to influence the poets as a poet. Next to Ahvood he is the most often interviewed writer in the country. All along he has been not only writing the literary essay, but also reinventing it. He has not just written the requisite papers of a writer who works at universities; he has produced famous essays. They have introduced famous phrases into the literature.

Some of those famous essays, such as "Unhiding the Hidden" and "An Erotics of Space," reappear in this collection.

When I go to conferences on Canadian literature in New Zealand and Australia and Italy and Germany, it is Kroetsch I hear those foreigners writing about. Maybe this is because he practis-

es literary theory. In so doing he breaks an old Anglo-Canadian proscription against thinking about what you are doing in the making of literature.

There are 17 essays in this collection. Some of them appeared in an earlier collection of Kroetsch's essays, edited by bp Nichol and Frank Davey, and published as an issue of their journal, *Open Letter* in 1933. (It has been for five years a much-annotated college textbook.) The rest are treatments of narrative in Canadian fiction. In fact only one of the essays is in total about verse, the much-presented "For Play and Entrance; the Contemporary Canadian Long Poem."

Kroetsch performs what seems to be a paradox (and he will not be unhappy to see that word). He casts his eye and nets wide over Canadian narrative, from Haliburton to Buckler, Ross, Laurence, and Audrey Thomas. He is all-embracing, too widely encouraging, according to some of his readers. He finds valuable stuff practically anywhere in our letters. Yet he is the most readable critic, and I think that is so because he treats his criticism as part of a multilogue with our other writers. In a book-length interview he once said, "I think criticism is really a version of story . . . the story of our search for story."

That word "our" appears often in Kroetsch's writing. His subject is some times the ways in which we can make ourselves Canadians. That is likely part of the reason that so many of these essays were begun as papers at international conferences. But Kmetsch connects finding ourselves with finding a

way to speak. He takes chances, foolish ones sometimes, and that promotes our faith. He takes plunges, sees something delicious in the new European theory de3 and gobbles it down without sitting at their table.

Narrative strategies are his preoccupation. Northrop Frye, he says here, is our epic poet. Christopher Columbus is the mythic hem. Christopher Columbus was an Orpheus. America was not his Hades but his Eurydice.

Kmetsch finds Orpheus all over Canadian literature, in which the wounded artist is so often the central figure, in which we find so many idyllic and doomed couples, in which our citizens are under the ground, at the bottom of a lake, buried by snow or earth or trees. Here we see the way that Orpheus haunts Malcolm Lowry's fiction. Howard O'Hagan's Tay John is "an inverse Orpheus figure. He has come up from under the ground, not with speech or poetry, but with silence."

What I like about things such as Kroetsch's discovery of Orpheus among us supposedly placid Canadians is the excitement in the finding. Kmetsch does not present the waxed and polished fruits of his research. We see always the autobiographical, the search. We get a man standing by his words, not behind them. He is writing his reading. Thus we are invited to do and offer our own.

A bonus in this volume is an irregular piece called "Toward an Essay: my Up state New York Journals." This resembles *The Crow Journals*, and dates from 1970 to 1974. The last entry we get is another of Kroetsch's demonstrations against closure: "I said to Jane, what is the subject of a love poem? She said, There can only be one subject of a love poem. What? I asked her." Orpheus, we reflect, went to Hell to try to erase closure.

"To reveal all is to end the story," Kroetsch says to begin one essay. So he tells us what he prizes among the deferred, the hidden, the secret, including silence as a narrative strategy. He loves those secretive writers: Grove, Lowry, O'Hagan, Sheila Watson. His famous "unnaming" and "uncreating" are actions taken against enclosing history. They are meant to return us to origins, where myth can precede factism, to "avoid both meaning and conclusiveness," he once said.

So one might anticipate, while enjoying these essays, that there is more to come, more beginnings. Even though these essays are pressed between boards made by the Oxford University Press, Orpheus's head will continue to sing along its river path to the never reachable sea. □

# BOOK REVIEWS

## In council and war

By Daniel David Moses

### A GATHERING OF SPIRIT

edited by Beth Brant

Women's Press, 240 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88961 135 1)

WHEN I TOLD my friend Lenore Keeshig-Tobias that I was looking at this collection, she nodded in recognition. The book was published in the United States in 1964, first as a special edition of the magazine *Sinister Wisdom*, then as a book. And Lenore has a pair of poems among the more than 80 pieces of poetry and prose, drawings, and photographs by 61 Native North American women. "That's a good book," she said. Unusually, since one of the sour grapes we usually chew over together is how Native writers are being anthologized to death. I listened closer. "It's not angry," she said. "And Beth Brant taught me so much about being an editor."

I read through the book and took in the usual stories of poverty, alcoholism, racism, institutionalized kidnapping, stories that usually get my dander up and leave me feeling inadequate. But then there are also letters and poems from women in prison, essays, interviews with activists and historians, stories of mysteries not so far in the past, and stories of love for women, children, and men.

Reading through the book feels like working through the "Indian problem" and by the end I was ready again to face the white one. Unlike most anthologies, which look at the stories of Native people either as a problem for mainstream society, ("Oh, we've already done Indians this year!") or as a marketing opportunity, this anthology sees Native people's problems as caused by mainstream society, as just an extreme example of that society's own deficiencies, its

main stream so shallow and polluted we are forced into side streams for viable solutions. This anthology in oblique or not so oblique ways offers some of them.

In an essay entitled "Amazons in Appalachia," Marilou Awiakta (Cherokee) gives us this scene:

"Where are your women?"

The speaker is Attakullakulla, a Cherokee chief renowned for his shrewd and effective diplomacy. He has come to negotiate a treaty with the whites. "Among his delegates are women 'as famous in war as powerful in Council.' Their presence also has a ceremonial significance: it is meant to show honor to the other delegation. But that delegation is composed of males only. To them the absence of their women is irrelevant, a trivial consideration.

To the Cherokee, however, reverence for women/Mother/Earth/life/spirit is interconnected. Irreverence for one is likely to mean irreverence for all. Implicit in their chief's question "Where are your women?" the Cherokee hear. "Where is your balance? What is your intent?" They see that the balance is absent and are wary of the white man's motives. They intuit destruction,

And in an interview Winona LaDuke (Ojibwa) points out:

The desecration of the planet and of native peoples is hidden away in the back pages of the newspapers. Because the natural environment is not economically influential, politically prestigious, or fashionable, what happens to it cannot percolate into the information bank of the general population. The same can be said of the people who live closest to the natural environment . . . native people. Native people have not attracted enough popular interest to be accorded a piece of the popular mind.

How they have begun to change in five years! But I

don't want to give the impression that this book is political in only the narrow sense so many would prefer to avoid. Most of the writing here grows out of personal experience or story-telling into the world of literature. My friend Lenore's poem "Mother With Child" is a good example of this; it lies on the page in academically understandable stanzas, but floats in the air like a traditional song:

*Oh Mother, so many times  
i would sit on  
i would sit on  
that kitchen chair*

*with the night's sleep  
or an afternoon of play  
tangled in my hair*

*and you with your  
tummy full of child  
tummy full of child  
would nudge nudge and  
press*

*against my shoulders  
against my shoulders  
against my back*

*soothing my wildness  
while combing my hair  
while combing my hair*

Even those looking for more page-bound literary qualities will find them here. Stories like *The Devil and Sister Lena* by Anna Lee Walters (Pawnee/Otoe Missavi) or "A Long Story" by Beth Brant, *Degonwadonni* (Mohawk), the book's editor, intrigue with drama, character, detail, mystery, and passion.

Brant's work in "A Long Story" is simply compelling. Her evocation and comparison of love, loss, and continuing is intelligent and deeply moving. It is Brant's sensitivi-



ty and sensibility that inform the collection and make what could be called the inadequacies of some of the contributions (inarticulateness, semi-literateness) shine more, like scars on healthy skin. ■

## No news is bad news

By James Graff

### THE GARDEN AND THE GUN

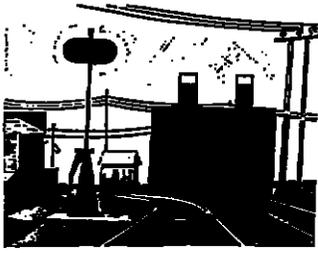
by Erna Paris

Lester & Orpen Dennys, 292 pages, \$15.95 paper (ISBN 0 88619 121 v)

ISRAEL IS IN mortal danger, writes Erna Paris, not only from Arab leaders and followers seeking her destruction, but also from within. The threat comes from the growing power of the militantly right-wing, Orthodox Jews who reject the humanistic, liberal values of the early "pioneers" and of the founders of the Jewish state. Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip continues to erode those values. The explosive mix of Jewish fundamentalism and right-wing politics threatens the integrity of Israel's social fabric, threatens her democracy, threatens her very survival.

Israeli Jews must be prepared to compromise. Palestinians must be prepared to compromise. Without compromise, there will be only despair, anger, and hatred, which will propel Israel towards disaster. These are the messages of Paris's *The Garden and the Gun*.

Using a carefully structured series of personal vignettes and interviews, interspersed with a standard — but questionable — version of Israeli history, starting with a visit to a kibbutz on the Lebanese border and ending with a pilgrimage to Ben Gurion's retreat in the Negev, Paris presents a cast of warm, friendly, caring Jewish characters, most of them intelligent and idealistic, some deeply reli-



describes youngsters in a West Bank refugee camp as 'tough-looking' with 'wily faces.' One of the young men she interviews looks "brutal"; another 'hisses' a response. They recite slogans in angry unison, calling up images of Hitler and Khomeini. Children are "programmed" almost from birth to engage in what Paris sarcastically calls "the struggle." When the youths she interviews tell her about daily beatings and tear gas attacks by Israeli soldiers, who shot a 14-year-old to death a few days before, she writes: "None of this is news. The Israeli papers have openly described conditions here." So much for Palestinian suffering. Paris writes movingly and grippingly about the horrors experienced by a Holocaust survivor, Menachem Perlmutter, who found a haven in Israel and had helped to "make the desert bloom." For her he and Ben Gurion embody the ideals and *raison d'être* of the Jewish state. It would have been inconceivable for her to have written of Perlmutter's story, "None of this is news. The history books are full of such tales."

The only way that the Jewish immigrant minority could establish a Jewish majority in the 70 per cent of Palestine they ultimately gained by force of arms in 1948 was by expelling scores of thousands of Palestinians, and preventing refugees from returning. And so it was done. They had to depopulate and confiscate the land to make way for Jewish immigration. But the logic of the pioneers, which Paris admires, is the same as the logic of the Orthodox right, of which she disapproves. The pioneers followed Ben Gurion in rejecting a binational state in favour of a Jewish state. The major difference is that at that time humanist and democratic ideals were applied within the new State. That is what is now threatened.

Like many others, Paris cannot see how anyone could view the dispossession, subjugation, and colonization of the Palestinians by Jewish settler-

immigrants as immoral, given the sufferings and vulnerability of European Jewry. But unlike many, she is able to see the immorality of repeating that human tragedy in what remains to the Palestinians of Palestine. She knows, too, that expulsion would require another war, and that apartheid means the end of democracy for Israeli Jews who do hold humane values. It is real4 for the sake of the Israelis that Paris rightly urges the tolerance and compromise needed for peace. Her humanism would have appeared less lopsided had she urged that peace for the sake of the Palestinians as well, with equal compassion and concern for their humanity. □



## Canada's voices

By Laurel Boone

### DEAR BILL: THE CORRESPONDENCE OF WILLIAM ARTHUR DEACON

edited by John Lennox and Michèle Lacombe

University of Toronto Press, 400 pages, \$37.50 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 2624 9)

WILLIAM ARTHUR DEACON, Canada's first full-time literary journalist, began reviewing books for *Saturday Night* in 1922, joined the *Mail and Empire* in 1936, and continued as reviewer and literary editor until he retired from the *Globe and Mail* in 1960. He believed that "a national literature comes into being in response to the deeply felt need of every civilized society to understand itself." As a mediator between writers and readers, Deacon devoted his life to

helping Canada "find its authentic voices."

John Lennox and Clara Thomas published the biography *William Arthur Deacon* in 1969, and *Dear Bill*, edited by Lennox and Michèle Lacombe, is the second book to emerge from the Deacon collection at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto. It is a selection of letters written by and to Deacon between November, 1921, shortly after he began publishing literary essays, and August, 1966, when Alzheimer's disease began to overtake him. During his retirement, Deacon planned to write a history of Canadian literature and a book of memoirs, but he became too distracted. In a way, Lennox and Lacombe have done both jobs for him. *Dear Bill* is a history of Canadian literature and culture as seen through the eyes of Deacon and his correspondents.

Naturally, Deacon and him circle discussed literary topics most frequently. Deacon respected writers enough not to pull any more punches in his private communications than he did in his reviews. At the same time, he rewarded work he believed in, even when he considered it of minor importance, with open-hearted praise. Always, though, his concern was not just for the work or the writer, but for the contribution work and writer together made to Canadian literature. Of Sherwood Fox's slight but popular *The Bruce Beckons*, he says,

Who the hell cares about the Bruce? . . . You took something out of your mind add made it a living reality to us. That is ART. . . . You have added to the world something intangible but stronger than anything material. . . . My dear sir, I stand for values. I have to teach people what is immaterially great. There it de lights me that the thing has clicked.

Deacon combined his interest in books and writers with a passion for politics. He can-

gious and apolitical, others deeply religious and intensely political. Although she disapproves of their ideas, she offers a fascinating and humane account of ultra-orthodox communities, who reject humanism, modern science, and the equality of the sexes, and who would even deny her status as a (Reform) Jew. Although conflicts between secular and ultra-Orthodox Jews have erupted into violence, the threat comes from Orthodox militants who insist that God gave the Jewish people all of Palestine, that a truly Jewish state must be a state ruled by religious law, as written in the Torah and interpreted by their rabbis and scholars. They seek theocracy, not democracy, in a land cleared of all Arabs who will not submit to permanent Jewish domination. These views find support among Israel's Oriental Jewish majority and among extreme right-wing Zionists who combine in a formidable and dangerous power bloc. Dehumanizing and depersonalizing the "other" is an essential element of this ideology — "the other" being the Arabs. This is a dagger pointed at the very heart of Israel's founding values, as Paris sees them.

Ironically, Paris falls victim to the very depersonalizing and stereotyping she rightly warns against. Over and over she describes Arabs as angry, despairing, burning with rage and hatred. She repeatedly refers to any Palestinian attack, even on an Israeli military target, as "terrorism" and calls up images of knife-wielding Arabs stabbing their victims in the back. She traces a dubious and tenuous connection between the PLO and the Nazis: Yasser Arafat, she says, encourages 'the stab in the civilian back.' She

paigned at various times to ensure adequate payment for writers and favourable tax and copyright laws. With Pelham Edgar, he worked to establish the Canadian Writers' Foundation, a government-supported pension fund for indigent writers that remains effective today. At least through World War II, he was determined that some kind of socialist government should prevail in Canada, and his letters to and from J. S. Woodsworth and Father Athol Murray show how he abetted their schemes to turn their ideals into reality.

It would be easy to criticize *Dear Bill* for what it is not. Readers familiar with the literary and cultural history of the period will meet many old acquaintances but will be tantalized by the incompleteness of the exchanges. Readers not familiar with the period may find the book disjointed, since the theoretical principles of selection, though stated clearly in the preface, are by no means clear in the application.

One fact vitiates such criticism: the editors refer readers who want to know more to DEAKDEX, "the computerized inventory to the Deacon MS Collection, which catalogues all letters ... by correspondent, by date, by subject of letter, and by type of correspondent"

*Dear Bill* has one major imperfection: the annotations are jumbled to a really annoying degree. People are not identified at first mention, and dates of birth and death may or may not be part of the main annotation or may — as in the case of Arthur Stringer — be absent altogether. Index entries in boldface for main annotations do make all information accessible to the researcher dipping into the collection, but they do not soothe the irritated fan reading *Dear Bill* from cover to cover. At the opposite extreme, such matters as the publication of Gabrielle Roy's *The Tin Flute* and Deacon's presidency of the Canadian Authors' Association are

noted over and over again in neighbouring letters. The suspicion that the letters, once selected and individually annotated, were "ever read consecutively is strengthened by a note stating that a letter to Earle Birney mentioned in the text is lost, when that Very letter is the next but one in the book.

This problem is a nuisance, but it is not a serious handicap. *Dear Bill* is an absorbing companion to William Arthur Deacon, and it will prove an invaluable resource in the study of Canadian literary history. □

## Corporate ties

By Christopher Moore

### LORDS OF THE LINE

by David Cruise and Alison Griffiths

Viking (Penguin), 400 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 81437 7)

THE STORY of the presidents of the CPR reminds us how hard it is for business people

to achieve lasting renown. "Gilbert LaBine is one of the few living Canadians whose name is certain to go down in history," said the business press in 1947. And down his name went, deep down almost beyond recovery, though his corporation (Eldorado) is still with us. Mighty corporate logos vanish daily in bankruptcy or buy-out. Individual executives, extravagantly feared and celebrated in their heyday, prove so transitory that each volume of *The Canadian Establishment* becomes obsolete before its sequel appears. Only great crimes or heroic philanthropy seem able to guarantee enduring fame for ever" the most successful tycoons.

Presidents of the CPR have fared little better than Gilbert Whatsisname. Whoever holds the office automatically becomes a mighty force in Canadian economic life. But in historical perspective they begin to look like the midget inside the circus machine, madly pulling levers to keep the

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monster responding on cue. During the 1920s railway mania, Edward Beat@ maniacally expanded the railroad. only to cut back just as **fast** in the 1930s. When conglomerates were trendy in the **1970s**, Ian Sinclair vigorously conglomerated. Were these leaders — or weathervanes? Cruise and Griffiths present them all as titans, but their offhanded description of one of the lords as “a gifted paper-shuffler” may be more **generally true than they recognize**.

Of the six **lords** (almost literally lords-four got knight-hoods or better), the **only** one with indisputable historical h&is **William Van Horne, the CPR's** general manager when the **line** was built and its president until 1899. Their Van Home is the same character long since established in Creighton, **Berton**, and **John Colicos's** portrayal in “The National Dream.” But they have a new story to tell of his battle with his American counterpart J. J. Hill. Cruise and **Griffiths** argue that Hill won the battle because Van Home was sabotaged by his **predecessor** as CPR president, George Stephen, who had secretly gone over to Hill's camp. The battle between Hill and Van Home, with Stephen pulling strings in the background, **deserves** a book in itself. Stephen, who left Canada with a publicly subsidized fortune and loud complaints about the nation's failure to appreciate him, emerges as the **first** of the ingrate **millionaires**, like a 19th-century Robert **Campeau**.

The rest of the lords **display skill** and drive, to say the least — one gets the impression **Ian Sinclair** never met a man he **didn't like** shouting at — but real power? Steam buffs **may still resent N. R. Crump** for hi diesels, but in this century railroad executives cope with history more **than thw shape it**.

**Lords of the Line** is biography in the light-heroic mode; the ominous phrase “larger than life” appears in the preface. Cruise and **Griffiths** portray each president through celebrity gossip and **colourful**

phrases. To convey **Beatty's** stature, they cite the 1934 **opinion** “there is no lii in the CPR without **Beatty** and no life in Beatty without the CPR.” even though the life went out **of Beatty in** 1943 and the CPR seems to have survived. **They** rarely try for personal insight or **reflect** on the wellsprings of business **success**, but every president must **have** his greatest **moment, his moment of tragedy**, and **his surprising** contradiction. Footnotes proliferate like a parody of Peter C. Newman; and someone should tell them (and their editors!) about dangling **participles**.

**Their p.o.v.** is very much CEO. There are no peasants of the line (“grimy underlings” in their phrase) to argue the case for damning the CPR Cruise and **Griffiths** even decry “government interference” as if the CPR could have existed without it That's too bad. They have worked through a lot of material in search of their story. One wishes they could slow their relentless pursuit of **colour** to reflect on what they have found. In a time of corporate celebration, we need that from our business **writera**. □

## Fever

By Lawrence Jackson

**THE GOLD CRUSADES: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF GOLD RUSHES 1849-1969**

by Douglas Fetherling  
Macmillan, 272 pages, \$32.95 cloth  
(ISBN 0 7715 9287 6)

**THE GOLD HUNTER'S GUIDE TO NOVA SCOTIA**

by Tony Bishop  
Nimbus, 113 pages, \$12.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 920852 93 9)

**WHAT PIERRE BERTON** did for the Klondike, Douglas **Fetherling** does for gold rushes everywhere. Approaching them as social history, he reaches beneath the **inevitable** wealth of anecdote these events **sup-**ply. He examines them as a phenomenon **fuelled** not by gold and greed alone but by



widespread **freedom of movement** and “the **rootlessness born** of optimism.”

A mass movement of **all** nationalities flooded from one rush to the next, from **California** to the Caribou. **from Australia** to the Transvaal from Nevada to the Klondike, “**hurrying away from** civilization.” The tougher the obstacles, the wilder the **rumours of wealth** and the more feverish the efforts to seize it. The term “**crusades**,” otherwise a **puzzling allusion**, becomes clear in the light of **Fetherling's** contention that these **stampedes were in one sense a single, protracted event, reflecting profound social change and sweeping** through nations and **generations, altering them deeply**.

**Fetherling** pays close heed to the tension between order and chaos on these many frontiers. Miners founding camps that mushroomed into small cities **both** needed and reseated authority. In **California, Nevada, and Alaska**, individual lawlessness ruled until **the violence became intolerable**; then **vigilante** lawlessness replaced **it**. In **Australia**, incompetent authority was in place before **the rush** began; the resulting armed clash killed about 30 but led to **reforms** that spread far beyond the **Australian gold fields**.

In the Klondike, where perhaps 30 per cent of the miners were American, the highly competent authority of **Sam Steele** of the Northwest Mounted Police met them at the border. Canadian **values stood firm against** the “**ram-pant Americanism**” spilling across **from** towns like **Skagway, Alaska**, run by thugs. The **Mounties** were joined by 200 Canadian **troops**, nearly one-fifth of the country's standing army, and four mem-

bers of the Victorian Order of Nurses. The Yukon remained **Canadian**.

**Fetherling's** book is **well researched**, amply illustrated, and lovingly written: a **thorough** treat.

For latter-day **prospectors**, Tony Bishop offers a businesslike manual for finding gold in Nova Scotia. There, deposits hate tended to be small but high-grade, with plenty of the “**free**” or visible gold that quickens the pulse. (Elsewhere, it often comes mingled with other minerals, or in flecks too **fine** to be visible.)

Roughly half this book **covers** prospecting and mining techniques. The **remainder** is chiefly a **catalogue** of early mines, with a **record** of the gold officially taken from each. **Several** yielded more than **50,000** ounces. **Unofficially** the yield was much higher, because free gold tempted miners to pilfer rich chunks of ore. Indeed, **Bishop** suggests, mines that strictly controlled this had trouble **keeping miners**.

For the serious weekend prospector, Bishop's book is a **wealth** of tips and practical information. □

## Truth in advertising

By Bruce Serafin

**A SOCIAL HISTORY OF CANADA**

by George Woodcock  
Viking/Penguin, 423 pages, \$24.95 cloth  
(ISBN 0 670 81960 3)

**CAVES IN THE DESERT**

by George Woodcock  
Douglas & McIntyre, 256 pages, \$24.95 cloth  
(ISBN 0 88894 619 8)

**GEORGE WOODCOCK's** *A Social History of Canada* is written in a **prosaic, flat**, “primer” style, which is hard to describe but which you can get a sense of **in** the following **extract**:

**Effective transportation**, the spread of population and the development of the country have **always** been interdependent in Canada. Settlement in New France occurred around the **navi-**

gable waterways, the St. Lawrence and the Richelieu. Across the continent, birchbark canoes opened up the land for kade and exploration. Steamboats, canals, roads and eventually railroads like the Great Western and the Grand Trunk took the settlement of rural Ontario to saturation point by the middle of the 1860s.

The entire book is written like thii — one fact following another, fact after fact laid down in the deadly careful style of someone uneasy with writing trying to put together a report. For a person who has written as much as Woodcock, this can only be due to tiredness or working too fast. There is not a gleam of vivacity in the book, no dramatization of events, no strong engagement with the material, and no insights except for the utterly conventional kiud provided in the first sentence of the extract quoted. It is as if Woodcock were just cranking it out. Everywhere you seem to catch him simply restating what other writers have said, and binding the material together with the kind of bland copybook prose that a professional writer can produce in his sleep. Still, if the book is poor as writing, as history it is embarrassing. Each of the 22 chapters in this work treats some huge chunk of Canadian history in a very short space (there is a chapter titled "Workers and Workplaces," for instance, that deals with the entire industrialization of Canada in 16 pages); the overall effect is of enormous haste and superficiality. Two examples. In his chapter "Canada and the Great Wars" (a chapter that is four pages long), Woodcock devotes approximately 10 sentences' to the effect of World War II on Cana-

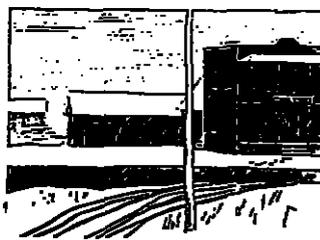
da. And in an extremely brief discussion of how wheat farming developed in the Prairies (a subject of such importance in the West that 10-year-olds in Alberta used to know the names of the various strains of wheat and who had developed them), he never explains why Canada became a major exporter of wheat while Argentina, for instance, did not. In general, this is a book so blandly written and so shallow that it is impossible to imagine who its readership could be.

*Caves in the Desert* is more successful, but you have to accept it for what it is: the rather plodding book of an old gentleman who has taken a trip to China and there indulged his enthusiasm for Asian art. There are some vivid moments in the book — for instance, when Woodcock describes taking a piss in a latrine outside Pyingyao. "There I stood," he writes, facing the platform on which,

with no concealment and in every condition from constipation to its extreme opposite, men were perched like grotesque birds above their slots, straining in the agonized postures of caricatured Rodin figures, farting thunderously, squirting abundantly.

This is lively, but such moments are rare. Most of the book is more like this:

There [was] ... a large figure in black oily looking stone, representing the later Chinese conception of the Maitreya (the Buddha of the future) as the 'Smiling Buddha,' a strange metamorphosis of the sublime and kingly image of that figure current in Indian and early Chinese representations into a fat-bellied image that seemed to project little higher than carnal contentment. It reinforced my view that a the Indians are to be regarded as philosophical Quixotes, developing highly rarefied spiritual concepts, the pragmatic Chinese must be seen as the Sancho Panzas of philosophy, so much is their thought attached to this earth on which we dwell and to man's ability to live



there peacefully, which in Confucius' view lay in the proper ordering of society and in Lao Tzu's on the proper understanding of nature both within us and without.

This extract is long-winded, padded ("this earth on which we dwell"? and platitudinous (the Indians as "philosophical Quixotes," the Chinese as "Sancho Panzas"). It is also characteristic of the book as a whole.

I received *Caves in the Desert* shortly after reading Paul Theroux's *The Iron Rooster*, which is also a book about a trip through China, and I couldn't help comparing the two. The fact is that Theroux's new book is so much better than Woodcock's that I hardly knew whether to laugh or cry. I don't just mean better written (though it is that — Theroux's writing is superb), but better in every respect: in the detailed image of China it contains, in its emotional range (from humour to fury to despair), in its cast of characters (there are dozens: Theroux presents us with a world), in its intellectual penetration and cosmopolitanism, and above all in the fact that Theroux constantly does the real titer's work of dramatizing what happens to hi. In comparison, Woodcock's book seems like the work of an amateur: flat, bland, self-indulgent, conventional.

Does this matter? I think it does. Too often, Canadian writers are reviewed as if the world outside Canada didn't exist, as if their books didn't have to compete with all the other books being written. But they do, and it matters that the reviewer keep this in mind. So it angered me to read Roy Starr's *Globe and Mail* review of *Caves in the Desert*: it was such a blatant example of the kind of

puffery-among-friends that you always hope will some day end in this country. When Starr writes that "For a vicarious trip through China, one could imagine no better guide than George Woodcock," or states that "*Caves in the Desert* thus turns out to be about as readable and informative a book on China as one could hope for," he is ludicrous. Compared to what? To Theroux's book? To the writings of John K Fairbanks or Jonathan Spence? The troth is that misrepresentation of this sort doesn't advance the cause of reviewing in this country, and neither does it do George Woodcock much service, since it has the ultimate effect of turning readers off him. A little more truth in advertising is needed; otherwise, among younger writers at least, he is likely to become a sort of laughing-stock whose genuine contribution is ignored. □

## Who do you think you are?

By Denis Salter

### THE REAL WORLD?

by Michel Tremblay, translated by John Van Burek and Bill Glasco  
Talon Books, 96 pages, \$7.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 88922 260 6)

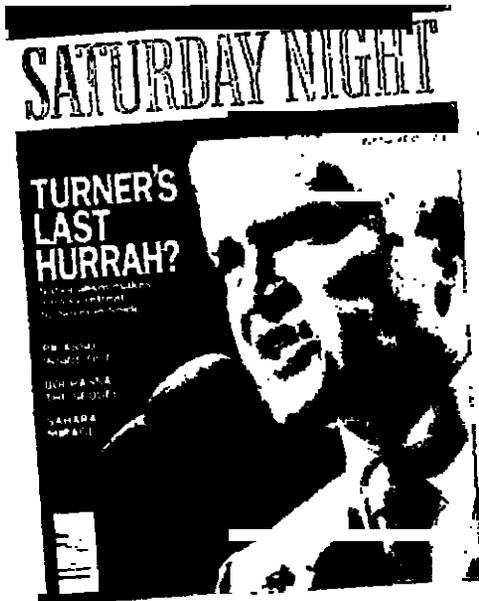
### BONJOUR LA, BONJOUR

by Michel Tremblay, translated by John Van Burek and Bill Glasco  
Talon Books, 96 pages, \$7.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 88922 252 5)

WHEN HE WAS YOUNG, Michel Tremblay thought he'd mastered the trick of leaving home — forever. But over the next 20 years he wrote a cycle of plays — from the controversial *Les belles-soeurs* in 1965 to the elegantly structured *Albertine en cinq temps* in 1984 — in which he psychoanalysed his family and himself so relentlessly that Quebecers experienced the painful ecstasy of self-recognition. Now middle-aged, looking down from the wealthy heights of Outremont towards the congested and lively streets of Plateau Mont-Royal



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**SATURDAY NIGHT**



where he was raised, Tremblay finds that facile judgments have been replaced by perplexity, despair, and difficult questions. Despite Tremblay's honesty, these questions can't be definitively answered in his latest play, *Le vrai monde?/The Real World?* As its title suggests, reality is problematic and meaning, though eagerly sought, is endlessly deferred. Tremblay is confronting all the dilemmas of postmodernism.

His counterpart in the play is Claude, a young aspiring writer who wants his family to agree with how he has chosen to interpret their life together in his first play. They are horrified. "That's not me!" his real mother (Madeleine I) exclaims in disgust at the mother (Madeleine II) whom her son has invented. "That's not how I am! That woman, even if she has my name, is nothing like me!" What ensues is a sometimes protracted struggle between competing views of so-called reality. His actual family appears concurrently on stage with the imaginary family, which acts out, often with vivid abandon, the subtextual conversations, fantasies, and taboo subjects that the actual family had tacitly agreed to suppress. This is no home-sweet-home but a prison cell of festering memories, incestuous desires, and bottled-up secrets. As it turns out, Claude's right to be himself, without subterfuge, is a struggle that he can't ever win.

Claude must also subject himself to the judgement he so readily passes on others. What right do I have to exploit my family for the sake of my art? he eventually asks. Whose view of what has happened is right? Theirs? Mine? Or maybe reality doesn't really exist and is merely a construct of the human mind, a projection of loss and desire. His choices are bleak. If he leaves home, he replays the family's neurotic scenarios in his head; if he stays, he's nothing more than an accomplice in the dual crime of silent acceptance and self-denial.



At the end, Claude realizes that the theatre's age-old paradox of using lies to tell the truth is a cul-de-sac. What if lies are just lies, nothing more? Then he'll be just as manipulative as his actual father, whom he's trying to destroy by rewriting his identity. The closing image is of his father cursing him as he begins to burn his son's precious manuscript, page by page, just before an emblematic blackout. Claude, it seems, hasn't managed to write and perform an autonomous identity that he can call his own into existence; the past can't be imagined away so easily; and maybe he has done irreparable damage — to them and to himself — by disclosing his family's private affairs. As in Pirandello, the art to which he has so completely surrendered himself is now being subverted by the very reality it had tried to supplant. His most traumatic discovery is that *everything* is indeterminate, including human identity itself.

John Van Burek and Bill Glassco prepared this translation of the play for the 1988 English-language premiere, directed by Bill Glassco, at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto. Tremblay's French is notoriously difficult to translate. Its combination of soaring lyricism, earthy vulgarity, and aria-like monologues can lead all too readily to the kind of overcharged rhetoric that gives actors nervous breakdowns. Or translators will rely on flat-footed English colloquialisms which erase the musicality of Tremblay's richly textured *joual*.

This translation steers a safe course between the two extremes so that English-Canadian productions can now get as close as possible to the spirit of the original.

It is also useful to have this revised translation of Tremblay's favourite play, *Bonjour là, bonjour*, which Van Burek and Glassco first translated in 1975. This latest translation, like *The Real World?*, is convincingly idiomatic and precisely attuned to Tremblay's verbal "score" with its constantly shifting rhythms, colour tones, and melodic lines. □

## Zinging them in

By Kent Thompson

### A TRIP AROUND LAKE ONTARIO

by David McFadden

*Coach House, 232 pages, \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0 88910 315 1)*

THE ONLY TROUBLE with David McFadden's *A Trip Around Lake Ontario* (but it's the same trouble with Dany Laferrière's *How to Make Love to a Negro Without Getting Tired*) is that it is going to inspire a lot of bad books. That is because both are (purportedly) autobiographical, which will lead some people to think (many people already think this) that if they lead interesting lives they will be able to write good books. Wrong. McFadden and Laferrière actually lead pretty humdrum lives, if you want to know the truth, but they make them seem interesting by writing well.

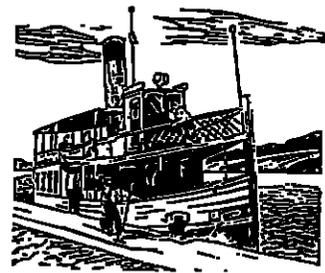
So *A Trip Around Lake Ontario* is a very entertaining book, not least of all because McFadden is sneaky fast, as we might say of him if he were a baseball pitcher. That is, he's humming along the countryside in his little red sports car being ordinary and everyday and we are thinking that he's seeing nothing that we wouldn't see, and then he zings one in, catching the reader flat-footed. For example, wandering east out of Toronto past the sewage-treatment plant he gets lost in a

subdivision, asks directions of a beautiful woman and decides to leave his map in the trunk because "there's a special magic about not knowing where you are." Oh, true. And then he nips us with an explanation that touches on mortality: when we are lost, "time loses its little sharp teeth."

Not that everything he says about this trip is to be taken as true in the literal sense. At least, sometimes you hope he's making things up — for instance, when he tells you about taking two little girls for a spin in his little red sports car while he's down in the States. Their American mother has told them, sensibly, not to take rides with strangers. And here is our narrator, grinning, saying he couldn't be taken for a molester, could he? He's so Canadian. Uh-huh. So was and is Clifford Olson. But we realize at such moments that McFadden is both daring and challenging. This trip is not going to be without judgement for us. We are going to have to face some challenges.

One of the things I like about McFadden as a storyteller is that he won't let up. He won't let the reader escape into tidy summary. Chapter 11 is a case in point. The old fellow running a fruit-stand has had to have his dog put down and he tells the story to McFadden in embarrassing detail. It is not a story you want to hear, not least because it's so soppy. But sopiness is out there, and McFadden isn't going to let us off just because we want to be sophisticated.

He is a clown figure who makes us take a joke seriously by going too far. His garb indicates his role: he calls himself Captain Colourful, which he certainly is: Hamilton Tigers painter's cap, a



Hawaiian shirt, green jeans, and red suspenders.

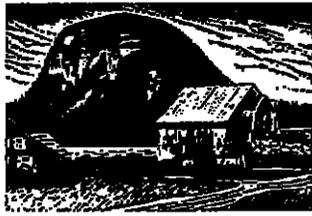
In fact, many of these stories are undoubtedly fiction. That's because he has a film crew with him. The trip is in fact the film-makers' idea. McFadden's previous trip books @ Trip Around This Lake and That One) have inspired them. But what the film records and what McFadden sees are deliberately different, I suspect (I haven't seen the film. A note in the book tells you how to order it for viewing.) McFadden is collecting stories — stories he is told, stories he makes up. He seems to delight most in those that cannot be filmed.

Which is one reason, probably, for the story about being in bed with hvo airline stewardesses. No one is going to believe that, except metaphorically, which is probably why he tells it to us. (It is Dany Lafferrière who remarks that people's realities are in fact their fantasies; they live by their fantasies.)

On the other hand, there is a serious story running through the book—although I'm not sure this one is true, either. He is coming to the end of a relationship with a mm. Yes, it does sound pretty outrageous, doesn't it? He's divorced and lonely, and she is mysterious. They seem to have had good times, but she has always slipped away to her love for Christ. The story is the exact antithesis of the night with the hvo 'airline stewardesses.

The weaknesses of the book are chiefly in the form. Each chapter reads like an opting chapter. We hope the story will break into a novel even though we know it won't. We've got to keep going on in this awkward circle with stops and starts to get back where we began.

And it's not a book to be read in one sitting or even straight through. Ideally you should keep it lying around and read a chapter now and then, or carry it around with you, which is what I did. Stuffed it in my large pocket while skating at Harbourfront. I had it with me. too. when a



visiting writer came to town and we went out to one of the more famous stripbars in Toronto. McFadden goes to strip-bars, too, and in one of them he has a meeting of minds with a stripper called Pinkie. He sees her and the other girls dancing naked in mirrors.

But he also believes in coincidence (well, what goes around comes around, doesn't it), and a white Volvo and Rilke's poems keep popping up when you least expect them.

So I wasn't surprised in the least when, with McFadden's book on the bar, I saw Pinkie dancing in the mirror. Charming girl.

And very real. Because McFadden is instructive on the distinction between what is true and what is real. "Whatever we write becomes real," he says. "Whatever we don't write disappears forever." □

## Not your heart only

By George Bowering

### PELL MELL

by Robin Blaser

Coach House Press, 114 pages, \$12.95  
paper (ISBN 0 89910 339 9)

ROBIN BLASER HAS BEEN among us in Canada for 25 years, a major poet who has had a remarkable influence on West Coast poets and other writers. The remarkable is even more remarkable given the scarcity of Blaser's publishing. Prior to *Pell Mell*: seven thin books and pamphlets of verse. This nice thick new volume nearly doubles the poet's output

Thank goodness for that. Thank the Coach House editors, Sharon Thesen and Michael Ondaatje for that. They and the invaluable publisher have made for us a beautiful, difficult and reread-

able book. It is rare adult poetry, a confrontation of mortality, a demand for intellectual community.

In "The Fire," an essay Blaser published in 1980, he described his literary purpose: "I suppose I want to say that the real business of poetry is cosmology, and I'm claiming my own stake in this."

Thus Blaser's verse is not anecdotal, not confessional and personal. It is unafraid of thinking aloud in the company of Nietzsche and Octavio Paz. In other words, it wants no part of the too-often heard aw-shucks Canadian cultural cringe. Among other things, Blaser's poetry seeks to recover or plan a civilization. In his introduction to the recently published selected poems of Louis Dudek, Blaser writes: "Our nature, that is, is to work the atoms of the mind's music, words, in a composition of identity and order against triviality."

Blaser has been, all his writing life, accused of hermeticism, or obscurantist ambition. But the work is not really obscure: it is difficult. It requires intelligence and curiosity and perseverance from its audience. As William Carlos Williams once said in a poem: "I wanted to write a poem/ that you would understand/ . . . But you got to try hard—"

You have to try harder with Blaser than you do with Williams. Yet I know a teenage boy who bought *Pell Mell*, his first book of poems. He has been reading it as well as he can for a week and more. Some poets and some readers (see Eliot) see no good reason to make poetry easier than living. Yet Blaser has been for years writing numerous short poems all entitled "The Truth is Laughter." An attentive reader learns to see and acknowledge the doubled gesture when the poet in this collection refers to his subject and antagonist as "that deadly plaything, thought."

That deadly player, Thoth, got us into our fix. Robin Blaser, to counter vain notions that language is a tool or a slave, used to say that we do

not in our most serious and vulnerable moments speak poetry — rather poetry speaks us. Great modern poetry does not allow of the single voice. Ezra Pound taught us 20th-century readers to expect a lot of quotations, from texts and from life's discourse. Poetry is polyglot. Blaser is, for instance, a speaking citizen of a constantly created world, not a bard but at best a presiding eye and ear.

As this book proceeds the reader notices that it is composed. As it gathers toward the last pages we bear more and more often the poet's argument that poetry, like Pound's *Cin/n*, is not a one-man job. Blaser speaks for a writing that is not lyric, single-voiced, egoistic, confessional. Poetry comes from outside. It is made by the company of poets: "if I think 'I' unifies/ I lose,/ and the feeling overflows the bucket" he says in a poem about the politics of poetics.

I think that the key quotation in this book is the one from Montaigne, his answer to the question of why he loves: "Par ce que c'estoit lui; par ce que c'estoit moy." Blaser sensibly follows the lead that Charles Olson and William Blake were following when they came to identify form with love. Love is also at the mot of a search for civilization: if it is not, that civilization is not one to be wanted. In Blaser's ongoing series, "Image-Nations," continued here, the imagination ties the moral effort to the possibility of the recovered civilization I mentioned.

That sub-paradise cannot be planned by a single (lyric) eye, nor will it be made from a univalent material. In a poem for bpNichol, Blaser writes: "the ferns dream as they re-



turn/ to green the efformation, the/ dis-creation, the kindness of fragments." what a discovery, that phrase!

So if we hear some of the Romantic poet's voice, it is the part that is concerned with social-artistic prophecy, not the heroic individual: "that is his claim to fame, to/ seek out what is beyond any single/ man or woman. or the multiples/ of them the magic country that/ is homeland."

This is what makes for seriousness in poetry: not to show the interesting self to the willing world, but to show the possibilities in that world to readers who will understand that "the language/ composes the good." The prophetic language speaks "our inclination for one another," not the common "positivisms of the self/ that die into an urn."

This is not to say that Blaser's poetry will not deliver pictures for those who want the visual as well as the thoughtful. In a series of remarkable and unprecedented poems on his childhood Blaser offers dancing in sock-feet on the floor of the school gymnasium, and the boy who had to bury the cow, then come back and cot the cow's protruding feet off at ground level.

But the images are never there to support the anecdotes of the individualist that we get in much of our literature. The images are the fragments out of which to build an art. Blaser's idea of the communal work is best seen in another of his ongoing series, "The Great Companions." This current collection ends with two of them, one concerning Pindar and one concerning Robert Duncan, whom Blaser met at university.

"Robert Duncan" is one of the most moving and highly accomplished poems of our time and place. In it, Blaser's great theme is beautifully pronounced in words shared by the two poets, hvo other people cited, and the poem: "The heart in the breast is not your heart only: it is a microcosmic sun, a cosmos of all possible experiences that no one can

own."

If you want a book you will need to have when you are reappraising our poetry's history 30 years from now, get this one. Become, if you take the care, a companion. □



## Parents and children

By Lynn King

### IN THE NAME OF THE FATHERS

by Susan Crean  
Amanita, 185 pages, \$9.95 paper  
(ISBN 0 921299 04 4)

### FOR OUR LOVE IS ABOVE THE LAW

by D. Zaman Zadeh  
Zaman Promotion Institute, 35 pages,  
\$5.00 paper (ISBN 0 921658 02 3) •

IN A RECENT *Globe and Mail* article about fathers who have custody of their children, the headline notes "Duties Conflict for Single Fathers: Caring for Children Can Hamper Careers." The writer sympathetically talks of the difficulty single fathers face in juggling career, housework, and child care. Apparently, the practical fact is that being a single father involves compromises on the job that may slow down a man's advancement." As if women hadn't known that for decades in relation to their own jobs, and borne the brunt of it

Notwithstanding the difficulty of being a single parent, it now seems more and more fathers want to take on the role — although with a hivist They want to be; "joint custo-

dial parents" — to share the parenting with their ex-wives although not necessarily the responsibility. Attacking the concept of joint custody is like attacking motherhood, although ironically that's often what joint custody is all about Susan Crean fearlessly deals with this new and ecstatically heralded concept in a concise and passionate way.

Joint custody has existed for years — many separated parents share the responsibility for child care in an amicable and constructive manner. The reason Crean felt compelled to write her book was not to examine or criticize these smoothly functioning arrangements but rather to explore the latest trend: a demand for the legislative and judicial imposition of joint custody in all or most cases. The idea is supported by "fathers' rights" groups and many politicians. It sounds good. After all, why shouldn't the child have the benefits of both a mother and a father even if the parents are separated? But as, Michele Landsberg says in her insightful introduction to Crean's book, this is "an easy answer to vexing problems." She points out that the most overwhelming problem for divorced mothers and children is that the majority of fathers pay neither attention nor child support to their offspring. In fact, she says, "most divorced mothers struggle not to keep fathers away from their children, but to get fathers to visit or phone more often."

Crean explores the complex and difficult issues of legislated joint custody. Very often, it simply becomes a lever in reducing the wife's support and property division claims. Fathers' rights groups say they need the legislation because there is a judicial bias against men — yet Crean shows that the vast majority of men do not contest custody and do not seem to want it. One would think that if anyone had something to fear from judicial bias it would be women — after all, out of 74 family court judges in Ontario, only four are women, and the

statistics for women in other provinces are equally bleak.

Crean also explodes the myth that joint custody is alive and well in the United States. Many Canadian legislators point to California legislation as the model. The evidence, though, is that the results of that legislation have been horrible and it is being urgently reconsidered. As one study noted by Crean states:

forcing (by legislation or court order) parents to carry joint decision-making responsibilities in the face of such obstacles as continuing acrimony can mean perpetuating the conflicts between them, perhaps exacerbating the conflicts which led to their separation in the first place

Crean offers a much-needed examination of the Canadian scene. She looks at the cry for joint custody not only from fathers' rights groups but also from well-meaning legislators, mediators, social workers, and others. In her study of the American experience and the Canadian movement she notes that

feminists who have analysed the mechanics and implications of joint custody legislation have come to see it as badly thought out and ill researched .... What legislated joint custody does is add a new chip to the poker game, upping the ante for the weaker partner and creating extra pressure for her to give in earlier and press her case less forcefully. A presumption for joint custody in the law cannot help but steer the existing balance of power in divorce or separation negotiations in favour of the more powerful.

The feminist movement, in Crean's words, "has not yet cottoned on to the fact that the battle between patriarchy and feminism has shifted, and the fight is now over our children. . . . This hook is an attempt to raise the issue and sound the alarm." Crean does both well, through heart-breaking examples and thorough analysis.

D. Zadeh's *For Our Love is Above the Law: A Small Manifesto* is written by what I gather is a bitter and enraged man

whose wife was granted custody of their small daughter. According to Zadeh, the judge is totally to blame for this injustice — not the mother, not other circumstances, not the matrimonial history, and certainly not D. Zadeh. ■



## Writing to Miss Nobody

By Laurel Boone

### THE EARLY JOURNALS AND LETTERS OF FANNY BURNEY,

VOLUME I 1768-1773

edited by Lars E. Troide

McGill-Queen's, 381 pages, \$65.00 cloth (ISBN 0 7735 0538 5)

PUBLISHED LETTERS and journals, like any other books, must both delight and instruct, however famous their author and in whatever terms critics may express these requirements. Considering that the aim of Lars Troide was clearly — perhaps solely — to instruct, his *Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney: Volume I* is a remarkably delightful book.

When Fanny Burney wrote the first entry in the journals published here, she was already an experienced writer, although she was only 15 years old. She had burned her earlier diaries, poems, plays, and novel on her 15th birthday, resolving not to waste any more time in such idle pursuits. Usually, adolescent girls of literary bent address themselves to diaries out of loneliness. If that was true of Fanny we will never know, because in her old age she censored her youthful effusions, cutting parts of pages as well as entire leaves from her note books, cancelling some words and passages and writing over others in heavy black ink, and

pasting slips of paper — sometimes themselves cut from the journal — over offending paragraphs. However, the material that remains shows the writer to be generally comfortable, energetic, agreeably occupied, cheerful (even giddy at times). sociable if somewhat shy, and surrounded by a family that was happier and more loving than many. Self-examination was not Fanny's preoccupation, and she seems to have altered her girlhood journals more to cover up the indiscretions and indelicacies of others than to revise her own character for posterity. Unlike the more common teen-aged soul-searcher, Fanny regales her imaginary confidante "Miss Nobody" with tales of visiting and visitors, concerts, plays, and family affairs, and she dramatizes conversations apparently for the sheer pleasure of doing so. Fanny's enthusiasm for the life around her and her delight in the vagaries of human nature carry the reader through the bogs and brier patches caused by her later censorship and the intrusions of scholarship.

The Burney family seems to have hoarded every scrap of paper any of them ever laid pen to, thus supplying grist for the mills of academe for more than 200 years. Fanny Burney's early journals were published in 1890, 1907, and 1913, and it is tempting to ask whether the world needs this new edition. However, Troide's book promises to be of inestimable value. Instead of publishing the journals in the form prescribed by the author in her old age (as the first and subsequent editors did), Troide and his associates recovered as much as they could of the young Fanny's original writing from beneath the cancellations, paste-overs, emendations, and embellishments. In his annotations, Troide connects these early journals with the rest of the Burney family's published life-writing as well as with the intellectual, literary, social, and political history of the period and the genealogies of hundreds of people men-

tioned or conspicuously not mentioned. Finally, Troide has tried to present the whole in a readable format despite the plethora of variant and uncertain readings and the gaps in the text.

Troide followed as far as he thought practical the rigorous editorial and scholarly standards established over 20 years ago by Joyce Hemlow, when she began editing *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay), 1791-1840*; but two of his decisions must be questioned. He plainly calls all of Madame d'Arblay's emendations "bad," although common sense suggests that some of them must supply clarifications, and all of them must supply insight into the changes in Fanny's personality as she aged. Troide includes some of these changes within brackets in the text and others in annotations and introductions, but, in leaving out an undisclosed amount of Madame d'Arblay's commentary, he has forestalled one of the more obvious studies that might have arisen from his project. The index is deficient in a similar way. In his introduction, Troide defends what might seem to be excessive annotation on the grounds that some apparently insignificant person may turn out to be of great historical importance. Yet the headnote to the index explains that whereas all proper names mentioned by Fanny are included, a selection has been made among names in annotations and introductory material so as to include only "the more significant or interesting" ones. Significant or interesting to whom?

These complaints aside, there is no question that *The Early Journals and Letters of*



*Fanny Burney: Volume I* is a contribution of tremendous value to English intellectual and social history. Scholars in many disciplines will look forward to the remaining volumes! which will bring the early journals up to the beginning of the 12-volume *Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay), 1791-1840*, and so complete the modern edition of the 72-year record kept by this indefatigable writer. El

## Northern dancers

By George Payerle

### WHITEOUT

by James Houston

Greey de Pencier, 175 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 920775 28 4)

JAMES HOUSTON'S most recent novel makes peculiar fare — for the uninitiated at least. The book presents itself as an adult novel in the company of the author's widely hailed *Spirit Wrestler*, *Ghost Fox*, and *The White Dawn*. What we find is a 17-year-old Toronto youth exiled to Baffin Island for getting mixed up with drugs and the law. Jonathan Aird, apparently a brilliant pianist, has fallen in with the wrong crowd because he plays jazz. His father has died, his mother cares more for her business career than for her son, and his uncle is a kind of Dickensian recluse who runs the Hudson's Bay post in the fictitious village of Nanuvik on Baffin. Mother and uncle are trustees of young Jon's inheritance and could keep him a pauper till he's 40 if he doesn't prove himself to be a "sensible and steady person."

If you think this sounds like material for cliché, you're right. Add a nasty schoolmaster, a cheerful HBC clerk named Noddy, love at first sight with a pretty Inuk girl, and a sinister man with a scar. The reader could be excused for thinking of it all as "Enid Blyton Goes Ouhvard Bound to Teen Romance." No doubt, *Whiteout* should be reclassified as "young

adult" fiction. Even then there would be problems, particularly with credibility of character and motivation, but at least one's expectations would be in the right genre

On the other hand, Houston's credentials as a true man of the north come through in passionately telling detail. When Jon's foot first touches the wind-packed snow of the airstrip at Froblisher Bay, "the ground seemed to squeal in anguish." An Inuk granny cuts teabags open because she doesn't like paper in her tea. During a break in the Christmas dance, "the dancers ran pell-mell out into the light cast beyond the open door and stood breathing deeply, their foreheads shining in the immense cold of the Arctic night . . . Jon watched the steam from their bodies rise in thirty bonfires in the freezing air." One needs to know, and love, whereof one speaks to be able to say this like that.

In such moments, unfettered by the demands of a moralistic plot and its formulaic need for stock characters, Houston doesn't "write about" the High Arctic, he recreates it on the page. As one struggles through the first hundred-odd pages of manipulated developments, the savage beauty of the landscape and the enduring, quirky warmth of its inhabitants keep hope alive.

Then, with part two and the whiteout of the title, hope is rewarded. Three young people on a dogsled cross the sea ice in a long sequence crackling with action and veracity and explosive manifestation of the shamanistic spirits that inhabit Houston's holistic embrace of the North. This is strong and wonderful stuff. The thoughts, feelings, and actions of the characters become inseparably melded, emblematic of a profound oneness in extremis that makes the denouement of the novel entirely credible.

Perhaps *Whiteout* was simply ill conceived, falling between genres intended for the adult and the young without successfully claiming the diffi-

cult territory of the young adult. Perhaps it was not well edited. Certainly, the book could be a hundred pages longer. Its characters and story of discovery and choice could be strong and compelling if left to their own devices and more naturally developed. Jon, for instance, is a very thoughtful and attractive young man when we aren't being told he's a troubled teen-age rebel, which he just isn't. And his uncle Calvin is clearly a charming and compassionate eccentric who never carries off the ruthless tyranny Houston initially asks of him. Houston knows his northern characters as he knows their landscape, but has subjected them to a clichéd "southern" plot that they do not inhabit comfortably. □

## It's a frog-swallower

By Dennis Cooley

### NEXT-YEAR COUNTRY: VOICES OF COUNTRY PEOPLE

by Barry Broadfoot

McClelland & Stewart, 386 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 1675-1)

IN THIS BOOK, Barry Broadfoot returns to a place and its people that he is able to chronicle with special sympathy. Those who spoke to Broadfoot speak to us in the immediacy and dignity of their lives. Their speech is certainly there: it's laconic, loose, and additive, tumbles in coordinates and double subjects. It's there in appeals to listeners, the pop of idioms and hyperbole: grass stands "yea high," some people have little time for "small potatoes," some "had the old thinking-cap on." Some folks howl their heads off, others should soak their heads in a bucket, still others blow their stacks. There's hyperbole too: "They're here to eternity," the folks in small towns are, even where winter's "cold as a billy goat's ass."

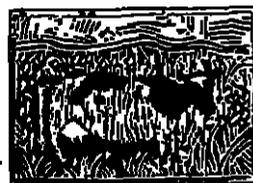
The anonymous narrators tell wonderful stories stuffed with imagination and sound.

Here's what happens when an "old geezer" rescues you on a country road: "Well, he walks up. . . and he says, 'Give it a roll-over.' Zzzzzzzzzrrrr zzzzzz. About twice. He takes a pair of pliers out of his overalls and he fart5 around and says try it again. Zoom. I got me a car again." There's jump in that language. And in the repetitions. One woman keeps a record of births: "A woman would be forty-five and have had sixteen or eighteen children, bing, bing, and they were still having them." A young woman, restless to leave, tells us of what she longed for, what she missed, what there was for her at home: "and all it was about, this life, was nothing. Just nothing, nothing, nothing." What more is there to say?

Some of the most inviting voices sound as though they'd just escaped from a Robert Kroetsch novel. Rambunctious, inventive — they dance on our funny bones. There's the farmer who decides he's going to save some money.

No' more of this town 'milk, "so weak you could spear fish in it. No, a cow's the answer. Great uproar. Who's going to milk the cow? You, I tell the kids, you guys. And collect the eggs. What eggs? Big up roar. The eggs from the chickens. We're going to save money like nobody has before."

Many people break into poetry. One after another, page after page, they speak. You know about spring? "You can't put a name to what you smell, it's just there. You can put your hand out and feel like you're stroking something new and warm." Most of these moments seem reserved for the seasons, the dip or rise of sun, and they are there, across the book, luminous momenta. The wind, always there in your face, making the chimes on the porch go clink-clink-clink in a musical way. The sunrise in the spring . . . I look out the window and there it is, so big and red . . . and there is our wheat, all green, and blowing in the



## THE HUNGRY MIND REVIEW

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wind, moving all the time." There are wonderful leaps of language, too, when people speak of electricity and radio coming in, the **magic** of those lights and **sounds**. There is a **delightful** account of opulence on the railroad, and another of how **Aberhart** spoke to people's hopes. A particular joy tells of "a monster **sale**, a dandy, a **stem-winder**, a **frog-swallower** of a thing." Ear-catching, too, are **one** person's thoughts about how the prairie can come back from a desert, words inviting **in** their rhythm, their clean naming of things, **their** snap and beauty.

The entries **fill** in a "invaluable" history of prairie people, and of the fresh turns their language accords them. For archival purposes alone they would be important, but they will be generative, **too**, for anyone who cares about naming and speaking of **the** place.

Which brings me to a **quibble**. It looks as though **Broadfoot** decided to stick pretty much to farmers. The preference makes sense but it reinforces all the **stereotypes** of prairie folk as a bunch of **hay-seeds**, however dignified or eloquent they may be. In **Next Year Country** there are **no** intellectuals or artists to speak of, no naturalists, few **professionals**, no children. There is virtually nothing on **the** most northern or most southern parts of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and **so** on. So **we** get a section on oil in **Alberta** and yet we get nothing on, say, potash or coal mining in Saskatchewan. **Broadfoot** could have made some room by cutting back on tales of farmers' **bankruptcies** in the '70s. Instead he's ended up with something which, **centred** in Alberta, **scarcely** allows prairie **people** to rise about **naïve** politics or to show any cultural awareness of themselves. Toronto media, if ever they think of **the prairies**, want to suppose that prairie writers m-shucks, gosh-dam, and **hyperbolate** in the manner of an inebriated duck. Others know the prairies, suffer the mistreatments, speak of the place. Why don't we hear from them, too?

This is a good book, a joy to read. I only wish it had gone a little further. □

## Radio days

By Candace Jane Dorsey

### LIVING THE PART: JOHN DRAINIE AND THE DILEMMA OF CANADIAN STARDOM

by Bronwyn Drainie  
Macmillan, 256 pages, \$26.95 cloth  
(ISBN 0 7715 9918 8)

IN THESE DAYS of free-trade debate and despair, how to **resist** a book, even an actor's biography, subtitled "The Dilemma of Canadian Stardom"? It's a "apt subtitle for a" unusual and irresistible chronicle and memoir.

Orson Welles called John Drainie "the best radio actor in the world." Bronwyn Drainie, John's eldest child and herself a broadcaster and writer, has written a lucid, readable and **opinionated biography** of her late father. From his birth (in 1916) and childhood in Vancouver to his death from cancer in 1966, his life is chronicled with insight, analysis, **humour**, and **faithfulness** to the facts. The book is worth reading more than once and hanging on as a "invaluable source of information on the **history** of Canadian radio, television, and **theatre**. Furthermore, it is never **boring**, "ever pedantic — rather, it's as engaging as a thriller.

Don't get me wrong. This is no **Mommie Dearest**. While Bronwyn Drainie makes no **secret** of her **youthful** dislike of her father, it was based on his occasional temperamental outbursts at home, not on any more scandalous **behaviour**. He was a gentleman, a professional, and a genius at work; there's **no evidence** he played around on his wife; he loved, **supported**, and encouraged his eight children; you won't find skeletons in any of his closets. Nevertheless, I was spellbound by this beautifully told **III**.

John Drainie did not **docu-**



**ment himself on paper**. To research his **story**, Bronwyn had little written **material except a diary** of his late teenage years-but she reviewed hundreds of hours, recorded on acetate discs and kinescopes, of his work in radio and television, most of it undertaken for the CBC, between 1937 and 1966. She had, as well, the remembrances of such colleagues as Fletcher Markle, **Lorne** Greene, Kate Reid, Frances Iiyland, Andrew Allen, Douglas Rain, Barry Morse, **Austin** Willis, Paul **Kligman**, **Lister** Sinclair, Patrick **Watson**, Don **Harron**, **Mavor** Moore, and many others: the list is long and reads like a **roll call** of famous names **from Canadian** — and international — broadcasting history. It includes those, like Christopher **Plummer**, who **left** Canada to become "stars," and those we **know** as CBC regulars over the years who stayed to be what we **have** instead of stars in Canada: household names who "ever quite get the **honour**, the money, or the power of American stars, but who are broadly recognized and respected among the critics and audiences of their country.

Because of his talent, and the **nature** of the era when he entered broadcasting, John Drainie was in the enviable yet awkward position of having made it to the top of his profession here at a very early age. To go to New York or London, both of which he tried at **different points** in his career, was to enter a **strange** middle ground between respect and lack of status. He was known, but they didn't **know** what to do with him. The **result** was a **soul-destroying limbo** — and a **quick return** to Canada.

Bronwyn Drainie has a clear, laconic style with plenty of kick in it. On the decline in quality and originality of CBC radio **programming**, for example, she writes:

It used to be axiomatic in broadcasting circles that audiences related to people on television in an entirely **different way** from those on

radio . . . . But as **CBC** radio moves **more** in the direction of **affective** "personality **broadcasting**," the **distinction** between style and substance will blur completely. We are already well on **the way**. "**Dayshift**" with Danny Finkleman and Mary **Ambrose** managed to fill **two** hours of the **national** AM network every day last season with absolutely no content at all.

On Nathan Cohen:

Cohen's prejudice against radio had the effect of **alienating** almost the entire professional performing **community** in Toronto. In my childhood home, there were very few immutable beliefs we were forced to share, **but** that Nathan Cohen was the Antichrist was drummed into **my** psyche from the earliest possible age.

On the penchant of **Canadian** producers and **directors** to cast **second-string Americans** instead of first-rate Canadians in key **roles**:

In Canada the cultural pie always seems to be of **strictly** limited proportions, **so that if one artist gets an important grant or commission**, another will be **deprived**; if a foreigner is brought in to do a **film** or television part, that part must be subtracted **from** the **fixed** "umber of **roles** available that **season** to **Canadian** actors. If **there** is a bad-tempered tone to most public pronouncements by Canadian **artists**, it is the bad temper of **people** getting their toes stepped on" in a **crowded** subway car.

Drainie places her **father** in context, using his life as a frame on which to hang a comprehensive overview of broadcasting history in the years he was active, and her comments and analysis connect those beginnings with the years since. But she never stints on the life itself; the man and his **achievements** are **there** in **three dimensions**, and her **insight** is that of a fellow **artist** as well as a daughter. □

# Winter sun on snow

*Half of Clarence Gagnon's lifetime production of paintings was done to order for a show in Paris in 1909*

By Ross Skoggard

VASARI WROTE *Lives of the Artists* because even in the 16th century people wanted to know what the men who made the pictures were like. Since we admire the same qualities in a work of art that we admire in people — sincerity, grace, intelligence, wit — and also find similar faults — glibness, ostentation, deviousness — there has probably always been the urge among art lovers to reach around, or through, the work to the person who made it and to compare him or her to the art.

Some people have taken great satisfaction in the discovery that Pablo Picasso, to give the most prominent recent example, was not a model husband and father. His ill-treatment of women in particular, it is argued, some how disqualifies his images of them as great art — as if to admire his weeping portraits of Dora Maar, say, is to become an accomplice in what he did to make her cry in the first place.

Now, from Tuktoyaktuk on the Arctic Ocean comes a study, Picasso and Marie-Thérèse Walter, 1925-1927 (Editions Isabeau, 172 pages, \$22.00 cloth), by Inuit art collector and general practitioner Dr. Herbert T. Schwarz, which purports to show, from the evidence of the work, that the 44-year-old Pablo Picasso had "relations" with Marie-Thérèse Walter in 1925 — no years before he ever admitted he did, and a full year before her 16th birthday!

Schwarz's attempts to iden-

tify Marie-Thérèse from her likeness in synthetic Cubist images of the period, and his feverish dissection of drawings from 1925 and '26, including graphs charting the frequency of what Schwarz calls "double images" — faces rendered with combined frontal and profile elements — are only rarely convincing. The real, solid evidence of his conclusions, which he says he obtained only after his analysis of the pictures was complete, is the account of Marie-Thérèse's initial encounter with Picasso in the Gare St. Lazare, provided by her older sister who was with her on the day in 1926. Unfortunately for Dr. Schwarz, the release of his book coincided with the publication in *Vanity Fair* last summer of an article breaking the same news by the art critic John Richardson: it was accompanied by illustrated love letters from Picasso to Marie-Thérèse dated 1925 and '26.

In Clarence Gagnon (Heritage Broquet, 201 pages, \$60.00 cloth), René Boissay, a former Radio-Canada producer, makes the expatriate Canadian Post-Impressionist out to be that historical anomaly, the happy artist. The comfortably middle-class painter evidently had no trouble at all finding success and fitting into a comfortably middle-class pm-World-War-1 art world.

In late 1909 A. M. Reitlinger, the owner of one of the largest art galleries in Paris, offered Gagnon a show in three years' time, and then

suggested what kinds of pictures he wanted to see in it. Gagnon obediently set to work producing 75 Laurentian snow scenes: half his lifetime painting production. Boissay says the French critical reception to that show was "quite warm," with a number of witters remarking on the artist's ability to depict convincingly the myriad light effects of a low winter sun on snow. Later, around 1930, when Gagnon came under the spell of the Scandinavian painters, who were at least equal masters of the same effects, his drawing and composition firmed up and the increased emphasis on figures made his paintings more affecting.

I can't understand why the publishers allowed every fifth plate in this well-researched volume to be reproduced from horrendously out-of-focus negatives. Maybe they used frames from Boissay's 1985 television film on the artist. Gagnon, the perfectionist, would never have stood for it.

Why don't other museums in the country take advantage of the opportunity to borrow some of the splendid loan exhibitions that Pierre Théberge, the director of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, has been bringing over from France in the last few years? "Marc Chagall: Works from the Collections of the Musée National d'Art Moderne" is just the latest in a 86-ries of major shows that have spotlighted the paintings of Picasso, Miró, and others for a month or two in Montreal, the" gone right back to Paris, while in Toronto we're nourished on slender slices of relative art-historical arcana, served up by major U.S. corporations and private galleries.

At least we can enjoy the lovingly produced catalogues the MMFA puts out. Marc Chagall (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 199 pages, \$50 cloth) comprises 92 colour and 65 duotone photographs and reproductions of works from the "Dation Chagall," the pictures Chagall's heirs settled on the French govern-

ment in lieu of inheritance taxes. The artist was a master colorist who effortlessly assimilated successive constructivist, cubist, and surrealist influences into his whimsical, narrative painting style. Two sensitive essays, from 1951 and 1964, a 1962 interview, and a chronology and bibliography complete this exemplary catalogue.

The world is a cold, cruel place for Canada's industrial designers. Hewers of wood and drawers of water don't often have much of a" eye for the nice points of modular moulded plastic integrated stacking systems. And those that do probably buy something made in Milan. To help remedy the situation, Peter Day and Linda Lewis, two freelance curators, spent four years scouring the country to bring 120 Canadian-designed products together in the 1966 exhibition "Art in Everyday Life" at Toronto's Power Plant Gallery.

The catalogue to the exhibition, Art in Everyday Life (Summerhill Press/The Power Plant, 176 pages, \$24.95 paper) shares the flaws of the exhibition itself. The decision by the designer of that show to display chairs and tableware on angled shelves was particularly irritating because it confounded the viewer's ability to sense the balance of the objects. How a thing stands, how it supports itself, how gracefully it counters and accedes to the pull of gravity are essential components of any object's "presence." Seeing the objects on angled shelving obliterates that and replaces it with a" unsubtle reminder from the exhibition designer that "I'm an artist, too, you know."

If the catalogue, it's the book designer who calls attention to himself at the expense of the objects. Was it necessary, for instance, to lavish a total of 12 photographs on André Morin's "Match 1" modular kitchen storage system, yet leave three out of four other designs in the exhibition unillustrated? The curators' halting "product descriptions" are no substitute for

even a small picture, and without seeing what the majority of the products look like, it's impossible to guess from the catalogue whether the selection might even have begun to illustrate a national style and approach to design problems. The bibliography, however, looks functional.

There is some good art in the 1988 **Gallerie** annual (Gallerie Publications, 144 pages, \$12.00), a quarterly out of Vancouver devoted to women's art. But you have to search for it. The first work that made me stop and want to have a second look was a vertical abstract sculpture by Lylian Klimek whose work, she writes, was recently described by an art historian as "either feminine "or feminist." Reproducing several works each by 45 artists in 144 pages results in a cluttered layout with too many black-and-white pictures on a spread, exacerbating the problem of distinguishing the individual trees from the forest.

The editor, **Caffyn Kelley**, evidently has a weakness for expressionist drawings and paintings packed with bodies, which may be an approved feminist genre. As I looked through the book a thii time, images by Maggie **Landerbeck**, Mayumi **Oda**, **Betye Saar**, **Lesley Bell**, **Persimmon Blackridge**, **Anne Bolivar**, **Natalka Husar**, **Susan Point**, and **Nancy Spero** began to reveal themselves as having been executed with a means to match their passion.

These artists might have been better served if the editorial policy of the magazine were less inclusive, and the commentary written by someone other than the artist. This would certainly have made **Gallerie** more like one of the powerful New York monthlies that are so crucial to big-time artists' careers. But since women do have a legitimate gripe about having been discriminated against in the art world (statistically they are under-represented in museums and galleries), perhaps imitating the organs that enforce art-world elitism would

not have been the most sensitive choice for a feminist journal.

You will search the front and the back of the book in vain for the name of the author of **Treasures** (Canadian Museum of Civilization and Old Bridge Press (Camden House), 180 pages, \$26.95 cloth), a sumptuous picture book of highlights from the two-million-object national collection of Canadian archeological and cultural artifacts. Instead there's a list of 86 "contributors to this book" on the last page, including a steering committee, creative team, production staff, etc.

Unfortunately, a book written by a committee is going to exhibit some predictable dromedarian shortcomings. The lack of authorial voice makes the reader feel he or she is being addressed by one of those smooth and bloodless voice generators that tell you when your new ear's seatbelt needs doing up. The text accompanying each glorious photograph is really an extended cutline with most of the tiresome facts omitted. If you want to find out how old a thii is, what it's made of, or how bill it is, you have to consult the "catalogue" at the back. Still, it's a great collection and the book makes you want to see it in person which may, after all, be its primary purpose.

From the evidence of this half-dozen recent titles, the world of Canadian art is not yet being brilliantly served by its scholars, curators, and art-book editors. Most of these books betray a lack of confidence in their audience: in their reluctance to present information not already cooined in interpretation, in a patronizing tone, or in slipshod editing and production. On the other hand; the unhealthy numbers generated by art books published in Canada could mean the people involved believe the public readership for art books and catalogues doesn't really matter anyway, and that the only readers in Canada who count are the ones sitting on grant-dispensing committees. □

## Wake-up tales

*Who says Angel and her polar bear can't eat bananas and play dominoes?*

By **Linda Granfield**

**DOES SPRING** arrive in April? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. After the blustery winter months we are all longing for a colourful, fruitful spring, but the weather in April often holds our expectations in suspense. In the world of books, too, the same barren weeks are followed by a profusion of spring titles. While planning the garden, however, readers can find pleasure looking back over some of the past season's abundant offerings.

Arctic winter, with its complications and joys, is chronicled in **Normee Ekoomiak's Arctic Memories** (NC Press, 28 pages, \$14.95). Each page is printed in both Inuktitut and English. The book is a collection of prints, made from Ekoomiak's originals, reflecting daily life during the artist's childhood in the Arctic. The struggle to find food and shelter is tempered by the joy of tossing a friend up in the air in a blanket or playing string games. There's plenty of information here: readers learn how someone must stay outside the iglu in a snowstorm in case those inside are trapped under heavy drifts and must be dug out. The Inuit spirit Okpik is depicted in story and illustration, as are ancestral beliefs and a tender Nativity scene. Everything is coloured by Ekoomiak's moving personal revelations: I am "an Inuk of the city," he states. "My North is not there anymore."

The pallor of the cover illustration is misleading, for **Arctic Memories** is a hook full of colour. Acrylic paintings depict the barren landscape of the North, the never-ending panorama of ice and snow.

**Ekoomiak's** felt applique creations, however, are his masterworks. As a boy, the author was taught the art of embroidery by his grandfather. Magnificent designs in vivid colours are applied to dramatic ha&grounds. The simplicity of form and execution is a powerful balance for the text: both can be enjoyed by child and adult alike.

Marie-Louise Gay, the author and illustrator of **Angel and the Polar Bear** (Stoddart, 32 pages, \$12.95) explores a "imaginary Arctic in her latest picture-book. **Angel** is a six-year-old with freckles, messy hair, missing teeth, and a loud voice. She tries to awake" her drowsy parents in the morning with invented stories, which might shock other parents out of bed, but not hers. Angel's inventions become a fantasy trek through her apartment as the water she "hears" surrounds her bed, floods all the rooms, and carries her through a succession of fantastical incidents. A lot can happen while parents sleep!

Much of the fun in Gay's books derives from her use of secondary characters- here, for example, Angel's cat. Children following the text and the illustrations will find another, parallel story in the antics of the snorkelling feline. Somehow, the most surprising things make sense. Of course opening a refrigerator can cause rivers to freeze, and of course a polar bear lives on ice, so naturally he comes out of the fridge. And who says Angel and her polar bear can't eat bananas and play dominoes?

In contrast to the rollicking

playfulness of Gay's book, the poems in *Leaping Lizard*, by George Swede (Three Trees Press. 48 pages, \$5.95), make one stop, listen, and look in a more contemplative, personal manner. One poem is printed on each page; some of Swede's pieces are no more than two words long, ("storm clouds") but each word, with its typographical message, is powerfully evocative. Language is presented in all its sound and silence. Competent young readers are encouraged to use their visual imagination. How "fortunate then that the illustrations by Kimberly Hart offer such inappropriate accompaniment to the poetry. "After coming/all that way/sunbeam rests/on the couch" is defeated by a cross-legged Sun wearing heart-shaped glasses and a Carmen Miranda hat. Such foolishness diminishes the beauty of the world that Swede excels in portraying. "Snow over eve&b&grandmother hums as she brushes/her white hair."

Winter's bleakest prospects provide an apt metaphor for the numbing emotional problems in Budge Wilson's *Breakdown* (Scholastic. 152 pages, \$3.95). In this challenging novel. Mr. Collicutt is a man driven by the expectations of others and himself. Only 33, he's still in a dead-end job doing the work of three at the plumber's mart in Halifax. At home, there are four children and a determined wife, all of them targets of his chronic irritability. Mr. Collicutt is not just "sick"; he's suffering a nervous breakdown.

Wilson's fiction has always been good at capturing the warmth of family life, and his portrayal of this family's situation is obviously based on a good deal of research. The Collicutts, in particular 13-year-old Katie and 11-year-old Daniel, pass through various stages of emotional angst as they try to understand and help their father. This is a story of loss and gain on many fronts. When Dad is finally hospitalized, the family finds its strengths. Mum can

be a competent cashier who considers moving into the computer field. Katie and Daniel get their priorities straight and take part in deciding their own future. But they must deal with constant challenges, and feelings of guilt and futility. There are no pat endings here. Dad is not completely well at the end of the book but he's well on the mend. Like the other members of the family, he has re-evaluated his attitude toward life.

In another time and across the continent from the Collicutts, we meet the resourceful teen-aged Catriona McLeod. Orphaned in Scotland, she immigrates to Vancouver with her grandparents at the beginning of the Depression in Catriona's *Island* (Groundwood, 127 pages, \$7.95), by Florence McNeil. Catriona's recollections of her first year in Canada are evocatively written. McNeil's use of symbol and language (despite some flagrant grammatical errors) is effective. Her attention to detail ("he held the tea cup as if it had no handle") provides quick character definitions. The use of Gaelic folklore and superstition also works well in the story of a young girl's first infatuation, on an island off the coast of Vancouver. Her family wants Catriona to have job security, as a teacher, but she decides she will not go to normal school, but will be an artist. A encounter with an older, married man provides the emotional catalyst that enables Catriona to put her life into perspective. A young girl's fears dissipate, and a young woman embarks on a new life.

Challenges of another sort await the title character of Robin Muller's *Little Kay* (North Winds, 32 pages, \$16.95), a fairy-tale with modern overtones. The spunky Kay is the youngest of the old magician's daughters. When the Sultan decrees that each family must send a son to serve as a knight for a year and a day, all the daughters are anxious to go. Disgrace and fierce punishments await

the parent who does not send a son. The elder daughters fail in their attempts to march to court. Little Kay, however, creates a suit of armour from a kettle, soup pot and platter and, astride her donkey, begins her journey.

The ridiculous Sultan suspects that this new knight is not a man, and proceeds to test her courage and cleverness. Each test, however, only succeeds in demonstrating the foolishness and incompetence of the other, male, knights. When finally "n-masked, Kay goes on to save the Sultan and the land from a fierce ogre, using brains rather than brawn to overcome him. As she casually remarks, "Fine feathers don't make a fierce falcon!" In the future, daughters and sons will be equally acceptable in the service of the Sultan.

This equality of the sexes may sound didactic when summarized, but in Muller's tale it is a refreshing and

amusing look at the subject. There is a lot of text in this picture-book, but the book still works as a read-aloud for even the youngest child. The illustrations are glorious, filled with textures and swirls of colour, moving from silhouette to patterned borders and back. The characters look like a child's neighbours, so realistic and contemporary are their visages. Kay could be a sister, and her eye contact with the reader includes the child in Kay's moment. The ogre is so ugly he's cute, and "one of the fearsome characters will terrify a young reader. Muller uses words filled with action and image ("scrunched", "strode", "skewer", "jubilant"), and his humour brings a smile: "I am Jabel," the ogre bellowed, "and today is my birthday! So what do you say?! 'Happy birthday, Jabel?'" whispered the Sultan."

Little Kay is an entertaining tale for a rainy day when spring is slow in coming. □

## IMPORTANT NOTICE FOR BOOKSELLERS

# RANDOM HOUSE COLLEGE DIVISION ANNOUNCEMENT

All Random House College Texts  
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shipped by McGraw-Hill Ryerson after  
December 1, 1999 and for all Random House  
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## VACLAV HAVEL

SEVERAL MONTHS ago I had the privilege of reviewing Vaclav Havel's *Letters to Olga*, written during four years in a Czechoslovak prison. Now Mr. Havel has been arrested yet again and sentenced to nine months in prison. Amnesty International has called for an urgent action on behalf of the playwright and those arrested with him.

Those wishing to protest these arrests may write to: His Excellency Jan Janovic, 80 Rideau Terrace, Ottawa K1N 2A1; and Guđr Gustav Husak, Prezident CSSR, Praha-Hrad, Czechoslovakia.

Cary Fagan  
Toronto

## OUR MISGUIDED REVIEWERS

KENNETH MCGOOGAN reviewing *Carry On Bumping* (Jan-Feb, 1989) charges me with 'deliberately misrepresenting' his views in his earlier review of *The Bumper Book*. Let me quote the part of my essay "A Conversation with Book Reviewers" in which I report his statements verbatim:

'I'd like to take up in particular the comments made by Kenneth McGoogan in the Calgary *Sunday Herald*, 8 March 1987. McGoogan's review of *The Bumper Book* states with frankness and obvious goodwill why newspapers cannot be expected to do a decent job in reviewing literary books in Canada.

"Metcalf doesn't understand what a Canadian newspaper is or how it works," says McGoogan.

"Metcalf's assumption, and it's widely shared, is that the primary function of a newspaper book reviewer is to serve the literary community.

"Trouble is, that community isn't paying his salary. The newspaper is. And the newspaper is a business."

These naive words reveal with a certain crude honesty what it is that's

wrong about the newspaper, as now constituted, sad its sense of purpose: "The newspaper is a business."

It's as though the money-changers in the temple said unto Christ, as he raised his whip against them, 'But we are here for business! We are not here to serve the religious community.'

I leave the reader to judge, whether I am misrepresenting Mr. McGoogan's views here, or whether, on the contrary, he is doing the misrepresenting himself.

The statement "The newspaper is a business" is of course perfectly true. It is the root cause of the utter philistinism of Canadian newspapers, in their book review pages, from one end of the country to the other. This is the problem I am trying to clarify and urge that we try to do something about. It can be done, if enough voices are willing to speak up.

But as usual, the reviewer has turned to something else, in this case to personal accusations and recriminations, while burying the real issue under a cloud.

Louis Dudek  
Montreal

IT IS RARE in Books in Canada to read such appalling unprofessionalism as that exhibited in Thomas Carpenter's recent review of Christopher Wiseman's *Postcards Home: Poems New and Selected*.

The review is not only incompetent but dishonest. Carpenter begins his review of Wiseman's book by writing out the following lines in prose form:

*Back again under these cliffs. The sea stretches tight and grey as canvas out to a*



*cold curved horizon. My children wade thr pools searching for crabs. My mind lets go and for a moment I am back thirty years a child in these same pools free and running with the long tides in the bright weather. Triumphant, my son holds up a crab, his face alight, wanting my praise.*

The first rule of quoting poetry for review is that lines be copied exactly as they appear in the poem with slashes to indicate line breaks. There is not a single slash in Carpenter's initial quotation. The first three lines of Wiseman's poem should read: "Back again / under these dis. / The sea stretches /".

Carpenter's dishonest rendering of Wiseman's fine and evocative poem "Filey Brig" obliterates the emphasis Wiseman puts on "again" through his skilled use of assonance, consonance, and ambiguity. The interchanging play of long and short 'a' vowels, 'i' vowels, as well as the subtle use of the sibilant 's' introduced in "cliffs" at the end of the second line, forms an intriguing sound pattern. This pattern, combined with the rising and falling rhythms of the poem achieved by attentive use of one-, two- and three-syllable words, evokes the rising and falling of the tides of the sea, a metaphor for memory. The superb crafting of sound culminates in the final word "praise," which combines the long "a" vowel and "s" sibilant. The stressed positioning of "cliffs," "pools," "son," "horizon," and "crabs" at line end hints, through association, at love, illness, disappointment, and danger.

Despite the remarkable craft shown by Wiseman, Carpenter ignorantly writes that "lines are arbitrarily cut and scattered down the page. A couple of commas that would otherwise guide the reader have been artistically omitted" and that the "poems do not carry enough evocative weight"

It's obvious that Carpenter knows nothing about tradi-



tional prosody. If Wiseman's poems do not "elicit much of a response," for Carpenter. Carpenter is advised to school himself in poetic convention before he utters any more hollow statements that show his ignorance. Otherwise Carpenter should stick to journalism, which appears to be his trade. I hope he exhibits greater integrity in that genre than he does with his sham review of Wiseman's poetry.

In the future I trust that editors of *Books in Canada* will show greater care in selecting reviewers.

Elona Malterre  
Calgary

Thomas Carpenter replies:

*People who pick their way through poems with all-purpose prosodic guidebooks in hand an self-certain boy scouts wandering through trees occasionally wondering where the forest is*

PROSODY is merely the science of rhythm and rhymes, a mechanical means of grappling with the fluid and often ineffable qualities of poetry. It is valuable but obviously limited in its uses and too often serves only to keep poetry at a comfortably intellectual arm's length. That is the reason — there being no "rules" for writing reviews — that I decided to avoid the kind of jargon that Elona Malterre so

nically parodies in the fourth paragraph of her letter. Good prosody does not guarantee worthwhile **poetry** nor does it redeem the kind of broadly sentimental subject **matter that was laid bare** by the deliberate omission of the slash marks in my quotation of the poem in question. Even if I agreed with **Malterre's** assessment of **Wiseman's** prosodic **dexterity**, I would not thereby conclude that "**Filey Brig**" is a fine piece of work. Her own gushing tribute to "**an attentive use of one-, two- and three-syllable words**" etc. sounds like **nothing** so much as damning with faint academic praise.

## OUT OF CONTEXT

**WRITERS SHOULD** not in general, I think, respond in print to reviewers of their work, but I would like to correct an erroneous impression created by **Erin Mouré's** review of **Poets SS** in your last issue. It is not easy to quote out of context in such a way as to **precisely** reverse the meaning of a passage, but **Mouré** has **managed** (accidentally, I hope) to do just that.

**Mouré** writes, "**David Manicom** conjures up women in company towns with the phrase '**wives as agile lovers again without bellies,**' (please

note the job requirement, girls)," implying that the **description refers** to women and that **I am rather** bluntly sexist. Ironically, the lines refer to **men**, as a slightly lengthier quotation makes clear: "**Mine-shafts ... like upended drawers with their men falling blinking out / returned to wives as agile lovers again without bellies.**"

I did not **appreciate** either the **accusation or the reviewer's carelessness**. There are no doubt **plenty** of gender biases lurking within me, and no doubt some of them slip into my work in some form. But I don't **think** any of these biases are as blatant and stupid as that I was accused of.

David Manim  
Montreal

### Erin Mouré replies:

Leaving aside the issue of the epoch of brothers that I was addressing (not just intentional sexism, but mental structures that perpetuate the epoch . . .) I'm glad David wrote to make his **authorial** intention clear for his readers I still **find**, alas, that his intentions make for ambiguous **results**. Does the "**authority**" belong solely to the author? I'll let the readers **decide** now that they **have** a lengthier quote.

## RECEIVED

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

Anabel Lee, by Edgar Allan Poe, illustrated by Gill-Tibo, Tundra.  
Appetit, by M. Anderson, Brick.  
Are You Paying Too Much Tax?, by Wayne Beech and Lyle R. Hepburn, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.  
As Long as the Rivers Run: Hydroelectric Development and Native Communities in Western Canada, by James B. Waldram, U of Manitoba.  
The Ashby Dictionary (English), edited by K. L. Cordner et al., Editions Renyl.  
Beginnings, by Dorothy Livesey, Peguis.  
The Beloved: St. Mungo, Founder of Glasgow, by Reginald B. Hale, U of Ottawa.  
Blood Red Ochre, by Kevin Major, Doubleday.  
The Canadian Price Waterhouse Personal Tax Advisor, by Richard Birch, Seal.  
Conspiracy of Silence, by Lisa Priest, M & S.  
Could You Stop Josephine?, by Stephanie Foulm, Tundra.  
The Crisis in Latin America/La Crise en Amérique Latine, edited by Terrence McGrath, U of Ottawa.

Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared, by Freda Hawkins, McGill-Queen's.  
The Dakota of the Canadian Northwest: Lessons for Survival, by Peter Douglas Elias, U of Manitoba.  
Dance for Cats, by Erica Rutherford, Ragweed.  
Descartes and the Enlightenment, by Peter A. Schuck, McGill-Queen's.  
Dictionnaire Français (English-French), edited by Sophie Arnaud et al., Editions Renyl.  
Exploring the Teaching Millieu, by Alice L. Boberg, Detective Enterprises.  
From the Great Above She Opened Her Ear to the Great Below, by Tim Liburn and Susan Shantz, Brick.  
Greenmantle, by Jocelyne Villeneuve, Penumbra.  
Gurgle, Bubble, Splash, by Richard Thompson, illustrated by Eugénie Fernandes, Annick.  
How Fizza Came to Our Town, by Dayal Kaur Khalsa, Tundra.  
How to Sell to the Government, by Hawley Black, Macmillan.  
How to Write a Précis, by Pamela Russell, U of Ottawa.  
In Defence of Science: Science, Technology, and Politics in Modern Society, by J. W. Grove, U of T Press.  
Infinite Worlds: The Poetry of Louis Dudek, edited by Robin Blaser, Véhicule.  
The Invisible Moon, by Carla Hartsfield, Signal.  
Ireland and the Federal Solution, by John Rendle, McGill-Queen's.

Jacks on Tax Savings: How to Complete Your 1988 Tax Return, by Evelyn Jacks, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.  
Let's Play Ball!, by William Humber, Lester & Orpen Dentys.  
Letters From an English Rancher, by Claude Gardiner, Glenbow.  
Lexicon of Economic Thought, by Walter E. Block and Michael A. Walker, The Fraser Institute.  
A Life in the Country, by Bruce Hutchison, Douglas & McIntyre.  
Love in the Temperate Zone, by L. R. Wright, Seal.  
Low-Risk Investing, by Gordon Pape, Prentice-Hall.  
The Magic Amethyst, by Miriam Goldman, Ragweed.  
Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War 1914-1919, by Desmond Morton and J. L. Granatstein, Lester & Orpen Dentys.  
Moby's a Monster, by Jill Creighton, illustrated by Ruth Ohl, Annick.  
Mood Pocket, Mud Bucket, by Deborah Turvey Zagwyn, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.  
My Name Is Louis, by Janet Craig James, Penumbra.  
Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World 1929-1949, by Peter Neary, McGill-Queen's.  
Pigs, by Robert Munsch, illustrated by Michael Martchenko, Annick.  
The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790 to 1870, by John S. Milloy, U of Manitoba.  
Please Carry Me, Lord, by Rose Corneisen, Kindred.  
Portrait of David Hockney, by Peter Webb, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.  
A Postcard from Rome, by David Helwig, Penguin.  
The Prevailing Influence/Influence Majeure, by Catherine D. Siddall, Oakville Galleries.  
Ritual Abuse, by Kevin Marron, Seal.  
Roughing It in the Bush Or Life in Canada, by Susanna Moodie, edited by Carl Ballstadt,

Carlson.  
A Season of Mourning, by Frances Ivan, Brick.  
Second Opinion: What's Wrong with Canada's Health-Care System and How to Fix It, by Michael Rachlis and Carol Kushner, Collins.  
Select Spas: In Canada, The United States & Mexico, by Anne Harding, Somerville.  
Selected Stories of Norman Duncan, edited by John Caldwell Adams, U of Ottawa.  
The Seventh Gate, by Keith Leckie, Macmillan.  
Shifting Sands: Managing People in Public Bureaucracies, edited by David Zussman, Institute of Public Administration.  
Song of Bakasani, by Rita Joe, Ragweed.  
Studia Ucrainica: 4 Ukrainian Studies, no. 9, edited by Irene R. Makaryk, U of Ottawa.  
Telling Differences: New English Fiction from Quebec, edited by Linda Leith, Véhicule.  
Temper Temper, by Nicola Morgan, Fitzhenry & Whiteside.  
The Fossil Cliffs of Joggins, by Luing Ferguson, Nova Scotia Museum.  
To Whom the Wilderness Speaks, by Louise de Kirilne Lawrence, Natural Heritage.  
Tommy Tricker and the Stamp Traveller, by Michael Rubbo, Montreal.  
Toronto Blue Jays Official Guide, 1989, Lester & Orpen Dentys.  
Translations: An Interpretive Approach, by Jean Delisle, translated by Patricia Logan and Monica Creese, U of Ottawa.  
Ukrainian Heritage Dictionary (English-Ukrainian), edited by Daria Andrusiechko et al., Editions Renyl.  
Voices on the Brink, by Tom Marshall, Macmillan.  
The Wealthy Barber: The Common Sense Guide to Successful Financial Planning, by David Chilton, Financial Awareness Corporation.  
Wifeytles: The Ultimate Guide to a Successful Marriage, by Glynne Walker, Seal.  
Wild Rice in Canada, by William G. Dore et al., NC Press.

## CanWit No. 137

By Barry Baldwin

**COMPETITORS ARE** invited to provide tides (maximum 6) of unlikely Canadian **instructional** home **videos** (e.g., Mii Duffy's Aerobics Championship Swimming with Joe Clark, etc.). The prize is \$25, and entries should be sent to **CanWit no. 137, Books in Canada**, 366 Adelaide St E., Ste. 432, Toronto, Ontario M5A 3X9 by April 25.

### RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 135

Few readers were willing to **claim** they are really distinguished, prematurely deceased Canadians. The winning entry comes from C. McKay of Fredericton, New Brunswick:

Having had my fill of severe hardships in the wilds of Upper Canada, and lacking that community of genteel and cultured souls so essential to any educated person, I used the royalties from my **novel, Roughing it in the Bush**, to buy a condominium in Florida, where partaking regularly of the Fountain of Youth has kept me in good health and spirits. I now **operate** an organic citrus farm, and have time to pen the occasional **article** (syndicated) on gardening.

(Mrs.) Susanna Moodie  
St. Petersburg, Florida.

## SOLUTION TO ACROSTIC NO. 18

Picking up her hairbrush, Alië ran it through my hair and made a part to one side. Then to my astonishment, she dotted lipstick on my cheeks and blended in the color until they glowed. Finally she dabbed perfume on my neck and wrists and behind my ears. "Well, what do you think?"  
Martha Brooks, *A Hill For Looking*, Queenston House Publishing

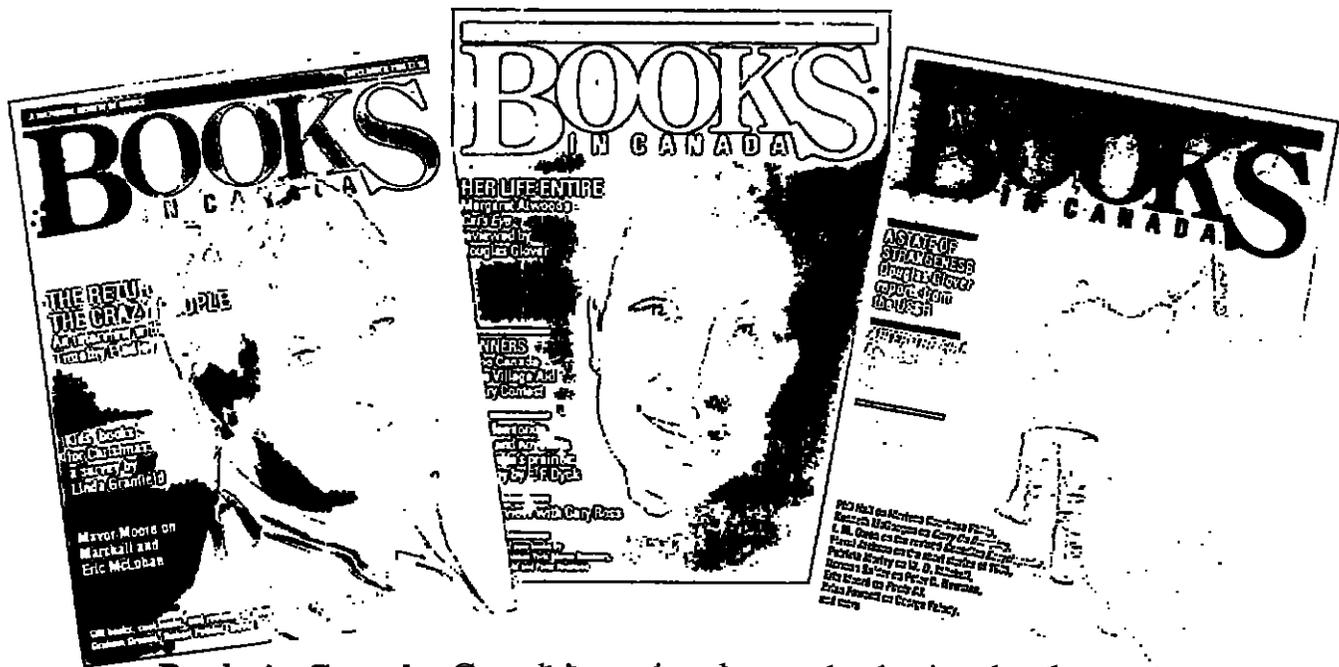
# CanLit acrostic no. 19 *By Mary D. Trainer*

1	C	2	U	3	H	4	Q	5	V	6	T	7	A	8	M	9	G	10	P	11	I	12	F														
13	J	14	N	15	X	16	C	17	M	18	E	19	O	20	D	21	W	22	N	23	Z	24	L	25	G	26	P	27	V	28	B	29	O	30	D		
31	T	32	G	33	F	34	R	35	N	36	U	37	O	38	AA	39	G	40	W	41	I	42	N	43	L	44	Y	45	H	46	A	47	C	48	O		
49	O	50	Y	51	N	52	S	53	P	54	F	55	U	56	W	57	Z	58	V	59	O	60	N	61	T	62	G	63	C	64	D	65	B	66	R	67	L
68	U	69	H	70	E	71	O	72	K	73	Q	74	I	75	T	76	B	77	L	78	V	79	W	80	M	81	AA	82	S	83	O	84	W				
85	O	85	X	87	K	88	N	89	B	90	V	91	W	92	Z	93	J	94	N	95	M	96	AA	97	U	98	E	99	G	100	X						
101	G	102	S	103	P	104	N	105	O	106	T	107	V	108	N	109	O	110	H	111	G	112	X	113	H	114	W	115	O	116	AA	117	L				
118	D	119	J	120	V	121	P	122	S	123	A	124	H	125	U	126	O	127	O	128	T	129	K	130	G	131	W	132	N	133	D	134	AA				
135	Y	136	M	137	T	138	P	139	G	140	Q	141	U	142	D	143	N	144	S	145	H	146	L	147	W	148	T	149	V	150	F	151	D				
152	G	153	N	154	B	155	F	156	O	157	J	158	U	159	I	160	Z	161	N	162	W	163	O	164	F	165	G	166	V	167	C	168	O	169	K		
170	G	171	E	172	A	173	P	174	O	175	Q	176	X	177	N	178	P	179	F	180	E	181	W	182	T	183	G	184	R	185	M	186	B				
187	O	188	H	189	J	190	L	191	Q	192	E	193	M	194	A	195	G	196	V	197	P	198	B	199	T	200	N	201	C	202	P	203	O				
204	J	205	Z	206	W	207	H	208	R	209	N	210	V	211	A	212	G	213	E	214	D	215	O	216	O	217	F	218	L	219	H						

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

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>4. Show obsequious deference      7   172   123   194   211   46</p> <p>B. Lecherous      89   154   76   198   28   65   186</p> <p>C. Okanagan Valley fruit      47   130   201   63   16   167   1</p> <p>D. Plagues lakes and forests: 2 wds.      133   64   151   214   30   118   20   142</p> <p>E. Newspaper publisher      192   70   18   171   98   213   180</p> <p>F. Scattered      150   33   155   12   217   164   179   54</p> <p>G. 1977 truckers' musical: 2 wds.      111   195   183   170   62   39   165   9<br/>139   32   99   25   212   152</p> <p>H. Common conifers      69   124   145   219   110   188   45   3   207</p> <p>I. Relating to vision      11   159   113   41   74</p> <p>J. Gathered pecans      189   93   204   13   157   119</p> <p>K. Yawn      169   129   87   72</p> <p>L. Dialect of Ojibwa Indian language      218   146   43   77   190   117   24   67</p> <p>M. Name associated with pulp, power, and paper      17   136   193   185   8   95   80</p> <p>N. Ruin a plan, often by accident: 3 wds.      88   94   104   51   177   153   14   200   108<br/>161   209   22   143   35   60   132   42</p> <p>O. Classical guitarist: 2 wds.      216   105   174   83   49   71   29   187   127</p> | <p>P. In agreement with justice: 3 wds.      121   197   138   178   202   26   53   10   173<br/>103</p> <p>Q. Theatre co. employing young mentally handicapped adults: 3 wds.      156   85   37   191   168   203   4   126   101<br/>109   175   115   59   19   73   215   140<br/>163   48</p> <p>R. Lavishly productive      66   208   34   184</p> <p>S. ----- Ranger marine disaster      102   52   82   144   122</p> <p>T. Temperate bass species: 2 wds.      106   76   182   31   157   128   148   61<br/>6   199</p> <p>U. Urged strongly      141   125   2   36   68   97   55   158</p> <p>V. Governor General's approval: 2 wds.      107   196   58   149   90   5   120   27   78<br/>166   210</p> <p>W. Talked together in an idle, friendly fashion: 3 wds.      79   147   131   84   61   56   181   114   162<br/>21   206   40</p> <p>X. Spawning grounds      100   15   176   112   86</p> <p>Y. Not regular, expected or planned      44   50   135</p> <p>Z. Synchronized swimming champion      205   160   57   92   23</p> <p>AA. Young, beautiful woman      134   96   81   38   116</p> |
|--|--|

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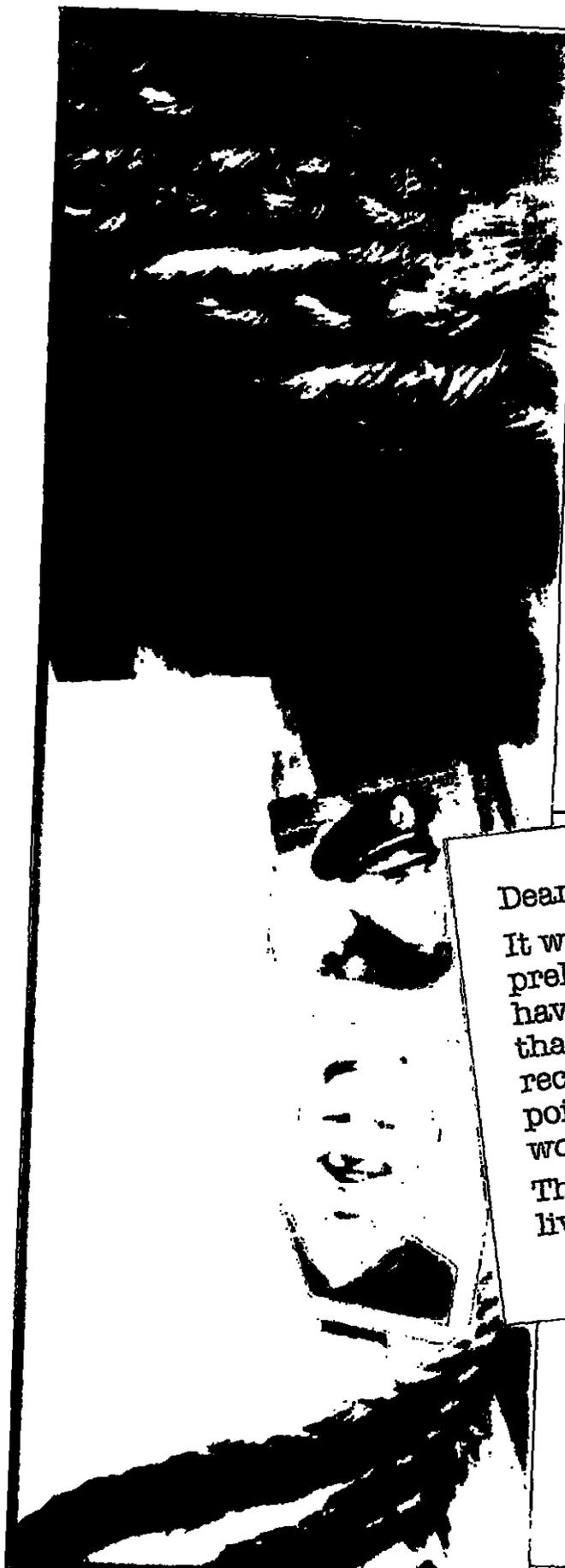
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