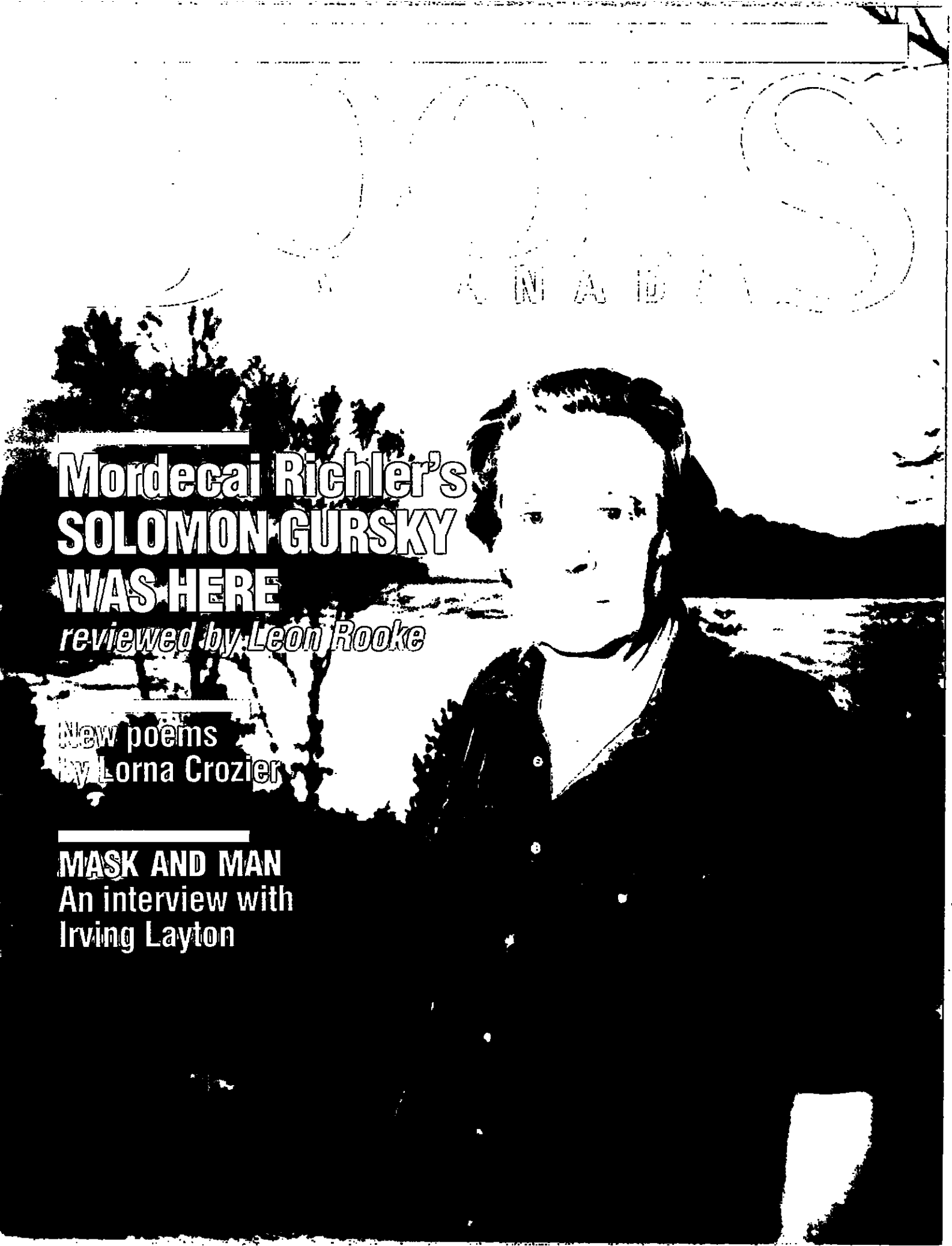

Mordecai Richler's SOLOMON GURSKY WAS HERE

reviewed by Leon Rooke

New poems
by Lorna Crozier

MASK AND MAN
An interview with
Irving Layton

BOOKS IN CANADA

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY
Paul Oranstein

Réshard's wake

He was a writer *of* subtlety *and* sensitivity, and *he* loved *language* in all its *forms*

And how MU you tell me you're lo-o-nely,
Or soy for you that tha sun don't shrine?

THE PLAYWRIGHT sits on the lowest sundeck. his shoulders forward, his head tilted back, his eyes closed. giving everything to the song. Wendell Boyle sits at the piano on the deck above, driving out great crashing chords, and Kent Stetson sings.

Below, in the garde". a knot &people stays close to the fire and the cobs of sweet new corn. glasses of wine in their hands. talking quietly or staring into the fire or singing along.

This is a wake for Réshard Gool, who lived and loved and worked in this renovated farmhouse with his wife, the artist Hilda Woolnough. It is the kind of wake Réshard would have wanted — a fine warm party on a crisp August evening in Rose Valley, Prince Edward Island. a party that brings together all kinds of old friends from the many worlds Réshard inhabited. Friends in government, friends from the university, friends from the community. friends from (above all) the arts.

Computer artists and curators, *poets* and painters. impresarios and editors. Fiddles and penny-whistles, guitars, the piano. Barbecued trout, zucchini salad, shrimp dip, home-baked rolls. Hilda is a phenomenal cook, and everyone else brought something. Blueberry buckle. liver pâté, broiled chicken, fresh green beans, strawberry mousse.

Good stories, laughter, and controversy. A capella singing. A little beer and a bottomless supply of *wine.* Bats zinging overhead where hummingbirds flew this afternoon, flowers lit by torchlight, the dark green of the spruce trees. and a small high moon.

And good talk everywhere. flowing over the sundecks. down into the garden, back into the house.

Réshard would have loved it.

Réshard Gool was born in London in 1931. He lived in South Africa, attended school in Scotland, studied in Toronto and Hamilton, taught in Regina. Jamaica, Charlottetown. There was a marriage somewhere that I knew nothing about, and a dark and lovely daughter I met briefly in a Charlottetown garde". There was his passionate pursuit of Hilda, before whose Mexican studio he once appeared still wearing his long-johns from Regina. *I just thought I'd drop* in, he said. You *bastard, she* said later, *I could have been in bed with someone.*

But you weren't, he grinned. And who could resist such assiduous courtship? They married; and in 1967 they moved with Hilda's children to Charlottetown, where R&hard taught political science at the University of P.E.I. There they were truly at home, and they never moved again — though they travelled widely during sabbaticals and vacations, living at various times in Mexico, the Canary Islands, Europe, India.

They were an enormously generous, forceful, talented couple, and their impact on their beloved island home was enduring. Hilda devoted years to the revival of the Island's handicraft traditions and to the establishment of innovative galleries. Réshard founded a newsmagazine, *The Square Deal,* and a literary press and sponsored an endless series of visits and public readings for writers he admired. He taught politics through the study of literature, encouraged and published Maritime writers, criticized and appraised the region's artists, implored and hectored and cajoled government agencies for better arts support.

In 1985. largely at Réshard's insistence, the university created a titer-ii-residence position. He the" bombarded me with letters, phone calls, and messages. Would I come to P.E.I.? For various reasons, I was reluctant. but. R&shard systematically abraded my resistance. In the end I went — and I was glad, too; the year at U.P.E.I. was rich, productive, and satisfying.

By then Réshard and Hilda had moved to an old farmhouse in Rose Valley, which they renovated themselves — a home stuffed with their eclectic collection of books and works of art, a house of comfortable chairs and wood stoves, cascading plants and a hospitable table. They added a wing with a bright, spacious upstairs studio-cum-bedroom, and a deck running halfway around the second story. Réshard had largely withdraw" from university affairs and public controversies; all he wanted to do, he said, was to write, and he proposed to take early retirement on a modest pension to make that possible.

He was a writer of bamque subtlety and sensitivity, and he loved language in all its *forms* — books, plays, poems. lectures, commentaries. polemics, letters, tabletalk, gossip, anecdote. (His repertoire included a marvellous imitation of a heavily accented South African municipal politician talking about 'shitty affairs at the Shitty Council.") His writing is marked by a vast range of experience and perception, and a passionate love of life in all its forms. He was no stranger to racism, and his burning denunciations of privilege, stupidity. bureaucracy, and the abuse of power were a joy to his al*lies* and a marvel to his opponents.

At his wake. a friend remarked that we could "sense" his spirit among us.

'No." I said. 'You wouldn't have to *sense* it. If it's not talking, it's not R&hard."

But in fact his voice had less range than it deserved. His complexity, and the remoteness of his fictional settings — South Africa, for instance, in his prize-winning novel *Price* and his posthumous

Réshard Gool

Capetown ***Coolie*** — restricted his audience, as did bll frequent focus on Prince Edward Island. At his best, he was a **marvellous storyteller,** but **his** failures were the obverse of his virtues. Sometimes, it seemed, he chiselled bis books too **carefully,** sacrificed momentum to the precision of his detailing, lost the story in the **service** of the voice.

And then he lost ***his voice altogether. In the summer*** of 1988 he was **ill, listless** and weak, and in August, **Pat** Lane-hi guest — took him to the hospital. He had had a **stroke,** and he would be hospitalized for **three** months. He came home for the **Thanksgiving** holiday — and four days later another stroke, much more severe, simply erased half his brain, leaving him speechless and **paralysed.** In a **Halifax** hospital, he hovered for some days **between life** and death.

The doctors thought he would never leave the hospital. By Christmas. Hilda had **him** back in Rose Valley for weekends. A month later he was home to stay. She built a **65-foot** plywood ramp from the house to the car and for four months devoted up to seven hours daily **simply** to ***preparing*** him for the day.

"Réshard couldn't speak, but that didn't mean he couldn't **communicate,"** says R&hard's neighbour and **protégé,** the poet Leon Berrouard. **Réshard** taught **himself** to sing without words, entertaining Hilda **with jazz riffs** and old pop songs. Hilda laughs when she recalls how they managed: **Réshard, un**able to remember the location or purpose of **electric** liiht switches, wheeling himself into a darkened room and pointing imperiously upward at the **light fixture,** Hilda carefully reteaching him how to **achieve** the **miracle** of liiht.

"We had a **two-and-a-half-hour** row one time." she says. "Can you imagine it? **Réshard** couldn't speak — but the **way** lie whipped that wheelchair around **expressed** ***everything*** he wanted to say."

During those four months, **Heinemann** accepted ***Capetown Coolie*** for 1990 **publication,** while tbe P.E.I. Arts Council and the **provincial** government conferred a special **award** on **Réshard** for his **services** to literature. At the reception, **says** Hilda, 'he roared around **the** room in hi wheelchair, wearing his cap— naturally — **and** getting loads of attention. He **loved** it"

On April **29, Réshard** and Hikla went into **Charlottetown** with Leon and Karen Berrouard to **attend** a screening at the Confederation **Centre** of **films** by Rick **Hancock,** a filmmaker **Réshard had** always admired and supported. He **was** clearly on the mend, and he **could** even speak a few words. When they got home, Hikla poured a drink of wine for the other three, **and Réshard mimed** that he wanted one too. No. said Hilda, you're not allowed to drink **wine.** But it was good red tine, not **nameless plonk,** and **Réshard was** not about to be **denied.**

'Oh, come on!" he said, and Hilda relented.

Next day he suffered a **third stroke,** and **they** bpth **knew** he was-dying. They said their goodbyes. When **Réshard** began to choke, Hilda took **him** to **hospital. He died in her arms.**

"He looked beautiful, absolutely noble," Hilda remembers. "He looked **like** a prince." She **kissed** hi goodbye. It was May Day. He was **57.**

And now, **in** August, his **friends** have gathered to celebrate **Réshard's** completed **life, Hilda's** new beginning. To **signal** that. Hilda built **two** more **sundecks** this summer, and now, as Wendell Boyle draws chords and melodies from the piano, Kent Stetson sings, and I look around. We are all, in a sense, **protégés:** we have **all benefited from** the **affection** and respect that R&shard and Hilda spread **with** such prodigious liberality. The **film** script of Kent Stetson's play, *A* ***Warm Wind in China,*** has just reached second draft. Marc Gallant's new book **will** be published in **six** countries. The **writers** here include Joseph **Sherman,** J. J. **Steinfeld,** Leon Berrouard, Jim **Hornby:** young people, many *of* **them,** when **Réshard befriended** them, writers who might never have persisted or pub lished without R&shard's faith and **affection.**

I am **glad** to have his **writing, and** I **will return to** it often, as a **way of** keep **ing his** memory fresh and green. But **in** the end it is the **man,** my friend R&hard **Gool,** that I mourn and **honour:** his courage, his **humour,** his ceaseless engagement **with** the **burning moral questions** of his day. Above all. I **honour** hls love for truth and beauty, **his** devotion to those who displayed, however modestly, the creative fire that alone partially **redeems** the cruelty, blindness, and greed that mark our species' passage **through** the **living** whole around us.

After Réshard's cremation, his **friends** and family drank **his favourite** champagne and poured a tot in the water while they committed his ashes to the stream that flow by the house **in Rose** Valley. That small private ceremony marked the reunion of **his** body **with** the living whole from which it sprang; but bis goodness had moved out to **enrich** it **long** before his bodr flared and **crumbled.**

Kent Stetson sings. We all sing. And **Réshard's spirit,** somewhere, stops talking, just briefly, to hear **us.**

— SILVERDONALD CAMERON

Watching the watchwords

If silence is the betrayal of **self** *and speaking the betrayal of* ***others,*** *what* ***is*** *a writer to do? At* ***the*** *very least,* ***she*** *can admit* ***and examine*** *the problem*

SOMETIMES **the** unbidden comes and begins a poem. ***"To speak of the watchwords which foiled" (from "Ameijoas").*** When the **line** came to me. it seemed to refer to the rhetoric of the mouth, the voice **that** makes us feel our **self-ness.** That connection behveen "voice" and **"being"** Jacques **Derrida** *derided as the* desire for presence, linear time, and transcendence. (Unlike ***writing,*** which is **always** a doubling, for it articulates **difference,** putting our notions of **"presence" (the** effacement of **difference)** into radical question).

I **think** the ***voice*** means something **different** to **women;** we more readily use the voice as dialogic or **polyvocal** (the philosophical work of **Luce Irigaray** and Julia **Kristeva** in **France,** the theoretical and **fictional** work of **Gail** Scott in **Quebec,** or **the** poetry of Marlene Nourbese Philip in Canada, to give some examples). more relational than **constitutive** of a **univocal meaning** or self. The result for many of us is that **we** see the voice not just as articulation of the self, but as link or **thread** with those others whom we inhabit. who inhabit us, who caress us with their voices and bodies, and the **weather in** which they came to us. What **resonances** there are in what we **"identify"** as the Voice"! Yet **this** women's view is not the one that has predominated lo a social order that valorizes the individual.

Still. I **think,** the voice and self are constituted **and** articulated only in **relation** to other "beings" **(which** could include wheat or trees, these beings). Yet **those** links we have with each other **are** constrained or covered **over** by habits of speaking and perception. In poetry, these habits can result In (for one **thing) a** poetry of the observer, by which I mean the poetic voice observing and commenting on **an** external world. I'm more interested in the ***movement*** of the linkages or threads than in the observed/observer, polarized at each "end." If you conceal these threads be**tween** us. setting up and isolating the **poetic** voice as "observer," I believe the resonances are diminished. Certain destructions become possible.

The poetry of the observer **can** be written by **anybody;** all it takes, they say, is **"imagination,** freedom of the' imagination." **But** even given this imagination.**if** the voice of the observer **is *unquestioned* — *the*** ideology it bears, the values and culture it **carries — what** is really being conveyed? It is said that sob-texts are stronger than the surface texts or meaning: one **sub-text** here, I believe, is the dominance of the ***voice-that-speaks over*** **that** which it observes. However lovingly the **description** is accomplished.

The posture of a **univocal** voice is what bothers me as well **in the *poetic image. The*** base of poetry is the power of images, remember that? But it seems the **image** often represses more than it conveys — the expression of one **"sight"** suppresses contradictory or anti-rhythmic others. In this, to me, is the limitation of the lyric form, **and** the triumph of a **social** order that **thrives** by exclusion rather than inclusion. That thrives by not **reflecting** contradictions, not questioning the voice's carrying of ideology, its **authority and privilege.**

But must the desire to **write,** asks the character in the East German writer **Christa** Wolfs novel ***The Accident.*** always be accompanied by destruction?

> . . .**the** intervening writing process, so **talked** about in the affirmative. always intervenes in the **lives of people,** persons who become affected by the writing, who are bound to **feel** observed, pinned down, **categorized,** misjudged, or worse still. betrayed. **always** kept at a **distance,** in **any** case, for the sake of **an appropri**ate formulation. and for that I **know** no other **remedy but** silence, which **transfers** the ill from without to within, which means less consideration for oneself **than** for others, in other words. self-be**trayal again.**

But betrayal of ***what self?*** For a **woman,** who is **often** outside the watchwords (even **the** word 'poet" must **be modified** by 'woman" to include her). the seams of the construction of a self are clear. The women whose work inspires me have been looking at those seams from various angles in their wit-

ing, and maybe it's in this, in looking at the seams, at one's own seams, at the so-&J order we've internalized, out loud in the poem, that can help "remedy" (for there is no "remedy") the destruction.

To convey more than it represses. I think the image must double back on itself, exceed tbe visual, the observed: involving the litanous body, perhaps, and not the visual, or changing the angle or speed of movement Exceed the visual? Perhaps just break through our internal censoring of the visible. Due to the limited area of visual attentiveness we have, thanks to the links between brain/eye/language. From where springs, as well, the control of the voice, giving us that sense of presence Derrida talked about Which is to me simply a repression, a constructing of the self, of watchwords that fail so many of us: women, "minorities" (the word its&sup poses dominance of the speaking voice), and the poor.

What I can't figure out is why so much poetry suffers still from a kind of hysterical failure to see the seams of the construction. Some even return to a formalism (as the editors 'of the recent anthology *Poets* 88. for example, note In their introduction) unseen in SO years or more, where the voice is unquestioned and "the image" comes from the glory of the "centred" imagination. Without admitting openly the singular voice ("the struggle to have our voices heard" as one poet told me) bears the silence of many others. And the alternative is not the silence of the writer. as Christa Wolfs character despairs. To borrow from signs carried by PLWAs (People Living with AIDS) at the Montreal International Conference on AIDS: Silence equals death.

Instead, to write. if we could, consciously, but without betrayal ... without layering a new "self," equally problematic and unquestioned, over the old. To speak of the watchwords which failed is to admit, at least, tbe problem, and to ask as well what kind of world we will have afterward. The imagination is, alas, not pore, but contains a social structure in the speaking voice. Admitting and examining rather than defending the position of observer is critical. So that the poem can go on, and it does: 'To *speak* of *'the watchwords which failed' and the infinitesimal chasm of* hope, *cut into the ventricle."* For beyond tbe watchwords, and their failure (for they must fail), hope lies.

— ERIN MOURE

The real life of letters

Tke *world has* *become so diffuse* *in our* *eyes tkat* *it is impossible for* *a mere book to imitate it*

THE NATURE of the real is always a matter for argument, and it is a pretty good argument for the practice of fiction — probably tbe best possible argument for the practice of fiction.

Robert Kmetsch, our main western writing hero, said that the fiction makes us real. We repeat that lovable saw every chance we get, especially at meetings of writers and critics Kmetsch wants us to start there. not to make of hi remark the summing-up of an argument.

People often quote what appears to be the Author's Intention found early in my novel *Burning Water:* 'speaking together to make up a history, a real historical fiction." That was intended to be advice as to the beginning of a project called the writing and reading of that book.

Of course any serious writing is an attempt to investigate tbe real. Emile Zola was trying to do that, John Dos Passos was trying to do that, and Robert Kmetsch is trying to do that Zola invented realism, based on laboratory science, to do it. Dos Passos imitated the unmediated camera eye to do it When Kroetsch has a bunch of loony Canadian prairie men build a toweling lighthouse made of ice a thousand miles from the nearest ocean, he's after the real.

Now I will tell you who is not after the real. Writers who write books or t&vision shows with the intention of satisfying their audiences are not interested in the real. They are acting out fantasies, their own fantasies of the Hollywood writer's Monte Carlo life and their audience's soap opera afternoon life. The audience is there, waiting to be fooled. They name their children after the people in soap operas and drugstore titilla-

tio" romance paperbacks: Tiffany and Shawn, Jessica and Chad.

Still. television — and all the other information technology in the hands of the uneducated — has shaken the world of the serious writer. Realism, for instance, is now a heroic, doomed adventure, because the world is so diffuse in our eyes that it is impossible for a mere book to imitate it The class structure and antagonisms that gave rise to realism are still there. That world survives. But we can no longer limit a world and try to represent it, to use Henry James's verb.

So what CM we do instead? We can try to make a text rather than trying to rep resent a world. A text is potentially unlimited. There are only 26 letters in the English language, and sometimes same of them are redundant. But they can be combined in what appears to any reasonable mind as an infinite number of structures.

Is this playing around. as opposed to the serious world of Emile Zola? Try to imagine any complex invention that we now seem to rely on — the airplane. the hydroelectric dam. tbe microwave. the kidney dialysis machine — try to imagine our making one of them without the combing of26 letters.

A fiction is made in a similar way. Fiction as a word was made itself, from parts in various European languages. meaning made up. meaning built.

The most real thing in the world is a" English sentence. The hand that signed the paper felled a city. Writers always notice very early in their lives the relationship between the word sentence as found in a written text and the word sentence as found in a criminal court When I used the adjective "serious" in front of the word "writer" earlier, that was what I had in mind. When he commits his words to paper he is committing seriousness, as if he were the judge making her decision.

People should be as serious when they are naming their children. Or building their children.

Some serious readers might wonder about my talking of potential infinity in the building of a text. They will say that we are now being forced to think of the earth as finite, of its resources as endangered by sprawling. wasteful idiots. How can someone talk about potential infinity in a world such as this?

My reply is simple and careful. You need not try to represent a finite world by means of a limited literature. You can look on your 26 letters as the parts of a pattern that can be made in time as large and varied as the universe. It can grow in front of you like a new big bang. But you will prove your care and your seriousness during the application of every additional letter.

Every additional letter.

If you still want to talk about mimesis, here it is. The care that you desire from the mortals on this earth, the steps necessary to keep this planet alive. can be imitated by the writer who knows that she is at the back edge of a potentially limitless structure made of letters. Make a sloppy syllable and it will be in the system for who knows how long. What is the half-life of a bad metaphor?

I know that poorly written fiction will disappear under the midden in time. I know that no one will be reading our drugstore books with the counter-display bosoms on the covers in a hundred years. That is not what I am thinking about I am thinking about the relationship of fiction and the real. I am thinking this: that person who watches soap operas and reads bodice-rippers has already show" a carelessness toward the ecology of words. Can we expect that person to take the Amazonian rain forest seriously?

If you want to write about the Amazonian rain forest to make your point about reality, all right. Just be careful where you are leaving those words, will you?

-GEORGE BOWERING

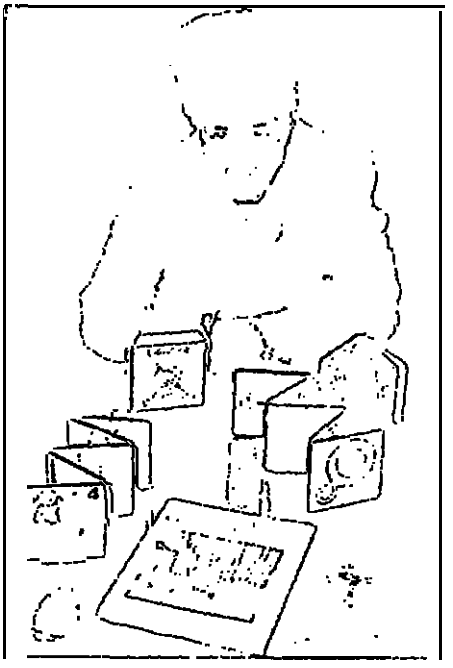
Dayal Kaur Khalsa 1943-1989

When I was a young teenager, and wanted to be a writer, and couldn't wait to leave home and go on the road in search of adventure to write about, my mother said, "There are stories right in your own backyard." "Hah," I said. So I left and had lots of adventures and, 25 years later, the first book I published took place in my childhood backyard. Hah!

DAYAL KAUR KHALSA was 46 when she died last summer after a four-year struggle with cancer. She left a legacy of joy for children, a picture-book world filled with the vivid sights, sounds, smells, and colours of her own childhood territory. Her first storybook, *Tales of a Gambling Grandma*. published in 19%. was an affectionate portrait of a rebellious grandmother and the little girl she protected and advised. Five more books appeared in the next four years. and each in turn was included in "'best" lists and nominated for awards.

Khalsa was born Marcia Schoenfeld in Queens. New York City. Her earliest ambition was to be an artist. Like the parents of the unnamed little girl in *Talcs of a Gambling Grandma*, Dayal's parents both worked. and she spent her days with her grandmother, who became the greatest influence in the child's life. When Dayal was eight, her grandmother — her protector and friend -died. The loss was traumatic; at that point, Khalsa considered, her emotional life was over. She channelled all her energies into observation and learning. She read throughthe local library shelves, subject by subject acquiring a vast knowledge of geography and art history.

She also paid close attention to her surroundings, and her detailed recollections of the social and cultural nores of the 1950s are powerfully evident in her books. A close friend and fellow artist, Yvonne Lammerich. has spoken of her 'phenomenal memory. She remembered the slightest details rom her childhood. Ail her stories are rue, although they are a bit exaggerated. The houses, interiors, and streets



Dayal Kaur Khalsa

are *exactly as they* were in the '50s and '60s. The books on the shelves are the titles Dayal loved, the art on the wails is the same."

After university, Khalsa became a social worker in New York City, -then worked as a copywriter in advertising. Some of her early writing was for literary magazines. She studied art in New York, and although she was attracted. to large-scale abstract painting, Dayal found herself doing small drawings, the work that would eventually illustrate her children's books.

The pictures for her books were always completed before she began writing the story. *My Family Vacation* (1988) captured the kitsch of Florida, then and now. Plastic flamingoes, the orange HoJo roof, the used-car dealerships, and the tacky motel moms are portrayed in all their full-blown splendour. Her drawings could be as witty as her conversation, and she liked to poke fun at revered icons: her cover illustration for *I Want a Dog* (1987) is a send-up of George Seurat's Sunday Afternoon on the Isle of La Grande Jatte," filled with heavenly hounds at rest on a lazy day. "Dayal Kaur Rhalsa obviously remembered what really matters to children," observed Debbie Rogosin, executive director of the Canadian Children's Book Centre. "She had a child's-eye view of what happens in a child's world. Her teats are filled with a warmth that touches both children and adults."

In the mid-19708 Marcia Schoenfeld joined a Sikh ashram and became Dayal Kaur Khalsa. Although she had no children of her own, she tended the babies and young children during many summers spent in a Sikh women's camp in New Mexico. Her understanding of early childhood and her desire to rediscover her own family led her at last to writing and painting for children, and the list of Khalsa titles, once begun, grew quickly. A child Insomniac dazzled readers in Sleepers (1988), Mrs. Pelligrino introduced pizza to the neighbourhood in *How Pizza Came* to *Our Town* (1989). and in *Julian* (1989) a naughty dog became a hero.

To the many admirers of her work, Rhalsa was a mysterious, gentle, white turbaned figure, an author about whom they knew little; to those who knew her well Dayal was a humorous, contemplative, introspective person who sought the positive influences in life. She loved country music, rock 'n roil, Italian food, and cowboys. "Dayal was inspired by the American cowboy's free spirit and his style," says Lammerich. In the spring of 1990 Dayal Kaur Khalsa's *Cowboy Dreams* will be published (by Tundra, publisher of all her books) as a fitting tribute to Khalsa's passion for the joy of childhood.

During the final months of Dayal's illness, a friend read to her nightly from her favourite book, *The Wind in tka Willows*. "She identified with Toad," recalls Lammerich. "He's the rebel who does what he wants, but at the same time he's the sweet, kind one who helps others, and he's honest: Dayal's perfect match."

— LINDA GRANFIELD

Write, writ, rote

Why memory work wasn't all bad

By I. M. Owen

ARCHAIC FORMS: The *Tories doth protest too much. "Alas," be quoths. She wouldst not. 0 death, wherefore art thy sting? Anyone* who wants to use an archaic form. whether for elevated or (as is more usual) for humorous effect. really ought to know what the form stands for. If you have read Shakespeare or Milton, or the 1611 Bible, it seems impossible not to know; yet the examples above are slightly adapted from errors I have seen committed, mostly by well-educated professional writers, over the last few months. So perhaps it's necessary to give some guidance.

There have been three big changes in the conjugation of English verbs. We have dropped tbe second-person singular noon *thou* and the verb forms that went with it: me now use the plural forms (*you . . .*) as singular. The old present and past second-person singular forms of the verb *lo be* were *thou art* and *thou wert or wast,* and in other verbs the second-person forms regularly ended in *-est or -st: thou goest, thou hast, thou hodst.* In *the* third-person present (not in the past) tense the ending was *-eth or -th,* which we have now changed to *-s.* Shakespeare wrote in the transitional period, and could stitch from one form to the other according to the metre: "It *blesseth him* that *gives* and him that *takes." Quoth* is a curious case; it's the third-person singular form of the present tease of the Old English verb *cwethan,* "to say," which otherwise disappeared early from the language, sod somewhere along the line *quoth moved from the* present to tbe past tense. He *quoth* means "he said," and there's no such form as *quoths.*

As for *wherefore,* it means "why," not 'where." I can't count how many times I've seen one of the most familiar lines from *Romeo and Juliet* misquoted by the insertion of an extra comma — 0 *Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?* — by people who clearly think Juliet's leaning over the balcony wondering where the hell he's got to. In fact, of course, she's saying *wherefore art thou Romeo? — asking why* he had to be R Montagu, Esq., and thus her hereditary enemy.

To revert to the confusion over the old verb forms, perhaps it's especially rife now because people now in their 40s and younger entered school at a time when the educators had decided that memorizing verse was "rote learning" and therefore by definition evil. People in my generation had to memorize regularly, and once you've done that for a dozen years or so it's pretty well impossible to get these thii wrong. Perhaps thii is also why almost all hosts of CBC music programs give Juliet three syllables instead of two -Julie Et — which makes it impossible to scan any line of the play in which the name occurs: "It is the east, and Julie Et is the sun." That is quite off the point of the written word, bat I've wanted to get it off my chest for a long time.

AWKWARD CONSTRUCTIONS: Here's a good example of the grammatically correct sentence that's abominable to read, from the catalogue of last September's Festival of Festivals in Toronto: *Since the death of Mizoguchi and Ozu, tbe aging of Kurosawa, the relative inactivity of Oshima, and with the exception of Itami, Japanese cinema* seems *to have lost its voice.* You'd think it would have been easier to write, for instance: *Since Mizoguchi and Ozu died and Kurosawa has grown older, while Oshima has been less active,* Japanese cinema seems *to have lost its* voice — *except for the work of Itami.* That's a little shorter, and a great deal easier to read.

ADVERBIAL POSITION: I often change other people's sentences by moving their adverbs and adverbial phrases to better positions. Luckily they don't often notice, so that I'm not called on to explain. Many times I do it by brute instinct rather than the light of reason; but I'm still hoping to formulate a principle and report on it here. In the meantime, I must pass on to you immediately this specimen from "Letter from Queen's Park," a communication from my representative in the Ontario legislature., "I was pleased," he says, "to participate in the Reading Tent set up by Frontier College to promote literacy *at Queen's Park on Canada Day."* Well, it's a start, but it might be still better if our legislators could be literate every day of the year.

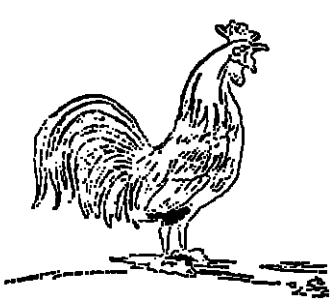
RUN-ON SENTENCES: 'I don't know what these are. Morton S. Rapp, a frequent writer of letters to the *Globe and Mail,* lately rebuked John Allemang. the "Word Play' columnist, for writing: Being *notoriously poor linguists, our tongues cannot always carry out what our good will intends, but we try.* Dr. Rapp says: "The quotation gives us a dangling participle and a run-on sentence, all in one. Not bad for a day's work!" Certainly being is a dangling participle. unless Allemang means that our tongues are poor linguists. But what's a run-on sentence, and, if this is one, why is it bad? Are we not allowed to tack new clauses onto sentences by means of conjunctions such as *and* and *but*? It seems very limiting. I seek instruction: can anyone enlighten me? ❑

BRIEF REVIEWS

BIOGRAPHY

I AM writing the best poems of my life: they will make my name," Sylvia Plath confided in a letter to her mother in October. 1932. She was living in Devon. England. with her two young children: her marriage to the British poet Ted Hughes had fallen apart; she was bringing forth (at the astonishing rate of one a day) the *Ariel* poems that would, indeed. secure her place in 20th-century English literature. And a few months later, at the age of 30. she would commit suicide.

Anne Stevenson draws on private correspondence, Plath's journal entries, and a wealth of anecdote from friends and acquaintances to shape Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath (Houghton Mifflin (Viking/Penguin), 448 pages, $27.95 cloth). Plath is a fascinating subject, a woman who laboured to project the image of "a nice, bright_ gifted American girl" even while she wrote of the terrifying rage that lay underneath it ("I have a violence in me that is hot as death-blood"). Stevenson writes well. and her insights into Plath's work are immensely valuable. But in trying lo redress what she terms "misunderstandings" about the poet's life — chiefly the amount of blame for her breakdown directed at Hughes — Stevenson produces an account that is itself strikingly one-sided. She acknowledges, for instance, that Plath's later journals are unfortunately "no longer available": she refrains from mentioning that Ted Hughes destroyed them. Though compelling and vivid, *Bitter Fame* proves *the* impossibility of giving au 'objective" summary of a life, especially one as fraught with controversy as Plath's. -B.C.



FICTION

THOUGH One's Company (Mosaic. 200 pages, $24.95 cloth, $12.95 paper) is Gerald Lynch's first collection of short fiction, it is by no means the work of au inexperienced writer. The stories, all set in Sarnia, Ontario, are original, varied, and delightful. Some include the same characters, but these links are loose enough to make the book an aesthetic whole without turning it into a novel *manqué*. Underlying the occasionally bleak surface is a good-natured acceptance of misery as the human condition and au irrepressible sense of fun. The faint aroma of Larry, Darryl, and Darryl adds a layer of hilarity (and pathos) to "The Lumbs," although the story's didactic frame should disappear. The two stories about Wanda and Ronald Stuart, funny and sad at the same time, show insight into human nature confined within the bonds of holy matrimony — and insight born of those bonds. "Spice Cake," wrenchingly pathetic, is at the same time unforgettably comic. Laughing in the face of death is not new, hut Gerald Lynch manages to make it seem so.

-L B.

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ANGER and violence are never far below the surface in the novels and short stories of the American writer Russell Banks, and it takes little provocation to bring them to the surface. In Affliction (McClelland & Stewart. 355 pages, 326.95 cloth), Banks's sixth novel, the narrator, Rolfe Whitehouse. traces the first few weeks of deer-hunting season in rural New Hampshire during which his brother, Wade, a bitter middie-aged alcoholic and divorced father, is finally pushed over tbe line to acts of violence and vengeance he cannot control.

Wade has become a fugitive because of his actions (not specified until near the end of the book) and Rolfe is obsessed with learning how the violence that lurks in the Whitehouse family surfaced in him as it had in their father, another hitter alcoholic who beat them as children and still keeps them in a psychological stranglehold even after his death.

Through Rolfe, Banks presents Wade to us as a strange ly familiar creature: proud of bis skills and embarrassed by his faults, not unaware of his destiny but powerless to stop it. Wade is both a convincing social portrait and a mirror of our secret fears. *Affliction* is a hauntingly beautiful novel that probes with sensitivity and surprising humour the ways in which people inflict pain on themselves and those they love without ever meaning to. — N. S.

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A VARIATION on the theme of oral history, The Parcel from Chicken Street and Other Stories (DC Books, 187 pages, $14.95 paper) was compiled by Fran Ponomarenko from anecdotes and tales told to her by her friend Ludmilla Bereshko. 'and at times those of other people." Bereshko was born in the Ukraine, "either in 1905 or 1909." endured "the years of fear and terror" there and was placed in an Austrian forced-labour camp during the German occupation. She was never able to learn what became of her husband and sons, and after the war she came to Canada and married again, "though not legally." Her stories are a mixture of strong emotions and grim realism. with a dash of high comedy thrown in. Though each tends to revolve around various crises in the Ukrainian immigrant community living on "Chicken Street" in Montreal, there is a larger undercurrent to them as well: the fearsome history that the older immigrants share and from which they are determined to protect their offspring. often with comic results. These are also stories about survival, for, as Bereshko 'herself often said, "Life is bitter, but one has to live." -P.B.

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ANN DIAMOND is not a prolific short-story writer: her first collection, Snakebite (Cormorant, 150 pages,. $10.95 paper), includes 10 stories written over the last decade. If this lengthy period of crystallization has not produced a full array of eponymous gems, it has at least polished them well. Two — tbe title story and the final one, "Jupiter's Transit" — are definitely worth the wait

Diamond's stories all feature women protagonists, and most are set in Montreal. She has a gift for linking the banal and the extraordinary in convincing ways: a child's dreams overlap observations of her mother's prejudice, a lesbian who plans to throw her coffee cup at the Pope faints and vomits instead, and then is *given a* plastic rose by an onlooker. In tone, Diamond is more a realist than a magic realist, but her mastery of the basic skill of short story construction — knowing what to leave out — allows her to make the jump between her generally wry, earthy characters to extraordinary outcomes and epiphanies. She also seizes some of the telling paradoxes of contemporary life: New Age capitalists, for example, peddling miracle herbal diets, or Anglos trying

to define themselves in militantly francophone Quebec.

The limits she still faces are a certain flatness of style — too many of the stories sound alike. although their characters and atmospheres differ — and a rather restricted range of heroines. Except for the five-year-old in "Snakebite." the women are uniformly white and in young middle age. Perhaps working on a broader spectrum of humanity should be on Diamond's next 10-year plan. — J. 0.

THE PAST

WHO AM I? is the underlying question asked by many of the immigrants or children of immigrants heard from in Worlds Apart: New Immigrant Voices (Cormorant, 430 pages, $14.95 paper), Milly Charon's sequel to her popular *Between Two Worlds,* an oral history of the immigrant experience.

Charon, herself the daughter of Hungarian-Czechoslovakian immigrants, presents interviews with a dozen other immigrants, most now living in Montreal. as well as a few short stories, personal reminiscences, and even a poem on the subject of displacement.

Not surprisingly, despite most of the participants' repeated declarations of love for Canada, sincerely felt and expressed, there is a certain wistful ambivalence behind their stories.

Most of the reminiscences concentrate more on the world left behind, often under painful circumstances, yet there is *a nagging* feeling that no matter how dreadful life was in Europe during the war, in Ethiopia or Morocco or Turkey as a persecuted. minority, or China during the Cultural Revolution, something vital to the immigrant's personal identity has been sacrificed. In this book Charon helps to rescue and preserve that identity with tact and sensitivity. — N. S.

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THE TITLE of Stephen Home's Ghost Camps (NeWest, 276 pages, $24.95 cloth, S14.96 paper) comes from the name given Assiniboine lodges abandoned by all but the dead after a smallpox plague. but the book extends the idea to include hvo often voiceless fringes of Canada, the north and the rural west. Home's purpose in these 17 essays is clear: to make his readers see that a solid sense of Canadian culture arises out of understanding what is usually seen as peripheral to Canadian life, past and present In four passionate but clear-headed essays about the history of native Canadians, alone and in relation to Europeans, he destroys rosy notions about both races. "Those who trade the painful troth of their past for the romantic myth that sustains present stereotypes," he warns, "soon find they have no past at' all — and that is the sure path to cultural oblivion." In live essays about escape from death by "Earth, Air, Fire and Water," and six about builders and preservers of their home land, he demonstrates his COD viction that 'citizens are the stuff of their own history." Perhaps it is vain to hope that *Ghost Camps* could make a dii ference in the way we see ourselves, but that hope is hard to suppress. — L. B.

POETRY

BRUCE WHITEMAN's extended prose poem — of which Book I appeared in 1984 — extends to The Invisible World Is in Decline (Books II to IV) (Coach House Press, 52 pages, $12.95 paper). He writes in repeated declarative sentences in a style that implodes academic essay and erotic apostrophe. His phrasing ("That language could be localized in the frontal lobe of the left hemisphere of the brain seemed to hi an idea that was both materialistic and insane") recalls Christopher Dewdney, who not coincidentally edited the book.

This book imagines language as "the invisible world." Language is also a metaphor for Iii. Attempts are made to interrelate the problematic body, the relentless mind, the too-soon-relenting heart. Sex recurs, but cannot overcome language (a woman who imagines she is giving the gift of fellatio is according to the narrator only "building an antilexical explosion in him").. There are undoubtedly brilliant passages in here, but not much of a sense of humour. There are undoubtedly too many arcane words, and too many loads of learning on the slender back of this particular poetry camel. Perhaps self-referential and cerebral poetry is a dead end

Nature comes and goes. Isidore Ducasse makes an appearance in one section, although he was more fun in *Les Chants de Maldoror. The series does* intensify towards the end of the last book. Perhaps, like Ducasse (Lautréamont) Whiteman will find his true readers in a later em. Perhaps I missed the point. Perhaps it was invisible. — J. O.

RERUNS

IN Running to Paradise (Little. Brown. 151 pages, $9.95 paper), *a reissue* of a book that first appeared 25 years ago, Kildare Dobbs compresses his life into; a sequence of vignettes that are often tinny in the sharp but comfortable way of illustrations in an old-fashioned children's book. He takes us from the Ireland of his youth to the Royal Navy of 1942, to "a hot day on the river Cam" in the summer of 1946, to Africa, and then to Canada. Each episode is animated by a person or an event, and each is presented in a bold, impressionistic, and extremely readable style. In the early part of the book, where Dobbs is obviously struggling with nostalgia, there is a touch of that horrible thing the "English humorist"; but by the time he gets to the Second World War the toffee and watercolour side of his prose has disappeared. He describes a storm at sea, a man being flogged in Africa, the peculiar shame of being an imperial Big Man, and then the quite different shame of being a salesman. At the close — perhaps because these brief vignettes have ended up encapsulating a life — sadness creeps in. Dobbs actually says very little about himself. yet it is remarkable how vivid — and ultimately how melancholy — this short book is. — B. S.

SCIENCE

IF YOU look in the mirror and bite on a Lifesaver in the dark, you'll see flashes of blue-green light. This is the energy released by cleaving molecular bonds in the sugar crystal. Wintergreen works best

In 40 per cent of us, eating asparagus generates especially pungent urine, but only 10 per cent of us can smell it

When you see snow on your television, some of the white flecks are the signature of photons, particles of light that have been flitting through the universe since the Big Bang. about 15 billion years ago.

Jay Ingram, host of CBC's 'Quirks and Quarks," pack-

ages science like candy. The Science of Everyday Life (Viking, 210 pages, $19.95 cloth) is a bargain pack of 24 zesty, tangy, wonderfully readable short essays on the oddities beneath the bland surface of the commonplace.

Most science is so awfully written that laymen turn away, repelled not by the sub ject but the form, but Ingram is a master. Another morsel:

Midges mate in mid-air. While they couple at one end, the female of some species *enjoys a grisly* lunch at the other. She inserts her proboscis in the male's head and socks him dry as they fall to the ground. The male is evidently too randy to notice.

This is everyday life? — L J.

SOCIETY

JAPAN has enjoyed tittering. even adulatory, media coverage during the last decade, especially in the business press. In Japan. The Blighted Blossom (New Star Books,

300 pages. $25.95 cloth), Roy Thomas argues that Japan's astounding success is part myth, part illusion.

One myth_ is that Japanese workers are loyal drones, happily committing their entire working lives to the good of benevolent corporations. In fact, Thomas insists. mahy are trapped by an intricate system of social controls.

Part of the illusion is that while Japan is wealthy and powerful, most of its citizens do not share in that affluence. *Since* 1948. Japan has been virtually a one-party state ruled by a business clique. Much of the wealth gets sucked up in hugely inflated values of real estate and food. Housing is generally dreadful and Japanese pay about eight times as much as we do for rice. For all the fabled Oriental veneration of age, Thomas argues that the old are treated cruelly in Japan. So arc prisoners, dissidents, and the mentally ill.

Thomas is almost unrelentingly critical. The book amounts to a well-rosaarched list of shortcomings, informative but discouraging. — L J.

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PITY the poor tomato. Bred for durability (not necessarily tastiness), gassed so that it will ripen on schedule. the tomato is emblematic of what is wrong with the food industry, according to From Land to Mouth: Understanding The Food *System (NC* Press, 160 pages, $14.95 paper). Brewster Kneen argoes that agribusiness is not only wasteful and ecologically harmful; because profit is its priority, food 'has value only insofar as it can be traded in and speculated on."

This book is really a critique of the logic of a market economy, and of our culture's reliance on technology to solve all its problems. Hence we have seed companies that develop hybrid plants able to resist the pesticides that they also manufacture; irradiation of food (what Kneen calls "a technology in need of a market"); and research to produce a tomato that doesn't wrinkle and thus has a longer shelf-life.

There's plenty of food for serious thought here. although some of Kneen's alternatives to the present system seem too idealistic — or too drastic — to be practical.

-B.C.

These brief reviews were prepared** by Pat Barclay, Laurel Boons, Barbara Carey, **Lawrence Jackson,** John **Oughton, Norman Sigurdson,** and **Bruce Serafin.

Tales from the Caboose

Let me put it this way. Canada is not so muck a country as a holding tank filled with the disgruntled progeny of defeated peoples'

By Leon Rooke

SOLOMON GURSKY WAS HERE
by Mordecai Richler
Viking/Penguin, 559 pages, $26.95 cloth
(ISBN 0 670 82526 3)

SOLOMON GURSKY was here. Like Kilroy was. Like Joey Hersh, St Urbain Street's avenging horseman who tailed the Nazi Joseph Mengele through the South American wilds, was here. Like a new history of the tribe of Judah on these shores is here. Like five pounds of manuscript, well over 200.000 words, are here, and you'd best have your notepads at the ready. This book, entertaining though it is. summons you to research it as you read it.

The novel tracks four generations of empire-building Gurskys, flagging down over a hundred minor and major characters in the process, as it leapfrogs from the present to that time when the Inuit presided over the far north and Sir John Franklin's 1845 search for a Northwest Passage ended with hi ships at freeze in Arctic ice.

Enter Ephraim Gursky, sole survivor of the expedition.

First Canadian Jew.

*Dandelions . . . Dig us out here and rid ing the wind we take root there."

"Who will sing our songs, Moishe?" Richler has Gitel Kugglemass ask, winding down from her latest shoplifting spree at Holt Renfrew. "Does anybody care about our stories now?"

Fresh from Newgate prison and blessed with a wondrously original criminal mind, the indomitable Ephraim is the first of countless characters in this novel to take up the Ha braic cudgels in one way or another, by fair means and fool.

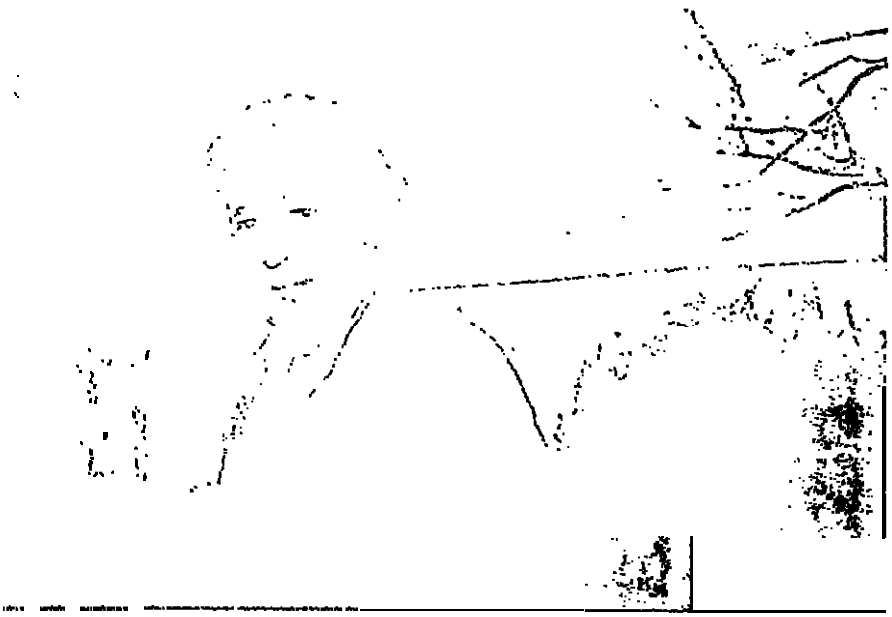
Recall, as Richler would have us do, the words the Lord said unto his prophet, Jeremiah: "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn ... Behold, the day comes, saith the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man."

Ephraim wastes no time in getting down to it:

. . . When the first evening star appeared they saw the little dark men.

beating on skin drums, parading their women before them, to the entry tunnel of Epbraim's igloo. Ephraim appeared, wearing a black silk top-hat and hinged white shawl with vertical black stripes. Then the little men stepped forward one by one. thrusting their women before them. extolling their merits in an animated manner. Oblivious of the cold, a young woman raised her sealskin parka and jiggled her bare breasts. .. Finally Ephraim pointed at one, nodded at another, and they quickly scrambled into his igloo.

Epbraim, Shaman of the North, has



PHOTOGRAPH: LORENS EW

Mordecai Richler

founded himself a church, and white settlers witnessing the above spectacle from their snowed-in perch atop the Crosby Hotel have this to say:

'Well. I'll be damned."

"Whatever them Millenarians is it's sure as shit a lot more fun than what we've got."

One hundred years later. Inuit arc still carrying the name — Corsky, Gurskee, Gurski, Girsky, Goorsky — as they entertain visiting British royalty with their throat singing ("rather like dry gargling"), and Ephraim and his descendants have altered forever the Canadian mosaic. These descendants, whose stories are interwoven throughout the novel, come chiefly in the form of three brothers, Bernard, Solomon, and Morrie, who vie for control of the massively wealthy liquor company created out of their bootlegger pmfits during Prohibition.

> Let me put it this way. Canada is not so much a country as a holding tank filled with the disgruntled progeny of defeated peoples. French-Canadians consumed by self-pity: the descendants of Scots who fled the Duke of Cumberland; Irish the famine; and Jews the Black Hundreds. Then there are the peasants from the Ukraine, Poland. Italy and Greece, convenient to grow wheat and dig out the ore and swing the hammers and run the restaurants. but otherwise to be kept in their place. Most of us are still huddled tight lo the border, looking into the candy store window, scared by the Americans on one side and the bush on the other. And now that we are here, prospering, we do our damn best to exclude more ill-bred newcomers, because they remind us of our own mean origins in the draper's shop in Inverness or tbe *shtetl or the* bog.

Is the Department of Immigration listening? Readers of *Cocksure,* of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz,* of the masterful St. *Urbain's Horseman,* impatient with this writer's absence from the novel scene since the 1983 *Joshua Then and Now,* need not worry that the caustic satirist, the iconoclastic diviner, the storyteller as social critic, as moralist with a skeet-shooter's eye, here in this, his most Canadian novel, has lost either edge or alp.

Nor. for that matter, has he abandoned his bred-in-the-bone compulsion for irreverent character portrayals that discomfit some in the Jewish community or bestir discussions of anti-Semitism, as happened with *Duddy Kravitz* and other of this writer's works. Francophones — and, understandably, some feminists, perhaps homosexuals, certainly some westerners, and Anglo-Montrealers — may feel the occasional shot of ire as well.

> Lewis and Clarke, Frémont hoo ha. my grandpappy Ephraim was right up there with them ... Westmount *oy vey.* It doesn't fool me that they get into a skirt once a year for the St Andrew's Ball, pretending they come from quality and that they didn't get the shit kicked out of them at Culloden.
>
> And the Frenchies? The higher one of them holds his perfumed nose in the air the more likely it is that *his* great-grandma was a *fille de roi, a* little whore shipped over by the king so that she could marry a soldier and have twenty-five kids before she was forty To this day you know what a French-Canadian family gives the daughter for a wedding present she's only sixteen years old? Hold on to your hat, fella. They send her to a dentist to have all her teeth yanked out.. . Well the Gurskys didn't come here steerage fleeing from some drecky *shtetl. My* family was established here before Canada even became a country.
>
> ... Every family has a cross to bear, a skeleton in the closet, that's life. Eleanor Roosevelt, she's been to our house, you know. Couldn't her father afford a dentist? Her teeth. *Oy vey.* Her people were in the opium trade in China, but you wouldn't read that in *The Ladies' Home Journal or* wherever she wrote "My Day." Joe Kennedy was a whoremaster from day one and he swindled Gloria Swanson. but they never sang about that in Camelot. Take King George V even, an OBE was too good for me. One of his sons was a hopeless drunk, another was a bum-fucker and a drug addict, and 'that dumbbell the Duke of Windsor he threw in tbe sponge for a tart. You want the Duke and Duchess for a charity ball, you rent them like a tux from Tip-Top.

This is that coarse, brusque; dynamo Bernard talking, head man at McTavish Distillers, as he staves off heart attacks, contends with the manipulations of his viper son ("that *putz,* Lionel') — as he grapples with and maligns his dead brother Solomon (Ephraim's chosen one), and combats mysterious company takeover attempts from Zurich.

"I'm going to die, Miss 0," he says to his secretary, Miss O'Brien.

'Would you like me to do your weenie now?"

Or consider the world from the point of view of the novel's one honest man, Bert Smith, who, as a young liquor agent for Ottawa, refused to be bought off by the booze-running Gurskys and spends the balance of his life yearning for the scale of justice to right itself.

> He did not have to worry about Jaws. on the street that he lived on in lowest Westmount, just this side of the railroad tracks. The street of peeling rooming houses with rotting, lopsided porches was altogether too poor for that lot Even so, there was no shortage of trash. Noisy Greek immigrants cultivating tomato plants in rockhard back yards. Swarthy, fart-filled Italians. Forlorn French-Canadian factory girls spilling over $4.99 plastic chairs fmm Miracle Mart, yammering to each other. West Indians with that arrogant stride that made you want to belt them one. Polacks, Portuguese. "Happily . . . we will not live long enough to see Canada become a mongrel&d country."

Is Immigration listening?

"The concern, deeply felt," Richler writes, wickedly concluding this passage by skewering western preoccupations with mongrelized hordes, "came naturally to Smith, an Anglo-Saxon westerner, born and bred." This being a statement that lines up with Solomon's earlier observation: "This country had no tap root. Instead there's Bert Smith. The very essence."

"If Canada had a soul," muses another character, ". . . then it *wasn't to* be found in Batoche or the Plains of Abraham or Fort Walsh or Charlottetown or Parliament Hill, but in the Caboose and thousands of bars like it that knit the country together from Peggy's Cove, *Nova* Scotia, to tbe far side of Vancouver Island." Richler's fiction has always shown the author's fondness for boozy personalities, and in Solomon *Gursky* he has gone to the source in composing a narrative about the family that created a sprawling financial empire out of its bootlegger origins. How much tbe novel borrows from the famous Bronfman family, which in real life is often reputed to have done the same, will be a topic up for grabs, though there arc some surface similarities — the Russian origins, early hotel and real estate invest-

ments in the west, energetic marketing of spirits during Prohibition years, squabbles within the family for control, to name just a few.

Hanging out in the Caboose, when he isn't in Yellowknife or such polar outposts as Tulugaqtitut (Ephraim's old stomping ground), or in England or Montreal, or dug in at his favoured cabin overlooking Lake Memphremagog in the Eastern Townships — wherever his obsession takes him — is Moses Berger, the alcoholic intellectual whom Richler has chosen to hold together this strong-out novel.

In chapter two, we meet Moses, the son of an arrogant, failed Montreal poet who had sold his soul to Bernard Gursky. Moses *is searching his* cabin for his favourite fishing fly and dwelling on the Gurskys, and particularly on Solomon, whose exploits Moses has been tracking since the age of 11. when his father took him to a Gursky child's birthday party. By novel's end. when Moses finds his fly, he has illuminated much of the mystery surrounding Solomon's life and raised the curtain on a man not content to live just once. 'Living twice, maybe three times, is the best revenge," goes the book's epigraph, and it is this idea that gives Richler some of his best fun.

In 1956, in Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship, in Blackwell's bookshop, Moses has this exchange with a man named Sir Hyman Kaplansky (in ap propriating this name Richler is likely espressing an appreciation for Leonard Q. Ross's *The Education of *H*y*m *a *n *K*a*p*l*a *n*):

"I road your essay on Yiddish etymology in *Encounter*," he [Sir Hyman] said. "Excellent, I thought"

"Thank you."

So I hope you won't take offence if I point out a small error. I fear you missed the mark on the origin of 'like.' Mind you, so did Partridge, who cites 1935 as the year of its first usage in English. As I'm sure you know, Mencken mentioned it as early as 1919 in his *American Language*."

"I thought I said as much."

"Yes. But you suggest the word was introduced by German Jews as a pejorative term for immigrants from the *shtetl*, because so many of their names ended in 'sky' or 'ski.' Hence 'ky-kis' and then 'kikes.' Actually the word originated on Ellis Island, where illiterates were asked to sign entry forms with an 'X.' This the Jews refused to do. making a circle or a 'kikel' instead, and soon the inspector took to calling them 'kikelehs' and finally 'kikes.'"

The key reference here is the Mencken one, for we have previously seen Solomon exchanging witticisms, and being photographed, with Mencken; Sir Hyman, who comes with his own ancestry, has looped over hi arm Solomon's old malacca cane. Is Sir Hyman then Solomon in disguise, having found his revenge? Is his the mysterious Zurich interest out to take over McTavish? The alert reader will tumble to this, though Richler plays out the suing. Over the three quarters of the novel yet to come, Richler suggests a good deal about Sir Hyman, much of it in a playful vein not to be taken too seriously — Who made the last call to Marilyn? Who erased the 16 minutes in Nixon's Watergate tape? — but by the end Sir Hyman's works are to be seen in much the same way we viewed those of *St. Urbain's* Joey Hersh, the Avenging Horseman. The idea, though it is not dramatically rendered to the extent one might wish, imparts a new strength to the narrative of *Solomon Gursky Was Here* and elevates the novel's worth another notch or hvo. Sir Hyman, we learn. se crety provided an air force for the newly proclaimed state of Israel. Near the close of the novel. living yet another time (his fourth incarnation, by my count). Solomon, now in his 80s, is funding and organizing the raid on Entebbe to free a planeload of Israeli hostages hijacked by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

The bootlegger has come a long way, and altogether atoned for what was unsavoury in his past — though a certain integrity, and loyalty to his people, was ingrained at the start. While Bernard and his sleazy sidekick, Harvey Schwartz ("who never met a rich man he didn't like"). were addii new labels to McTavish booze, Solomon had a cot in his office and his ear to the short wave. As Hitler strode over Europe, Solomon was petitioning Ottawa on behalf of the Jews and buying land in the Laurentians where the refugees might settle. "— Unsavory, shifty-eyed little strangers," in the opinion of Bernard. 'What are we buying?"

"Kikes," Solomon replies.

There you have it: Richler as offender and defender of the faith. Richler staking out new territory, but not yet stabling the reliable horse. It's good to have him back. ❑

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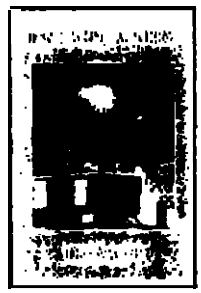

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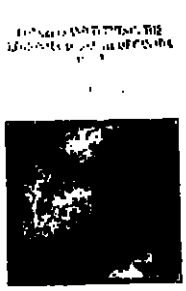

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Waiting for a sign

By Lorna Crozier

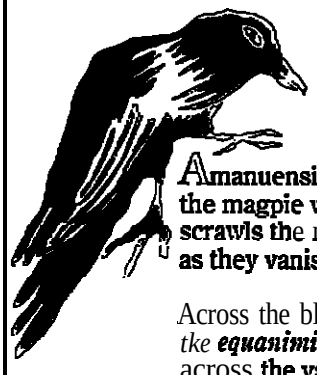
When I met you it was as if
I was living in a house by the sea.
Waves sprayed the windows,
slapped the wooden steps.
Yet I opened tbe door
and a white horse stood there.
He walked through the rooms,
swinging his head from side to side,
his hooves leaving half moons
of sand on the floor.

Make what you will of this. This was
the most natural thing I've ever done,
opening the door, moving aside
for the horse to come in.

Not that you were he. He was simply
a horse, nothing more,
tbe gentle kind that pulls a wagon
or drags seaweed from tbe shore,
ankles feathered, great hooves wide as platters.

He wasn't you,
that didn't matter. He looked at me
and we knew each other. That night
I wanted to live. I wanted
to live in a house where the door
swings on hinges smooth as the sea
and a white horse stands,
waiting for a sign.

Come in, I said,
and that was the start of it,
the horse, the light, the electric air.
Somewhere you were walking toward me,
the door to my Iii swinging open,
the sea, the sea and its riderless horse
waiting to come in.



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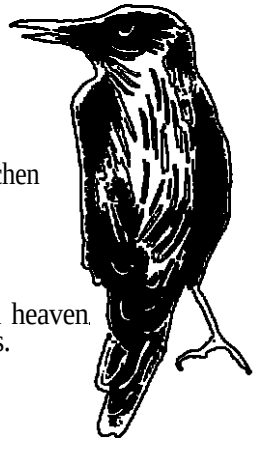

Amanuensis of the gods,
the magpie with its long tail
scrawls the messages they want to leave
as they vanish from the world.

Across the blue of flax it writes
tke equanimity of bones,
across the yard, between house and barn,
the optic ocean. Scholars from the university,
rabbis and monks arrive with heavy tomes
of explication, computer codes and charts.
As they set up their tents underneath
the power lines the magpie drags its tail,
interstices of sorrow. This must be
one of the greater wds,
they all agree, he is so cryptic.

In heaven hi wife the sparrow
walks across her breadboard
on tiny feet. In the flow
her tracks say *custard,*
biscuit, goat's milk. The god,
who'd rather spend time in the kitchen
than on his parapet of clouds
thinks this is a grocery list
she left for him. He sends
a seraph to find each item,
though he knows there's nothing in heaven
with a cloven hoof or mad gold eyes.

Tomorrow, he thinks, I'll tell
Magpie these words.
They can fill a head with wonder.
So full of import and such sweet intent,
a whole life unfolding
in the sounds they make.

Take the first word
custard.

Wbo baked it?
he must ask his wife.
Who ate it?
Was it good?

Metamorphosis

In that city half the people turned into typewriters
and the other half into typists. No one had a choice,
you just woke up and there you were, one or the other.
The ones who underwent the most radical transformation
(the typewiters, of course) went to their beds
with the others as companions. sweet nurses of keyboards.
of the double space, of margins and tabs. Heads on pillows.
the typewiters who had lost the art of speaking,
opened their mouths and curled back their lips
like a dog just before he bites. The typists
struck the keys of teeth, their fingers following
a pattern the mouths seemed to dictate in a secret
language that spoke only to the typists' hands.
0 what stories those typewriters had to tell!
What alphabets of misery rose from the bowels,
what veins of laughter, what dictionaries of sorrow
spilled from the wombs, the scrotums, what tenderness
the eyes had to sing. Even the youngest typewriter
on earth only a few days, had so much tenderness to tell
the typists could get no sleep. Faithful to the end,
fingers worn, one by one they all dropped dead
from exhaustion. no one left but the typewriters
lying still and mute in their beds. Mouths hanging
open, they dreamed commas, exclamation points, apostrophes,
they dreamed enough quotation marks
to surround every word
ever said.

Dreaming death

He tells my mother
last night he dreamed of dying.
Did you meet anyone you know? she asks.
No, he said. He only made it halfway there.

She is trying not to hold him
back, she unwinds from his hands,
turning her ring three times as she leaves
his mom. as if a charm will let him go,
transform the man she knows into a bii
making its way by stars
or a salmon that knows
in its fine articulation of bones
where the stream will lead.

Poor human flesh,
so lost and wandering. Halfway there
a bird will push its small heart
through a cloudy sky, only the Dog Star
breaking through. Impatient, my father
tries to remember what his flesh
must know, the ancient map of stars,
tongues of water speaking
the gravel of his spawning bed.

Mother, knowing he is gone
from the place her body made for him,
wishes she could dream a man
of fins and feathers.
Alone in their double bed,
asleep under stars, she tams
and turns her ring.

Stations of snow

Before the railways were built, what took the place of stations in people's dreams?
-John Berger

Sunday morning, seven a.m. Already
there are tracks in the snow.
a calligraphy of cats
traced in the alley. Their blue
ideograms read like a Chinese text,
up and down. 'With a small hroom
I sweep the windshield.
I am driving to the station,
meeting a train.

On the platform I want my mother to be there,
as she was. standing with two loaves of bread
in a brown bag, a suitcase with a broken lock
at her feet. I want her to have come
from a different country, to have crossed
all thls snow. the train pulling her further
into winter and another time.

At the place where she is going
a cat walks across the yard,
placing its hack paws precisely
where the front have been.
A man who could be my *father*
sweeps the steps with an old curling broom,
his name printed on the handle.

By the time he has finished,
the top step is filled with snow.
He sweeps and sweeps
for he knows my mother has no boots.
When she arrives she'll be wearing
a velvet hat, and on her feet
her wedding shoes.

Only remotely human

— Phyllis Webb

The caw of a crow and one horse
neighing. Beyond the row of pines
the sound of a truck
turning distance
into something you can hear.

A thirteen-striped ground squirrel
moves low to the earth. the meadow's
little monk, illuminator
of grassy texts. Now I am
neither man nor woman, only
another sound the wind picks up
on its journey to the sea.
Iphigenia, waiting.

The crow calls its shadow
from the trees as it sails past
Inside each blade of grass,
inside each word. I can hear
one heart beating.

Windows

Today we clean the windows for Caroline
though she'll never know, lying in

her hospital bed, small, wizened child
of forty-seven: ancient, embryonic.

This morning the light was so brilliant
(water or air?) it floated the house. Almost

too much to hold in the eye. (Caroline's eyes —
drugged, rolled back, as if

she looked inside, saw the mad
cells growing.) In this morning's liiht

anything could have happened,
proclaimed itself: an Angel of Death

or Mercy. A fox-priest A thunderbird
with lightning in its beak. Only

the neighbour's cat, mewing on the steps,
wanting to be fed, his orange fur

a planet the sir turns around. luminous
moons with no edges, no end. It is

a good day to die. To clean the windows.
Water in a blue bucket The smell of vinegar

on our hands. Everything that makes us
human, makes us animal, makes us want to live,

presses against the cold glass
looking out or in.

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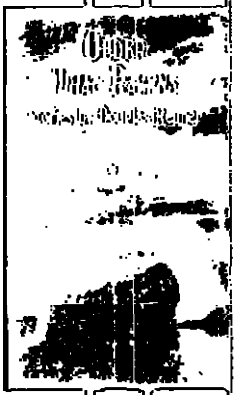

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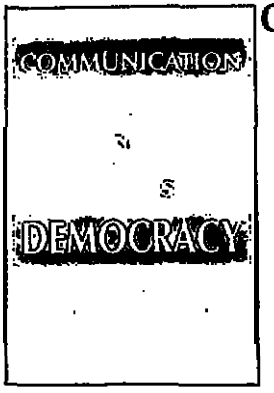

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Mask and man

'Canadians see me through a fog of misunderstanding. .. I did hope that after a while people would see that I was wearing a disguise. I'm not the phantom of the opera. I'm a real person'

IRVING LAYTON's first book, Here and Now, was published in 1945. His most recent, *Wild Gooseberries: The Selected Letters of Irving Layton* (edited by Francis Mansbridge), was published last month by Macmillan. In between, over the years, there have been more than 40 books — poetry, essays, polemic. autobiography, including *A Red Carpet for the Sun* (1959). *A Wild Peculiar Joy: Selected Poems 1945-1982* (1982), and *Waiting for the Messiah* (1985.). The poet and public literary figure is well known: either reviled or applauded, dependiig on the phase and the critic Less common currency, perhaps, is the man behind the mask, the disguise that, as Layton freely admits, he himself created. Recently, on a cheerful autumn morning over cigars, coffee, and cognac at the Montreal home he shares with his wife, Anna, Irving Layton talked to David Homel about his life. not only as a poet, but as a teacher and a social and religious thinker.

BiC: *What do you think is the fate of the post-ghetto Jewish writer? Younger Jewish writers are faced with a set of themes that are quite different from the ones you and your contemporaries have dealt with. Do you think they have the fire of their predecessors?*

Irving Layton: I taught at Herzliah, a Jewish high school, for about 10 years. Then I taught at the Jewish Public Library. I come out of this milieu, and I've had the opportunity to observe what's happened to the Jewish ghetto — the Jewish community. There *is* a change, there is a difference. The older generation, myself and A. M. Klein for example, was very much influenced by the idea of a Jewish community. Our interests were much broader, and there was a radical element Socialist ideas, the international Ladies Garment Workers, all came out of that That radical element is gone. Stalin took care of that Now, the focus is on Israel. There has been a great narrowing of interests, and that's reflected in Jewish writers in Canada and the United States. The old internationalism, the old idealism. the humanism that Jews had emphasized for many years — that emphasis is gone. The emphasis now is on survival, and that means the future of Israel and the fate of the Jews in light of the Holocaust In my time as a teacher, I saw that the Jewish students did not have that intellectual curiosity and zest they used to be known for.

Irving Layton

BiC: *There's a kind of mournfulness among some Jewish writers about their own secularization, about how they've lost the power and nourishment of the old imagery.*

Layton: They've lost more than the imagery; they've lost their Biblical roots.

BiC: *At one point you had an interest in reclaiming Jesus for the Jews. Is that something you still think about?*

Layton: Of course, though not with the same fervour. I'm not a born-again Christian, after all! But Jesus was a Hebrew prophet If it weren't for St Paul and the twist he gave to Jesus' teachings, his teachings would have been acknowledged as completely Hebraic. Jesus was not a Christian; he was a Jew. Everything he taught came strictly out of Judaism. Jesus never said anything that you wouldn't find in the other Hebrew prophets. If it weren't for St. Paul. ..

BiC: *In much of your work, you talk about Jews and Gentiles. Do you Rave any more thoughts on that conflict?*

Layton: Along with wanting to reclaim Jesus for the Jews, the other **thing** I wanted to do was to call the Gentiles to repentance. That's part of my Hebrew heritage; **that's** what Jesus and the **other** Hebrew **prophets tried** to do. They wanted to bring the guilty and the not-so-innocent to **an** awareness of what they had done. For me, the cardinal sin, the **crime** of our epoch, is the Holocaust. *This* **was** deliberate murder: it was not war. I wanted to **call** the Gentiles to **an** awareness **that** this had been **done** not only by the Germans, but by all those who stood by **impassively,** including the United States and Canada. The story is too well known now for me to have to repeat it

BiC: ***All writers,*** *and perhaps more* ***poets than fiction writers,*** *have a public* ***persona, and much has been*** *made of* ***yours.*** *A* ***public*** persona ***has many uses. One can*** *be* ***ironic about*** *it, or* ***one can believe in*** *it* ***completely.*** **Or** *both.*

Layton: My persona is a disguise I adopted many years ago when I **first** realized that the poet didn't count in our society. There's room for everyone else in society but the poet He's **an** outsider, there's no connection **between him** and society. I **realized** that even **if** I wrote great poems, I wouldn't change that a bit — I'd **still** be an outsider, and somewhat ridiculous in **the** eyes of hard-working people intent on raising a family and holding down a job and *making money*. **But I** did not want to be consigned to that position. I was determined to make people aware that there was a poet in their midst. They would not **realize that even if** I wrote the greatest sonnets in the world. **But** if I did *something* ridiculous, if I lowered my pants at the corner of **Saint** Catherine and Peel, then they'd notice me. Once I had their attention, maybe I could get them to read some of my poems. And it worked quite effectively.

BiC: *But now* ***you don't*** *need that image* ***as much*** *or at all* ***— or*** *does* ***a*** *poet always* need ***it?***

Layton: Now I don't need it; I'm known in this country. That has a good and an annoying **side,** of course.

BiC: ***So your disguise worked.***

Layton: It certainly worked insofar as it made not only me as a poet, but poetry in general, known. I put Canadian poetry on the map by putting myself on the map. I made the **Canadian** pub lie aware that there were poets in their midst. If you had been here **30** or 40 years ago, a poet meant less than nothing. Less than horse manure, if you don't mind my saying. I remember seeing all of A M. Klein's books **remaindered.** You'd be lucky to sell 50 **copies. The same was** true of Frank Scott and all the other poets. I was determined to change that. Especially because I happen to believe that poetry is the health and sanity of any community. I'm very fanatical about the place of poetry **in** any healthy society. I was determined to take strong measures. And it worked.

BiC: You *talk about* ***Klein*** *and* ***Scott. Those must*** *have been heady* ***days*** **in** *Canadian poetry.*

Layton: Montreal was where modem poetry was born, with people like Frank Scott and Louis Dudek and John Sutherland **labouring** in God's vineyard to make it happen.

BiC: ***What*** *about the* ***writing scene*** *here today — if we* ***can*** *avoid* ***making*** **easy** ***comparisons*** *between then and now?*

Layton: Montreal is **still** a **centre** for poetry. There's **David Solway,** a considerable younger poet. and Michael Harris. And Peter Van Toorn and Anne Cimon and the ***Noovo Masheen*** **boys.**

BiC: ***You've done a lot*** *of* ***teaching.*** *Ob* ***viously,*** *you're not one of those* ***poets*** *who* **believe** *that* poetry ***and*** *the* ***classmom*** ***don't mix.***

Layton: I've been a teacher for as long as I've been a **poet.** There's no contradiction, though I won't generalize. Some poets like Leonard Cohen and Al Purdy just couldn't make it as teachers. I happen to be something of a **ham,** and I happen to be **didactic** by nature. I like instructing. I get a pleasure **from giving** people information.

BiC: *Reading* ***through your*** *1977 New* ***Directions*** *collection, I* **realized** ***I was reading*** *rhymed* ***poetry, and*** *that I* ***hardly*** *knew how to do that* ***any*** *mom. It* ***takes*** *a kind of* ***ear,*** *and* ***eye,*** *tkat we've lost.* perhaps. ***What*** *happened to rhyme?*

Layton: After Walt Whitman, there was a great change toward writing in as conversational a style as possible. And when you're speaking, you don't spontaneously burst into rhyme. **Neither** do you in modern poetry. **Rhyme** is one of the curlicues that fell by the wayside.

BiC: *But you did* ***write rhymed poetry.***

Layton: *I* did because it came naturally. **After** all, I'm one of **the** older generation. I was aware of Whitman and liked him a great deal as a poet, but I wasn't prepared to throw everything out That was one of my **quarrels** with William **Carlos** Williams, who wrote a very kind introduction for my ***Improved Binoculars.*** *I nastily wrote hi* **— and I'm sorry I** did that, I didn't **know** he'd just had his fourth stroke — that **while** I liked him as a man and for what he had done for poetry, **there** wasn't much music in his work. I look for music, and I also look for metaphysics **in** poetry. I look for thought The great emphasis lo American poetry and writing is experience, not reflection or thought. **I'd** been' brought up on John **Donne** and Wordsworth and **Shelley,** and they valued reflection, and so do I. That's what I wrote him. The same argument went on in my correspondence with **Robert Creeley.** Those letters **are** in ***Irving Layton and*** *Robert Creeley: The Complete* ***Cor***respondence. **which** is going to be pub **lished by McGill-Queen's Press.**

BiC: So it was no "No ideas *but in* ***things" for you?***

Layton: That **limits** the **scope** of ideas **for me. I** don't know if **you** know the whole story, but I was adopted by the Black **Mountain** boys. Creeley was the **first** one to **publish** me — an American, not a **Canadian. That'll** never be forgotten! Charles Olson wrote me 10 or 15 letters. and I wrote back, and now Ted Hunter at **Simon** Fraser University has brought out that **corre-**

spondence in a magazine called *Lines*.

BiC: *How did you get adopted by Black Mountain if your ideas were so different?*

Layton: They saw beneath the façade of formality. They saw that what I was doing was not so different from them. They were trying to get as close to experience as possible; so was I. They were trying to shed the old taboos and ways of looking at the world; so was I. They saw the vitality below the surface form. They saw I was a secular poet, and an urban poet.

BiC: *You mention your collections of letters. Do you think it's still possible to produce a volume of correspondence in our world?*

Layton: Letter-writing is a lost art, like conversation. I still continue correspondences, but not with the same degree of enthusiasm. I like writing letters; it lets me get rid of excess dyspepsia.

BiC: *Recently you've become Irving Layton, the international man. You're especially appreciated in Italy.*

Layton: I've been translated into 20 different languages. The Italians have brought out five, six, seven collections of mine.

BiC: *Are these simply the rewards of a long career, or is there something in you that appeals to groups of readers in Europe?*

Layton: Canadians see me through a fog of misunderstanding. Because of the image of me, which I helped to create, and because of prejudice. I think that my being Jewish played a part, and because I have flatly said that Christianity was a major cause of the Holocaust. When you consider the fact that most Canadians are Christians, they didn't like that. The origins of anti-Semitism are in the New Testament. Canadians did not like being reminded of the continuing persecution of the Jews. The anti-Semitism I saw displayed as a boy and as a young man at the university, and the unfortunate experiences that I and a lot of Canadian Jews had . . . Well, no people likes to be reminded of its misdeeds and wrongdoings. Then, I startled Canadians by saying that sex was enjoyable. I once said that in this country you can say anything about sex except that it's enjoyable. My eroticism, literary and other, my secularism, and my calling Christianity to account made me a marked figure. Now, the Europeans don't start with an accumulated prejudice against me. They look at the poetry and they like the sounds I make. I have a reflective element in my work, which is European, and Jewish too. And the Jew is the ultimate cosmopolitan, by birth, by nature, by temperament. And the Europeans are cosmopolitan too. I am an urban, secular, cosmopolitan poet — that's me. That I am a Jew happens to be a fortunate historical accident that I revel in. I feel I'm fortunate to have behind me 5,000 years of history. I remind Canadians that I'm a 5,000-year-old Jew. And don't confuse me with others.

BiC: *This brings us back to the public persona. It can be a help, but a hindrance too, to the understanding of your work.*

Layton: I did hope that after a while people would be able to see that I was wearing a disguise. I'm not the phantom of the opera — I'm a real person. Now, slowly, this is beginning to happen. People are realizing that all the while I was wearing a mask. It worked for a while when I needed it, but now, there's no more reason for me to wear this disguise.

BiC: *Can this shedding of a disguise become a subject of poetry in itself?*

Layton: It can be a theme: the fact that all poets wear disguises. W. B. Yeats spoke of a mask. Because the poet is a naked, vulnerable creature, he can't wear the same conventional robes as other of society's members. But my strategy was different. I wanted strong emotions — rage, anger, disgust, malice — the stuff of tragic drama. These are emotions you cannot have in a bland, orderly society. I needed emotional fodder. I deliberately exaggerated things to create it. I created exchanges with French and Fulford — I take these names at random — as a way of getting my emotional vitamins.

BiC: *Emotional fodder in one's personal life is not enough?*

Layton: No, it must go beyond. Into society. In *A Wild, Peculiar Joy*, for example, I believe there are emotions you don't usually find in most Canadian poetry.

BiC: *And what of the future?*

Layton: More of the same — only better! I am still writing poetry. But I'm concentrating more on play and movie scripts. I have a plan to do something with the Israeli director who made *Berlin-Tel Aviv*. I'm planning to go to Israel next spring . . . You see, the last six months have been a kind of harvesting of poems and letters and essays from the last half-century. And I'm very happy with the yield. □

Miracle inspector

Bruce Chatwin approaches each of these stories as one might view a work of art — with curiosity, surprise, suspicion; most of all with wonder

By Ronald Wright

Bruce Chatwin

WHAT AM I DOING HERE
by Bruce Chatwin
Viking/Penguin, 367 pages, $25.95 cloth
(ISBN 0 670 82503 5)

ANY REVIEW of a last book by a man who knows he is dying must be a kind of obituary. Bruce Chatwin, author of *In Patagonia* and four other books besides *What Am I Doing Here*, evidently intended this collection of his shorter pieces as a literary farewell. The title, with its missing question mark, is both a question and an answer: the refrain of a remarkable life. The contents range from long, early pieces done in the 1970s for the *Sunday Times*, to urgent, sparkling fragments — cameos of the hospital cleaning lady, a letter to a friend on his 21st birthday, a travel sketch of Chiloe Island — that were written shortly before Chatwin's death in January, 1989. He was 48.

It has been Bruce Chatwin's misfortune to be best known in North America for his weakest book, *The Songlines*. Most of these short pieces are far better. He was a dauntless amateur, in the somewhat archaic sense, who never let academic research or received wisdom get in the way of a grand idea. These qualities produced the extraordinary range of interests gathered here; they are the spring in his gait and the light in the chiaroscuro of his prose; but they ran away with him when he tried, in Australia, a sustained pursuit of that philosopher's stone, the nature of man. "My whole life has been a search for the miraculous," he writes after spotting "Yeti tracks" in Nepal. Miracles seldom bear close inspection; and just as he failed to get to the bottom of the Yeti tracks or the wolf-boy tales in India, Chatwin couldn't bring himself to consider that there may be no such thing as human nature: merely human cultures, each one believing itself to be natural.

Never mind. *What Am I Doing Here* is a demonstration of Chatwin's strengths. The passions and odd obsessions of the collector inform all his work. (As a young man he worked at Sotheby's, and the protagonist of his last novel, *Utz*, is a porcelain connoisseur.) He pursues mythical horses in China, a lone albatross in the Shetlands, a war hero and writer in Germany, a Chinese geomancer in Hong Kong. Each story is approached as one might view a work of art: with curiosity, with surprise, with suspicion; most of all with wonder. If it is approached with prejudices, these are neither unthinking nor ideological but a matter of taste.

Several pieces in *What Am I Doing Here* are profiles of artists and collectors, some famous, others delightfully obscure. My favourite is the Bey (King Zog's Chamberlain, long exiled from Albania) who "gives" antiquities to Chatwin in return for having his hotel bills taken care of: "I write about the Bey because people of his kind will never come again." That line, like the one on miracles, could be taken as Bruce Chatwin's creed; nothing delighted him more than rescuing a marvel from obscurity. He pulls it from the attic, blows off the dust, deftly polishes it, and shows it to you. There! The best part of *Songlines* — the elucidation of Aboriginal "dreaming tracks" — is like this. His fascination with nomads stemmed only in part from his own wandering: it had as much to do with the fact that nomads have been thrown down the oubliette of history by settled civilizations, and especially by the one to which he belonged. Even if we don't agree (and I don't) that nomadism is the "natural" human state, Chatwin makes us see that something valuable has been forgotten and is still being destroyed.

Bruce Chatwin disliked the label "travel writer" and wrote his second book, *On the Black Hill*, a novel about twin brothers "who never went anywhere," to shake it. But he was one of the first to inspire the new literary travelling of the past 15 years, and if he is remembered mainly for his travel writing it is because he did as much as anyone to rejuvenate and expand the genre. This collection reveals the development of what he calls "my bleak, chiselled style." Some of the early pieces — for example, the essay on the Russian art collector George Costakis — show him slipping into ready-made phrases and techniques. But very quickly he purged these weaknesses and achieved the terse, eidetic prose he so admired in Robert Byron, whose *The Road to Oxiana* he took as a "sacred text" and presented to a new generation of readers. On the last page of *What Am I Doing Here*, Chatwin acknowledges other debts — to Hemingway, to Lawrence ("D. H., thank God, not T. E.") and to Ibsen — but the bloodline runs strongest from Kinglake to Byron (Robert, thank God) and Byron to Chatwin.

This is what he has been doing here. If only he were doing it still. □

BOOK REVIEWS

Eros examined

By Mark Czarnecki

BUDDY'S: MEDITATIONS ON DESIRE

by Stan Persky

New Star Books, 134 pages, $19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919573 90 8)

BUDDY'S is a chain of franchised gay bars whose Vancouver phenotype opened in 1982 and closed in 1988. During that time, Stan Persky, a writer and editor for *This Magazine* more widely known for political than sexual analysis, decided to write a personal "series of tales, matter-of-factly relating erotic encounters which originated in Buddy's."

His initial purpose was to deconstruct pornography — to write in a "mock-pornographic" style while exploding its basic stereotypes by revealing the complexity of erotic experience. Persky quickly found himself drawn into "literal" complexity as well, since the exploration of sex and desire seems to lead directly into the labyrinth of text: sexuality, reading, and knowing are the unholy trinity of our *fin-de-siècle* sensibility.

In these years of plague and facile violence, the three sections of Persky's book are titled Desire, Discourse, and Darkness. Yet he feels redeemed by the unfettered satisfaction of natural desire and eagerly defends the homoerotic under the banner of a more hopeful trinity: equality, reciprocity, and reversal. What heterosexual relationship, he wonders, can offer such non-oppressive polymorphous delight — tops and bottoms, fucking and being fucked, phallic maypoles equally rampant on a level playing field?

Buddy's is a dense, intriguing work. Persky's discrete meditations, anywhere from 12 lines to 12 pages long, most frequently arise from a pickup at Buddy's. Ever the investigative journalist, he generously provides all the details; the deconstruction is remarkably successful, and lovers whom he only briefly describes do acquire unexpected dimensions. The voice between the lines is also open for inspection and articulates a warm, vulnerable, funny man whose formidable intellect has managed to leave his emotions engagingly disarmed.

But the brain never stops. Invoking Barthes as his muse, he ponders all aspects of Eros: the charged moment when a would-be lover is about to acquiesce and only the delicious words of consent remain to be spoken, the Zen-like attraction of naked flesh framed by clothing, the sexy tension of the revealed and the concealed. He hazards taxonomies and etymologies of his lovers, dismisses psychological attempts to define the origins of the homoerotic and concludes, not very convincingly, that it just *is*.

In its combination of frank description and analysis, *Buddy's* ventures into territory largely unexplored in CanLit since *Beautiful Losers*. On the other hand, Persky slips into the "purple prose of pornography" when you least expect it:

> When I think of myself and B., or Pat, or even, with his redoubtable organ, Spencer, whom I praised without prevarication, eliciting from him a shy, pleased smile, I note that the orgasmic ceremonies provided — at least on occasion — *intimacies unique* — in short, "communication," yielding knowledge, as in the biblical locution, "then I knew him."

This is arch and coy, almost incomprehensible, as if Persky, contrary to his stated intention, is hiding behind clichés. It's hard to believe that he's assuming his "mock-pornographic" mode: whatever the diction, the voice sounds sincere.

Similar passages dot the book (one lover is "Olympian," another stands "in naked splendour"), all reinforcing the impression that the text inscribed by Persky's emotions sometimes refuses to yield its secrets. Given society's oppression of gays, this is not surprising. Despite the saturation of sexual discourse — or perhaps because of it — the deep structures of homoerotic discourse, out of sheer self-defence, often pretend to reveal what they want most to conceal.

Persky's reticence is evident when describing his most intimate non-sexual relationship, an enduring friendship with "George Stephens," a man (alter ego?) several years his elder (the book is dedicated to Barthes and to "George Stanley"). Latter-day incarnations of Kerouac and Moriarty, Stan and George ramble down the road to San Francisco every season tracking boys and philosophizing till daybreak. The split is clear: they are middle-aged men, probably in love, whose desire focuses exclusively on young men at least half their age. No laws dictate that Persky's desire and his love should be satisfied in one person for either a night or a lifetime, but the sadness is palpable and Persky knows it: "Love is endless," he writes. "Desire, fortunately, isn't." In Persky's world — which may be ours as well — ne'er the twain shall meet. □

Glass houses

By Heather Robertson

THE HOUSE IS NOT A HOME

by Erik Nielsen

Macmillan, 336 pages, $27.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9426 7)

SHADOW OF HEAVEN: THE LIFE OF LESTER PEARSON, VOLUME ONE 1897-1948

by John English

Lester & Orpen Dennys, 432 pages, $28.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88619 163 3)

UNFINISHED JOURNEY: THE LEWIS FAMILY

by Cameron Smith

Summerhill Press, 320 pages, $24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 929091 04 3)

THE FUN of reading a biography is discovering the Great One's feet of clay. Faults make him human, one of us, and enhance the qualities that make him exceptional. A smart celebrity will confess, even cultivate his failings and a smart biographer will tantalize us with glimpses into a "secret life" behind the public persona.

This keyhole peeping lies behind the controversy over the former Conservative MP Erik Nielsen's autobiography, *The House Is Not a Home*. During his 30-year political career, Yukon Erik projected the image of a tough customer, a right-wing spoiler honing his switchblade in the back alleys of politics. Now Nielsen tells all: Old Velcro Lips is really a warm, caring family man whose principal sin has been an overly zealous dedication to honesty and good government.

Nielsen depicts the Conservative caucus as a gang of thieves and liars led by a pusillanimous nitwit. The Mulroney government's appalling record of scandal and patronage bears him out, and Nielsen's description of the claustrophobic sycophancy of the Tory inner sanctum rings true. However, Nielsen's house

is made of glass — his current job as head of the National Transportation Agency is a patronage plum, a reward for doing the prime minister's dirty work on the Sinclair Stevens conflict-of-interest scandal.

Nielsen also confesses to an extra-marital affair that not only kept him out of contention for the Conservative leadership but also contributed to his wife's depression and apparent suicide. He makes the affair seem trivial, even shoddy:

> This young woman had already had one abortion. After my wife's death she became pregnant again. I had told the young woman that I did not intend to remarry, but she insisted that she was going to have the child anyway. That confrontation terminated our relationship. After the child was born I was confronted with her lawyer's demands for support payments.

Nielsen refused to pay support until the amount was cut in half. Still, he grumbles: "Those financial demands follow me to this day and have inhibited almost every single decision I have had to make." He ends the account on this sententious note: "It is only the unblemished who are worthy of public trust, it is only they who can act within the dictates of a totally free and clear conscience, devoid of hypocrisy."

The "young woman," Debbie Kelly, was shocked to read about herself and their son, Sean, in Erik's book. Kelly was Nielsen's Ottawa secretary; their relationship lasted 10 years. It was public knowledge — she was pregnant in his office. Sean is now 16. Nielsen has not seen him since he was eight months old, nor has he responded to his son's letters.

Hypocrisy indeed. Nielsen's behaviour may have been immoral; his present attitude is shameful. For all his *mea culpa*, his righteous wrath and good ol' boy Yukon gossip, Erik Nielsen reveals himself to be the same cold, sanctimonious, and secretive guy we've known all along.

This description, oddly enough, also seems to fit one of Nielsen's enemies, Lester Pearson. During his lifetime, "Mike" Pearson was beloved, even revered, as Canada's prime minister and great statesman, winner of the Nobel peace prize, a warmhearted, self-deprecating "good fellow" who expressed everything that was best and brightest about the Canadian élite. *Shadow of Heaven*, the first Pearson biography to appear since Mike's own memoirs, raises some serious doubts.

To begin with, Pearson apparently lied about his war record. Mike liked to joke that his military career ended ingloriously when he was hit by a London bus. He wasn't. Records indicate that Pearson's injury was related to an incident at his R.A.F. base and that the injury was psychological, not physical. In other words, Mike had a nervous breakdown. He was declared unfit for service and sent home. Mike never did see action, yet his letters to his parents, full of patriotic fervour, were published on the front page of the home-town newspaper.

John English also demonstrates that Pearson was less than frank about his family background. Mike liked to give the impression that he was a poor parson's son raised on gruel and charity. In fact his father, Ed, was a well-to-do Methodist preacher in southern Ontario, with a host of very rich and influential friends whose aid he did not hesitate to enlist on his son's behalf. One of these friends was Vincent Massey of the farm equipment fortune; Massey got young Mike a scholarship to Oxford and a job at the University of Toronto; he remained Pearson's *éminence grise* for the rest of their lives.

Mike's early success also rested more on sports than scholarship. At university Mike was a lazy, indifferent student, but a passionate jock. His intellectual career at Oxford was undistinguished; later he was such a failure as an academic his colleagues contrived to ship him off to External Affairs. Canada's foreign policy before the Second World War was summed up in the motto: Do Nothing. Pearson was very good at this. He played golf with diplomats' wives, mixed a good cocktail, told amusing stories, and expressed no opinions contrary to official policy. However, this vacuous playboy image concealed an ambitious, strong-willed workaholic who could be mean, bad-tempered, and demanding.

Shadow of Heaven ends in 1948 when Pearson enters politics. It leaves us wondering how such a lightweight could achieve international prominence. English's claim that Pearson was a man of "exceptional intelligence" is simply not justified by the evidence, nor is his assertion that Pearson's life and letters were full of "wit and ebullience." English reproduces very few of Pearson's letters at any length. (Many private letters have been destroyed.) The letters are conventional in both opinion and expression. No Charles Ritchie he. And although Pearson moved in influential diplomatic circles, neither he nor the people he knew have left much in the way of revealing anecdotes, observations, or insights.

English is reluctant to explore Pearson's darker side: his emotional distance, his hypocrisy, his lapsed religion. We hear from friends, but few critics. English convincingly dismisses rumours that Pearson was a Soviet spy, yet fails to explain Mike's ideological about-face from a liberal peace-maker to a hard-line cold warrior. He deals with Pearson's role as Canadian ambassador in Washington during the war with inexcusable brevity. In *Shadow of Heaven*, Mike seems a smaller and less significant figure than his public image.

The Lewis family suffers from overkill in Cameron Smith's *The Unfinished Journey*. Smith has attempted to do a socialist *Roots* by tracing the Lewis family from their origins in a Jewish village in Russia to contemporary Canada. David Lewis was once organizer and leader of the NDP; his son, Stephen, a former leader of the Ontario NDP, recently served as Canadian ambassador to the United Nations. This is sandy soil for saga building.

Socialists, like most of us, lead boring lives. Smith's attempts to transform the Lewises into charismatic folk heroes only make them seem more ordinary. Rather than picking up the obvious theme, the evolution of a political family from radical socialism to establishment liberalism, Smith buries his subject in an avalanche of indiscriminate information. The exciting part, the Lewises' holy war against Communism (alias the Waffle), loses its significance. (Smith also doesn't explain why the Lewises saw the Waffle as a feminist conspiracy.)

The Lewis journey into history doesn't seem to be going anywhere. David, never a popular politician, emerges as an obsessive fanatic who moved the NDP to the right by sheer force of rage; Stephen seems to be a high-strung airhead paralysed by guilt. The most sympathetic Lewis is David's wife, Sophie; Smith reproduces many of her poignant letters. Like Maryon Pearson, Sophie Lewis was a "single mother" as well as a political wife. Smith doesn't deal with the next generation of Lewises, now in their 20s. *The Unfinished Journey* simply ends. □

Out of the labyrinth

By Gary Draper

THE GOLDEN THREAD
by Ann Copeland
Harper & Collins, 274 pages, $16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 00 223497 1)

ANN COPELAND's most recent book inhabits that middle ground between novel and short story collection familiar to readers of — to choose an obvious example — Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*. It is a chronologically ordered sequence of stories linked by the presence of a central character and continuing themes and metaphors. These are the life stories of Claire Delaney, who becomes a nun and teacher in service at a series of institutions in the northeast United States. It's a pleasure to read about the religious life in a way that is not immersed in either saccharin or gall. These are clear-sighted but nonetheless generous stories, exhibiting the kind of painful truth-telling that is itself a kind of love. They have, moreover, such a ring of authenticity that the reader can hardly help supposing that there is some degree of autobiography within them.

Sister Claire and her friends and superiors tend to move about a good deal from institution to institution, as a consequence of which there isn't much scope for continuing, fully developed characters besides herself. This is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact it serves to reflect the isolation and the dislocation that Claire often feels. Moreover, it allows Copeland to turn the focus of the stories inward in ways that are wholly appropriate to the central theme of spiritual quest. It certainly is not because Copeland is a one-note author. Her miniatures are all very good, and the more fully developed portraits of, for example, Father Furcell and, even more, of Sister Barnabas are credible, consistent, and memorable.

One of the collection's major strengths is Copeland's imaginative and sometimes very sophisticated use of metaphor. The metaphor that informs the title story is, of course, the golden thread of Ariadne, which allows Theseus to enter the labyrinth and come safely out again. There are many other threads in these stories, however, leading Claire into and out of the cloistered life, into deeper forms of experience, of love, of freedom. In an early story, the voice of Mother Magdalena as she lies dying comes to Claire Delaney "threadlike, barely audible." Through Claire's early life as a novice runs "a thread of belief she [can] sustain." In counterpoint — but not necessarily in opposition — to that belief runs "the subtle thread of her own most deeply felt freedom." Finally, the thought of leaving the Order becomes "a dark thread woven through the tangled skein of her days." Set out thus on the page this may seem like an obvious or clumsy device. It is anything but. The metaphors are so entirely appropriate in context as to be almost invisible.

In one of the best stories in the collection, "Angels of Reality," Copeland plays variations on the theme of ascent, both physical and spiritual. Varieties of spiritual bookkeeping recur in a number of stories, as do the images and themes of freedom and confinement. These are by no means one-dimensional images. As the story "Higher Learning" unfolds, with both grace and wit, the title takes on a surprising number of meanings, some complementary, some very ironic.

As one might expect from an author who enjoys the play of words, there is also some humour here. None of it is broad, none of it mocking. The description of the act that is central to "Taking the Discipline," in addition to being very funny, is gentle, ironic, and compassionate. Or consider this finely observed thought, which occurs to Claire, very late in the stories, when she is sharing dinner in a restaurant called "The Bird of Paradise" near Fort Lauderdale: "He was peeling an avocado. She memorized his moves. Her future might include an avocado."

These are, for the most part, very well crafted stories. They are not experimental or, indeed, adventurous in their form or technique. Unfortunately, the first two stories, told in the first person, are the weakest in the collection. Don't let that put you off: the stories grow in strength as the book reaches its climax. Some of the earlier stories are too predictable, too pat, with too little sense of real life observed. There is an occasional sameness in these stories too, and every once in a while the reader may tire of hearing of the effects of Vatican II.

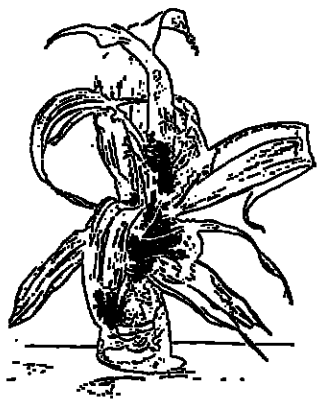
Or it may be simply that Copeland is doing all she can to make the historical context real and comprehensible to her readers, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. Of whom, by the way, she deserves many. These are in no sense parochial stories. They should be of interest to any reader who likes to read well-drawn, perceptive stories that deal sensitively with the journey of the human spirit. □

Divided we fell

By Desmond Morton

WAITING FOR DEMOCRACY
by Rick Salutin
Viking (Penguin), 299 pages, $24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 670 82284 1)

AT PERHAPS too early an age Rick Salutin gave up on electoral politics. Twice, in school elections, he backed high-principled chums against the merely popular. He wrote their speeches, guided their strategy and when, inevitably, they were beaten, he didn't get even; he just got mad. Politics was not for him. However, for reasons never wholly explained but familiar to any writer struggling over the next book, Salutin decided to see whether democracy looked any better in middle age by



watching Canadians pass judgement on the Mulroney government.

Not, of course, that Rick Salutin is unpolitical. He is, after all, a devotee of the red-headed rebel, William Lyon Mackenzie; a conspicuous left-nationalist; a dedicated promoter of the tiny, intensely nationalist Confederation of Canadian Unions; and playwright of impeccably progressive principles. By eschewing politics, Salutin merely spared himself the weary struggles, the compromises, and the team-style allegiances fostered by parties, elections, legislatures, and the other institutional forms that we traditionally identified as the substance of "democracy." By 1987, when the idea for the book was taking shape and advances doubtless were negotiated, free trade negotiations seemed to be foundering, Mulroney's Tories were dredging new depths in the polls, Ed Broadbent and the NDP were atop a mushroom of popularity, and the Liberals were drowning their own opportunities for victory in a puddle of John Turner's blood. It all looked like fun, with just the remotest prospect of watching social democrats take power.

That, of course, was not what happened at all. Having lost or abandoned every advantage Canada had ever sought from a free trade deal with the United States, Brian Mulroney imposed it anyway. Suddenly the issue was no longer "Lyin' Brian," the sleaze factor, deregulation, privatization, and the deficit; it was the age-old issue of Re-

ciprocity with, this time, almost every part of the business community massively arrayed on the continentalist side, and the unions, feminists, Rick Salutin, the left, and, unexpectedly, John Napier Turner on the other side — together, of course, with all other loyal Canadians.

Instead of covering the 1988 Canadian general election as just another round of political gamesmanship, Salutin found himself involved in a crusade to save all that had come to matter to him in the previous 20 years. He himself was a significant player. Salutin was already a prominent figure in the Toronto anti-free-trade coalition. He and the Montreal cartoonist Terry Mosher collaborated on *What's The Big Deal*, probably the best lump of propaganda produced by either side.

Far from trying to understand what Mulroney, Turner, Broadbent, and their backers were trying to do in 1988, *Waiting for Democracy* focuses narrowly on one issue: how any leader or party faced the only issue that matters to Salutin. That guarantees that Ed Broadbent becomes the book's sole unrelieved villain. Mulroney, after all, was only doing what his business backers paid him to do; Turner of the maniacal grin and the questionable past emerges as Salutin's hero, alone carrying the struggle, even against many in his own party and, by a fluke in the great debate, outflanking the journalists who seemed bent on keeping free trade off the political agenda.

Once the Liberal leader had adopted Salutin's issue, the NDP was worse than irrelevant. Broadbent's struggle to keep votes "parked" with the NDP from floating back to the Liberals was a mortal affront. Salutin, of course, was not alone. "One lifelong loyal NDP apparatchik pulled me aside and said, 'Write the toughest, most vicious book you can. And don't tell anyone I said that.' " Salutin has applied the advice. The affable, likeable Broadbent is portrayed as a "Macbeth," willing to kill a country for his ambition. His army of aides, advisers, and RCMP bodyguards becomes the escort for a political thug. Each union event bypassed by the campaign becomes a conscious snub to the NDP's humble backers. Salutin cannot bother to stay for the speech.

Defeat is an orphan. Broadbent must take his lumps. Thanks in large measure to John Turner, free trade became *the* issue of 1988 and the NDP's strategy could not adjust. Of course, Salutin's side was also beaten, and with far more disastrous consequences. By polarizing the debate, Turner may have saved his political reputation, but more than masses of business propaganda drove Canadian voters to the free trade side. And why not, when the Liberal option was more of whatever it was that had failed in the Trudeau years? Only the NDP had any positive proposals for a non-free-trade Canada and these, Salutin insists, were irrelevant. Broadbent's bid to win Quebec seats — even more irrelevant to Salutin, who spent only a few resentful days in French Canada during the campaign — failed in part because of the free trade polarization.

When a single issue turns a general election into a referendum, scores of other concerns, from PCBs to child care, will be ignored. Moreover, such is political experience, the issue of apparently transcendent importance soon fades, leaving politicians in office free to act on a host of policies scarcely mentioned and never debated during the campaign — such as Michael Wilson's self-proclaimed electoral mandate to slash public spending and implement his goods and services tax.

However, single-issue crusading is in fashion, and Salutin's book is an unconscious revelation of the style.

This is how our age prefers to play politics, whether the issue is abortion, feminism, the ecology, animal rights, or, in Salutin's case, economic nationalism. Single-issue politics saves its practitioners from most of the grubby compromises and moral crises entailed in parties and parliaments, though even Salutin felt a twinge of the experience when feminists in the anti-free-trade movement compelled him to drop an Aislin cartoon that contrasted Macdonald and Diefenbaker defending Mrs. Canada's virtue while a pimpish Mulroney told her to get out and hustle. Feminists' criticism "reeked of censorship, self-righteous leftism and an urge to self-destruct." Salutin almost quit the cause. He soldiered on, knowing his time would be brief and "the government" would handle the details when he and the voters found other interests. Politicians and party members may wonder why they bother with the chores. Fewer and fewer of them do. □

Essaying a definition

By I. M. Owen

BEST CANADIAN ESSAYS 1989
edited by Douglas Fetherling
Fifth House, 278 pages, $15.95 paper (ISBN 0 920079 43 1)

I HAVE NEVER found a method of reviewing anthologies that satisfies me. An attempt to say something about every contribution results not in a review but in an annotated table of contents; yet when I don't mention everything I feel badly, picturing the unmentioned authors eagerly scanning the review only to find themselves ignored. At least when it's an anthology of short stories there is some basis for comparison: this story is well told, that one isn't. But non-fiction is another matter: how on earth can you compare George Grant's reflections on the theology of Simone Weil from the *Idler* with Michael Webster's directions from *Harrowsmith* for making a sundial?

What's an essay? Fetherling tries a definition:

> . . . mostly what distinguishes it from the article is the skill of the writer . . . in sneaking something of higher than average quality into the publication for which he or she is working: something whose diction isn't totally corrupted by journalese, whose level isn't so limited by the need to inform as actually to preclude the possibility of thought.

This seems to say that an essay is simply a good article, or at least a better-than-average one. I'm not sure that's right; to me an essay, good or bad, is intended to provoke reflection and (usually) to entertain, though it may also inform, while an article, good or bad, is intended primarily to inform, though it may also do the other two things. For example, Ann Charney's account from *Saturday Night* of the life and death of Claude Jutra, "What's the Matter with Claude?", is much more than a better-than-average article; in fact, it's a superb one. But I don't think it's an essay. On the other hand, I'm very glad to have it in a book, where I'll know where to find it, and not have to leaf through my disordered file of back issues of *Saturday Night*.

As for the quality of the diction, what do you think of this, in Kay Armatage's "Fashions in Feminist Film Theory," from *Descant*?

> As opposed to the fetishized phallic woman (Johnston's Mae West), we find the woman released from spectacle and the concomitant cinematic codes which genderize both the feminine character and the processes of spectator identification. While I would agree with Kuhn that the body itself as site of sexual difference is returned as the inevitable "always already," there is also an opening out of both the social order represented in the narrative and of the structure, trajectory and viewpoint of the narrative, a "space of self-referentiality" (Kuhn, 54) which is put into play through this radical marking

(or unmarking) of the feminine body.

Yet this piece, I think, does qualify as an essay; and when the writer breaks free from her preferentiously impenetrable prose she becomes quite amusing, as in her account of how she lost her red silk shawl at a weekend meeting in France called "Psych et Po."

Being an essentially frivolous person, I like best the essays that make me laugh. There's Robert Fulford's rejection, in the *Financial Times*, of the word processor in favour of his mid-1950s Underwood. (Of course, I'm typing this on my 1940 Royal.) And Elliott Halpern's "Hamilton As It Should Be" from the *Idler*, and Margaret Atwood's forecast of life under Bill C-54, "The Porn Patrol," from the *Globe and Mail* (though both of these tremble on the verge of being short stories). And George Jonas's "Why I Love Opera, & Find It Irresistibly Funny," from the *Idler*.

"The Future of Our Past" by Rick Salutin, first published in this magazine (not, as you might have expected, *This Magazine*), qualifies as an essay in every way, by my definition and by Fetherling's. That I disagree with almost everything Salutin says in it is largely irrelevant, but I do want to seize this opportunity to question one of his assertions: that every nation must have "a national project. . . . Without a project a nation might exist, but . . . it wouldn't exist historically." Well, the nation that had the most notable national project in this century was the Third Reich, and it certainly existed historically, but fortunately not for long. What should Canada's project be? "To find a project," he says. Hmm. Roads to Resources? No Truck Nor Trade with the Yankees?

I have mentioned only nine out of 27 pieces. Of the rest, some are good, some are indifferent; only one is really bad: "If Kennedy Had Lived," by Ray Argyle, from *Video* [illegible] which treats this historical might-have-been with a perfectly astounding lack of imagination.

The cover design consists of inept typography imposed on an absurd photograph which I thought at first totally irrelevant, but which I now think may refer to the Armatage essay. Don't despair, though. The cover on my copy started to come off the second time I opened it.

By the way, were there no essays written in French in this country last year? □

Cinemascope

By Phil Hall

MAKING MOVIES

by Andrew Wreggitt

Thistledown, 78 pages, $9.95 paper (ISBN 0 920633 65 X)

IN THIS, Andrew Wreggitt's fourth book, his poems have become more sure in their manufacture, less sure of their conclusions, less anecdotal, and less processional in their narration.

The middle section comprises poems from a trip to Japan; the other two sections contain the familiar prairie and coastal scapes, old folks, dogs, labourers, and fires. The best poems here deal with two aspects of a story: the actual events and the element of dream that memory brings to those events. The actual and the dream memories are scrutinized in the light each casts upon the other. In such poems as "Alaska Highway, 1965," "Letter," and "Dream," by using an active present tense as well as repetition, Wreggitt achieves incantation:

The call, coming as it did, in the middle
of the night,
a sudden voice outside our tent,
a man's voice that seemed to rise
sharply out of this dream we were sharing

Particularly interesting are two sustained narratives that show the poet widening his focus to Cinemascope. "In Defense of the Burning of Some Letters" is built from the voices of a Russian couple speaking across time. They tell of religious persecution under the Bolsheviks, their journey to a sod hut half-buried in the prairies, all the sad, gruesome letters that reached them from the old country, and of the woman's mad survival 30 years after the death of her husband. The letters have been burnt by the old man, who says:

Listen. The sorrow you would take from these letters
is not yours
. . .
What you want to know as history,
was to us the world groaning and dying,
was to us the terrible end of all we had known

In the last section there are three poems about three brothers, Tom, Curt, and George. Together they tell a history of war and disillusionment that ends with the three men, all of them over 80, visiting each other in a hospital ward.

Imagery is pretty much beside the point in good story poems like these. Maybe that's why when Wreggitt uses a simile it is usually common and falls flat: "the sun waiting to ascend/like an angel" or "The traffic grinds/like a slow metallic animal." And his metaphors use that old trick of describing things in a poem as if they were each other. For example, the poem "Cars," which is about the poet's last memory of his father, ends by having memory become the car they are driving in:

The imperfect machine of memory
we bring home to our own families,
the traces of love we search for,
opening and closing its gentle doors

Still, considering the gritty, compassionate breadth of these new poems, this is a minor complaint. This is a very thoughtful, remorse-tinged, kind, and coherent book with useful things to say to us about this "crowded, altered landscape/of the living." □

B movie

By Bruce Serafin

ONE HUNDRED MONKEYS: THE TRIUMPH OF POPULAR WISDOM IN CANADIAN POLITICS

by Robert Mason Lee

Macfarlane Walter & Ross, 276 pages, $26.95 cloth (ISBN 0 921912 00 5)

WHAT IMMEDIATELY stands out in *One Hundred Monkeys: The Triumph of Popular Wisdom in Canadian Politics*, one of the first book-length accounts of the 1988 federal election, is Robert Mason Lee's style, which is exaggerated, bold, at times almost cartoonish — touched by a sort of punk gaiety. It is a young man's style, so much so that maybe only those who have a taste for comic books and B movies will fully appreciate its finer moments. Here, for instance, is how Lee describes the John Turner who appeared on our TV sets last fall, a Turner so wretchedly intense that Liberals across the land groaned and covered their eyes:

> Turner . . . presented a "hot" image that was wrong for television. Words danced out of him like spit out of a skillet; his gestures were the incoherent flailing of a wrung chicken; his eyes were burning coal tips on the rail line from hell . . . . Most viewers . . . had watched enough television to recognize Turner as a potential Mutant Ninja Turtle from Outer Space; at any moment his tight layer of ar-

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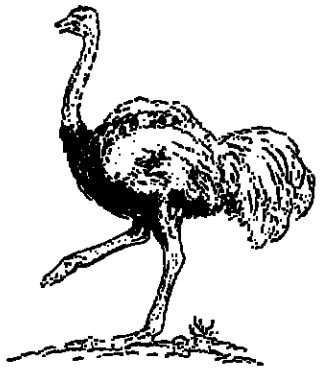


tificial skin could melt away, revealing two red lava pits in a screaming face of slime.

Equally accurate, in the same bold way, is Lee's evocation of Mulroney:

> If Broadbent's image attracted, and Turner's repelled, Mulroney's created a magnetic field of indifference between himself and the viewer. His face, on television, was a blank sheet. Nothing was written on it, and the concern of Canadians was that virtually anything could be.

Lee dismisses the NDP ("Like the party of underachievers he led, [Broadbent] did not want to spoil his popularity with success"); he calls Broadbent a "crabby and miserable" campaigner; he again and again describes Mulroney's unctuous, oily behaviour (but also points out his resilience, his pouncing desire to win); and above all he calls a lie a lie, and takes a young man's delight in showing that in the course of the campaign nearly all the big players lied, on large issues as well as small. In his style and attitude, Lee criss-crosses the field of the election like a night raider, plundering and pillaging, and occasionally letting out whoops and hollers of delight.

The book is a narrative — it covers the election virtually week by week — but it is also an investigative work. What Lee investigates is the means by which a modern political party fights and wins an election, and his discoveries are fascinating. He shows us in great detail not only the importance of technology in a modern political campaign, but also the almost overwhelming power of pure information (and by that is meant information that is not coloured by the campaigner's ideas and desires). Such information — obtained, above all, by pollsters — is the engine of a modern campaign, and any party that is unable to get it and properly use it is almost certain to lose. On the one hand, there is the information; on the other hand, there is the immense and ferociously disciplined organization that can implement what this information tells the party. The image, surprisingly enough, is of a profound reciprocity between the party and electorate, a reciprocity in which the electorate speaks, the party's organization adjusts itself accordingly, the electorate speaks again, and so on.

Of course there are those who attempt to "defy" the organization — which really means to defy the information the organization has gathered — and Lee outlines their fate in a stinging portrait of Maureen McTeer's "one-woman" campaign in Ontario. He is truly venomous here, and with reason. The only humility in modern politics is the humility of listening with an almost obsessive attention to what the electorate is saying; McTeer lacked that humility, and one feels that Lee's treatment of her is meant as a sort of angry lesson in the need to take the electorate seriously.

A really likable thing about *One Hundred Monkeys* is its almost naïve patriotism. Lee has a strong feeling for the ordinary Canadian. He sees us, if you like, sitting across from each other on our morning coffee break at work, reading the paper, spitting with laughter, making up obscenities about The Smile Of The Day — and at the same time taking it all in. In Lee's eyes we are a *free* people, who know who the master is and who the servant. While this might not be as true as Lee thinks it is, it is refreshing to read a writer whose every bold sentence sounds as if it were. □

Leaves in the wind

By Anne Denoon

FROM THE BELLY OF A FLYING WHALE

by Byrna Barclay

Douglas & McIntyre, 149 pages, $12.95 paper (ISBN 0 88894 639 2)

THE STORIES in this collection are not easy to read. Their predominant themes are alienation, violence, despair, and death. Their narratives are often enigmatic, their resolutions ambiguous, and their meanings elusive. But the restrained power of Byrna Barclay's writing and the subtlety of her imagination make them as compelling as they are disquieting.

Some of the pieces, including the title story, describe the deracination and despair of native, and other, Canadians face to face with the encroachment of late-20th-century technology and anomie. In the wake of recent politico/literary controversies concerning so-called structural racism, one tends to approach such material with caution. However, there is no condescension or sentimentality in Barclay's treatment of these, or any, characters; no noble savages or pathetic victims, though her protagonists' destinies are usually tragic. Mary Celeste, Dogrib matriarch and passenger in the flying whale, uses her anthropomorphic understanding of the world to try to make some sense of the insane incongruities of modern life in the north; Danny, a cynical foundling who has lost all trace of his native heritage, reenacts a macabre version of a Cree tradition in "Danny and Edwin and the Giveaway Dance"; in "Staying with the Dream" a lone squatter of indeterminate origins named Johnny Tangleflags stubbornly pursues an inchoate longing for meaning and identity that must end in a watery grave.

Several other stories deal with what might be called, for want of a better phrase, the complexities of family life. "Speak Under Covers," a psychological murder (?) mystery about, perhaps, twin sisters and the ghost of their long-dead lover, is the first story in the collection, and possibly its most perplexing. Yet in Barclay's sure hands, the cryptic nature of this tale becomes its strength, transforming material that might merely have been "gothic" into a disturbing depiction of guilt, love, resentment, and madness. In "Making It Up" a girl recalls the abuse of her little brother by a deranged baby sitter, and proves once again that suspicion and suggestion can be as chilling as precise details.

The author's penchant for ambiguity also means that even her more conventionally structured stories are often unresolved. "A Plane to Montserrat" reveals the agony of a mother forced to choose between a longed-for vacation, which will allow her marriage to continue, and her brain-damaged child's unrelenting need for her, which may end it. Though she makes a decision, it is not absolutely clear which one, so that her dilemma lingers unforgettably in the reader's mind. "The Woman Who Talks to Canada Geese" evokes both the terror and the banality of familial violence; it, too, ends enigmatically, but its conclusion only enhances its claustrophobic atmosphere.

Barclay's language and imagery always subtly reflect the personality and experience of her protagonist. In the last-mentioned story, for example, the woman who is emotionally imprisoned between her husband and her son watches autumn leaves "press their small crinkled faces against the tree farm's wire fence." If the stories' subjects are usually sombre, however, their characters frequently are not; the author seems to feel a special affinity with tough-talking, defiant loners. In the tragicomic "Aircraftsman-2," Wylie, a crotchety sourpuss confined to a nursing home (or is it an asylum?) has his daily — and nightly — routine pulverized by the arrival of the lunatic temptress Amelia. Although the story is told in the third person, the narrator's ironic sensibility is clearly close to

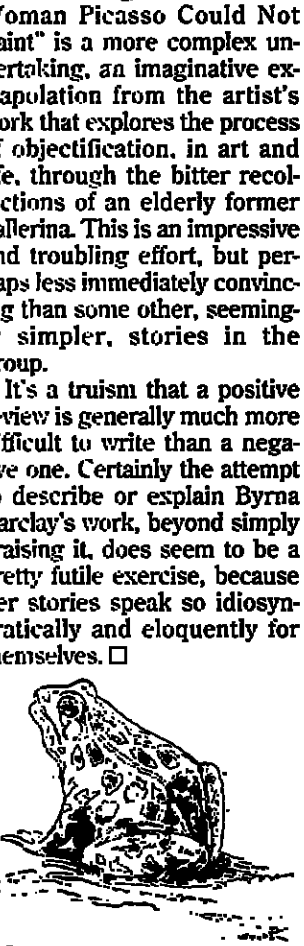
Wylie's own:

> Amelia never called this place a Home, she wanted to pay week by week — but it is also aides; and that night she blew into the buzzer and called room service for a bottle of Blue Nun, a carton of ...

When Elsie, the love-hungry proprietor of "Anything Elsie's Truck Stop," falls hard for the judge presiding at the trial of one of her customers, we learn that "she went home and started writing limericks, using words like truth, beauty and justice, but she had trouble with the rhyming."

All 15 stories in the collection are interesting, but if there is a weak link, to me it's "A Red Roadster and Steinbeck in the Rumble Seat," which tells of a derelict woman's fantasy about that writer. Perhaps it would be more appealing, its ending less mystifying, to someone more familiar with his work than I. The final story also concerns a historical figure, but "The Woman Picasso Could Not Paint" is a more complex undertaking, an imaginative extrapolation from the artist's work that explores the process of objectification, in art and life, through the bitter recollections of an elderly former ballerina. This is an impressive and troubling effort, but perhaps less immediately convincing than some other, seemingly simpler, stories in the group.

It's a truism that a positive review is generally much more difficult to write than a negative one. Certainly the attempt to describe or explain Byrna Barclay's work, beyond simply praising it, does seem to be a pretty futile exercise, because her stories speak so idiosyncratically and eloquently for themselves. □



This prison where I live

By Cary Fagan

AN INNOCENT BYSTANDER

by H. R. Percy

Macmillan, 234 pages, $19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9464 X)

FOR SOME authors and some books the question of authenticity arises. D. M. Thomas comes to mind, with his novels that play with history as if the past had been invented for literary game-playing. H. R. Percy's new novel, *An Innocent Bystander*, also raises the question of authenticity, perhaps intentionally, perhaps not.

"There is no such thing as an innocent bystander," wrote Johann Most, the 19th-century terrorist, and Percy takes his words as epigraph to his novel. For most of us it is a shocking statement, not so much for its political implication as for its casual threat of violence. Percy sets us up for a novel about justice, inequality, radical politics, and bloodshed.

And he gives us that novel — or does he? The book is written in the form of a prison memoir. The narrator is Gaspar Sánchez, an academic and novelist, who shares his cell with the filthy, flatulent, much-tortured Paulo Martinez, otherwise known as El Azote. Gaspar had the misfortune of becoming friends with Paulo when the two were students at Cambridge and Paulo was still the favoured son of a wealthy landowning family. It is Paulo's conversion to terrorism that has brought both of them to this cell.

The question of authenticity arises in at least two ways. The most obvious is the novelistic style of Gaspar's memoirs. Think of any genuine prison writings: the difficult living conditions, the hunger, pain, confusion, and fear shape both the form and the content. But H. R. Percy's Gaspar writes in such a leisurely manner, with such studied eloquence, that one might think he was writing not in a cell but under a palm tree with a cool drink in hand.

... phisticated use of time shifts to reveal an increasingly complex story. He luxuriates in description, such as this portrait of a sandal-maker who works in the street:

> If he once latches onto your foot you are lost. Snared, you look down upon his snooker-ball scalp with its garland of curly grey hair. He looks up at you with big, brimming eyes from where he squats on the sidewalk. It is a wonder he can see with such eyes to carry on his intricate trade. They swim in their gummy sockets, drowning, crying for help. They look up at you with harrowing entreaty as his hands explore and flatter your foot. His whole being becomes centred in this reverent appraisal. You feel like making him a gift of it, his hands are so covetous.

Perhaps we are meant to admire Gaspar's obsession with language, or even to see it as decadence. Still, it's hard to believe that a man who does not know if he will be taken in for torture tomorrow or the day after, or even that afternoon, would be willing to take so long to get to the end of his tale.

The other question of authenticity concerns politics; *An Innocent Bystander* does not engage in political ideas at all. The descriptions of Paulo's anarchist beliefs are inadequate, the occasional glimpses of poverty overly picturesque, and the history of the regime's current dictatorship merely facilitates the plot. Gaspar in his memoir seems to wish to remain an innocent bystander rather than a witness. Gaspar himself is far more interested in the love stories, of the woman who became Paulo's father's prostitute, of the English girl Martha who Gaspar loves and who Paulo seduces, of Maar and Nina and Eliza.

Is this avoidance of the politics that surrounds the characters intended as an indirect but grand irony, like the eloquent style that becomes increasingly dull and verbose? Perhaps so, or perhaps this is ... for an explanation of the years of effort that obviously went into this novel. □

Minding the biosphere

By Adrian Forsyth

INVENTING THE FUTURE: REFLECTIONS ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND NATURE

by David Suzuki

Stoddart (General), 247 pages, $24.95 cloth (ISBN 7737 23544)

THE PHILOSOPHER Arne Naess has suggested that environmentalists should try to be like Socrates. They should be "pests, but respected pests." Few scientists and few environmentalists have been able to achieve the status of respected pest; David Suzuki is an exception. Other scientists-turned-environmentalists, such as Paul Ehrlich, exist. But it is Suzuki, the scientist-environmentalist-writer and television-and-radio personality, who best uses both his scientific background and media skills to pester, ridicule, and educate the scientific, industrial, and political establishment.

Suzuki's work has evolved into a personal battle against the complacency, stupidity, and ignorance that are destroying the ecological future. With this series of essays written for the lay public on the interactions between science, the environment, education, racism, militarism, and politics, Suzuki continues his struggle to change the direction of society. *Inventing the Future* is a work of urgency, anger, concern, and hope.

The book, based on newspaper columns that Suzuki wrote for the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail*, contains essays on topics with environmentally and culturally important implications. Suzuki treats such themes as "The

Rape of the Amazon," "Ethnic Weapons," "The Prostitution of Academia," "Industrial Doublespeak," and "The Power of Diversity" and has organized this variety into 10 sections, each of which has a brief introduction.

This book is not a dry review of the issues. The articles are not packed with facts and figures, authorities are not quoted, alternative viewpoints are not discussed. Many a straw man gets flattened. Instead of journalistic pseudo-objectivity this book offers something far more valuable and readable: a clear and honest exposition of the opinions of an informed and intelligent person. Readers learn what Suzuki is worried about, what he admires and despises, and what he thinks needs changing. As such it is important, necessary reading.

Some essays discuss events in the news — the growing economic clout of the Japanese, for instance. Others begin with personal anecdotes from Suzuki's travels or childhood experiences. He uses them all as springboards, discussing their implications for society and the future. His observations on his daughter's learning to love salamanders are woven into a discussion of sexism and science. Many of the essays are about the limits and subjectivity of science. In the days before he worked as a commentator on science Suzuki was himself a gung-ho and prominent geneticist. Out of that experience came his current skepticism and realism about the limits, frailties, and foibles of scientism and technocracy. He is able to look at science from inside and out. Suzuki is critical of the way science is conducted, funded, and taught. But he is adamant that we all need more understanding of science in our lives.

Much of the book is about alternatives to our present behaviour and solutions to environmental problems. But don't expect a list of prescriptions and solutions to be spelled out. Many of the essays simply raise issues and don't attempt to solve them. Is looking for an AIDS cure worth torturing and destroying chimpanzees? When is it better to die than to live on, dependent on medical technology? Suzuki doesn't answer these questions but chooses the role of *agent provocateur* instead. When he does make suggestions they are often sweeping. For example, he argues that we should create a "Supreme Office of the Biosphere" to control human activities; but this, he admits, is just hyperbole, meant to provoke thought. This book is a primer for the issues, a searching for possibilities.

Suzuki argues convincingly that radical change in the educational system is our best hope, and *Inventing the Future* could itself be a useful discussion text for parents and teachers who want to have a dialogue with their children and students, or even with their peers, about the important issues of our time. Take it either one essay at a time or in the 10 thematic groupings organized by Suzuki.

It is no exaggeration to say that anyone who is not familiar with these issues is fundamentally ignorant. If you missed the newspaper columns, read the book. □

Behind the curtain

By Norman Sigurdson

THE VOICE OF THE CRANE
by David Gurr
Coach House Press, 272 pages, $18.95 paper (ISBN 0 88910 341 0)

DAVID GURR is a former officer in the Canadian Navy who has written six successful espionage novels (including *Troika, A Woman Named Scylla*, and *The Ring Master*), which critics have compared with the works of Eric Ambler. His new novel is just about as far removed from those commercial thrillers as is possible. *The Voice of the Crane* is a consciously "literary" novel, a postmodernist form-bending look at 20th-century Japanese history that uses the traditional Japanese puppet theatre, *bunraku*, as its model.

It is, perhaps, a bit presumptuous of a reviewer to try to analyse the personal and private motivations behind an author's decision to write a certain book. Still, in this case it is pretty hard not to speculate that after a string of successful paperback spy novels Gurr felt the urge to tear away the mask and reveal himself to the world as a serious novelist on the cutting edge of postmodernism, a writer of "fictions" . . . in short, an artist.

Bunraku is a puppet play in which there are two narrators and a Spirit Chorus; the men manipulating the puppets with sticks become all but invisible, dressed completely in black against a black background. Gurr sets his novel more or less along these lines, giving us three "voices" in rotation in a stylized and distancing dance.

One of the voices belongs to Ambrose Magellan, a middle-aged "oiler of wheels." Born in Tokyo, Ambrose is the son of a Portuguese adventurer (said to be a descendant of Ferdinand Magellan, the first circumnavigator of the globe) and a Quaker mother from Boston. Both his parents were killed in the war and Ambrose was unofficially adopted by the former Count Mochiwara (aristocratic titles having been abolished by General MacArthur after the war).

Ambrose, now a gangly six foot six, has a Japanese wife and considers himself Japanese. He works introducing American businessmen to their Japanese counterparts and smoothing the cultural way. His voice in the novel is in the form of his ramblings to his Japanese-American psychiatrist who has been sent from California to Japan to help American IBM workers there cope with stress.

The second narrator is Count Mochiwara, now 97 years old. His life story is told in the second person and it is intertwined with the biography of his childhood companion and "ward," the Crane, who is none other than Emperor Hirohito. Within Mochiwara's narrative we also hear "the voice of the Crane," Hirohito in the first person, "from behind the curtain."

The Crane's narrative is the most problematic. Set out as poetry, it is clumsy and at times laughable. The young Hirohito is made to speak in this strange verb-heavy pidgin:

New Baby Brother being-hiccuping
Mother being-bending with worrying
Being-spoiling her beauteous face being-making unhappy

and

Our wanting-being-hitting
Papa-Kawa with eating-sticks
Not wanting-believing
But Papa-Kawa never being-telling
Things that are not being-so

Author pretentious-being, this all is, and reader annoyed-being as well. The Crane's narrative lightens up somewhat as things go on, but only slightly, and much of his narrative is all but unreadable. The strange syntax bears no relation to modern Japanese. It may be meant to mimic the archaic court dialect, but as such serves no purpose.

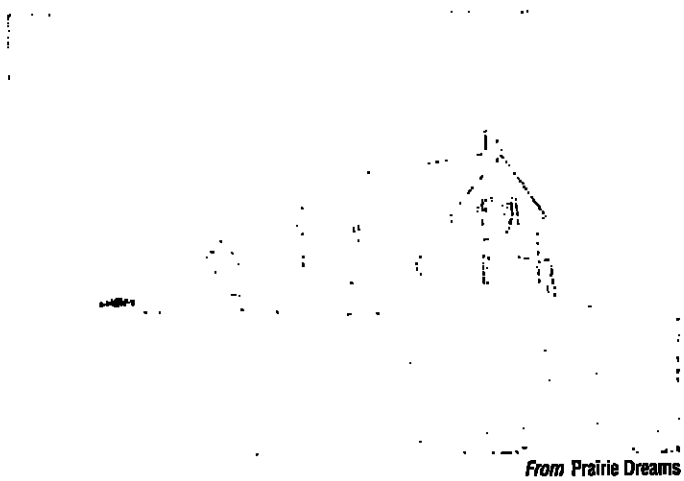
The strongest scenes belong to Ambrose and his descriptions of his cross-cultural loyalties. Mochiwara's adventures as a young man in pre-World-War-I Europe are interesting, but the reader is always held at arm's length by the artificial form.

Gurr has done what good spy novelists do, plenty of research. His best set-pieces are adapted from the works of others: Leonard Mosely on Hirohito's childhood, David Bergami's controversial *Japan's Imperial Conspiracy* for the war years, and Ian Buruma's wonderful *Japanese Mirror* for the scenes set in the porno bars where Ambrose entertains his clients. Gurr would have done better to do what serious novelists do, use his own imagination to invent a Japan all his own. □

It's flowery but is it art?

In a Canadian Garden *overwhelms the eye with images of greenery and flowers: the effect is like staring point-blank at a movie screen*

By Al Purdy



From Prairie Dreams

THERE MUST be more of these heavy books of landscape photographs published than any other expensive gift tomes. I once said, about the mountains of Banff, Alberta: they remind me of picture postcards standing on end and encircling a few agoraphobic tourists. Well, the landscape books seem to surround claustrophobic potential buyers.

Muskoka (Boston Mills Press, 118 pages, $35.00 cloth) is a case in point. More than one would ever want to know about cottage country, it has Judy Ross with commentary and John de Visser pointing the magic box. De Visser is probably Canada's best known and perhaps best photographer. Here he presents the stock shots of trees and water, the small towns (Bracebridge, Bala, etc.), where they probably have an ice or water carnival every time the next train arrives. De Visser is excellent, but the Group of Seven infected me with this bored malaise about landscape.

However, **Wild Birds of Canada** (Oxford University Press, 152 pages, $34.95 cloth) perks me up a bit. The anthropomorphic bird antics in Tim Harris's colour photographs are irresistible. Especially ducks. A goldeneye fixes an intruder with hostile yellow gaze amid her blasé ducklings. A redheaded drake floats like a massive slow-moving painted ship. The gyrfalcon crouches with cold eye over its kill, feathered pantaloons astride the dead pheasant's body. And the common loon — more like a work of art than a work of art. The cry of loons on my own small Roblin Lake I think much more euphonious than that of mating Fords and Chevys. A fine book.

When Art Shares Nature's Gift (Galerie Amrad, 236 pages, $54.00 paper) is a little more laborious. It's about the African calabash, which may be pumpkin, squash, or various other hard-rind vegetables. Esther Dagan, the author, is more than a little obsessed by calabashes. Whereas most people, I am sure, can take a calabash or leave it.

In Africa there are 750 species of plants that produce gourds for the calabash; they are employed as bottles, engraved works of art, dance masks, musical instruments, verbal symbol and metaphor, secular, domestic, and celebratory. It takes one's breath. If I had a do-it-yourself calabash kit, some new uses for the calabash would surely occur even to me. One of the book's myriad photos has nine shapely young African belles about to perform the Calabash Dance. If I had known in time I would have rushed to Africa and bought a ticket.

The Dinosaurs of North America: An Odyssey in Time (University of Toronto Press, 240 pages, $45.00 cloth) has a text by Dale Russell and some juicy dinosaur paintings by Eleanor Kish. And, of course, many photos as well. Russell outlines all that is known and theorized about dinosaurs, which is a great deal. He also describes the most popular current theory for their extinction 65 million years ago. It seems most likely that a large meteorite/comet whomped into the earth around that date, sending up huge clouds of debris and causing prolonged darkness. "Physical and chemical evidence of extraterrestrial material" has been discovered in earth's strata at approximately that 65-million-year date that supports the meteorite theory.

If one accepts this comet/meteorite premise, it brings into question the other great extinctions in the earth's geological history. About 200 million years ago, a previous mass extinction occurred: another meteorite? And after this last and final extinction of the great reptiles,

> a plague of ratlike mammals spread over the land, infesting everything and indiscriminately devouring eggs, insects, fallen fruit, and even carrion. Majesty, proportion, and beauty were diminished in a new world that did not seem particularly brave. The warm, moist air was permeated with loss.

(And eventually, the "ratlike mammals" became ourselves.) Bravo, Mr. Russell.

Two more landscape books. **Prairie Dreams** (Western Producer Prairie Books, 125 pages, $34.95 cloth) features Courtney Milne's photographs and many quotes from other writers. Even though the photographs are direct and in focus, I feel an odd obliqueness about them: as if the photographer were in search of something else related to his subjects, perhaps hovering nearby. Landscapes themselves — if you see enough of them — inevitably blur in your mind, it seems to me. They are more colourful than muted reality.

Anyway, the bald prairie is little in evidence here; the delicate images of photography crowd into what some Canadians conceive as very nearly nothingness. Milne proves it isn't. And all the postal codes merge.

Prince Edward Island (Nimbus, 112 pages, $24.95 cloth) is photographs only. I look at them and visualize the photographers themselves. A tag end of rainbow tacked onto the sky's edge was nice. The stain of red land merging into sea water was good. Double page spreads, white cloud and green vegetation, that's good too. Tignish Run, scissor slice of water through brown coastline, striking. Many taken from a hovering hired helicopter, or whatever it was. "The Island," as Milton Acorn called it; as we call the other Prince Edward "The

County" — and they're both like valentines to Confederation.

Ottawa, More Than a Capital City (Windsor Publications, 336 pages, $34.95 cloth) takes the somewhat novel approach of having some of the "advertisers" pay publication costs. I count 58 articles in the book, from hospitals to funeral homes to the Campeau Corporation. On glossy paper with coloured illos. The text and commentary — apart from advertising — are by Jane Wilson. Some 20 people are responsible for modern and historic photographs, lavish paintings, everything one might care to know about our capital city. A letter of greeting is included from the prime minister, which typically means little.

But it's a handsome and informative book, with 250 colour illustrations. Unlike most of these coffee-table tomes, it really is clothbound. (That's a rarity in these days of pressed cardboard book covers.) Still, I would have preferred a little less information be furnished to help prospective foreign takeovers of Canadian industry.

In **Photographs That Changed the World** (Macfarlane Walter & Ross, 102 pages, $34.95 cloth), Lorraine Monk introduces camera work all the way from Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (1826 — "the world's first photographer") to the earth photographed from the moon by the astronaut William Anders in 1968 and the Challenger explosion in 1986. The last five shots in the book are in colour.

There are indeed some fine and moving photographs among the 51 included here. Terry Fox limping along the highway, his face a map of his feelings, followed by a police car. Running Vietnamese children, burned by U.S. napalm, mouths open and shrieking in absolute terror. But the U.S. Statue of Liberty in full Technicolor in what purports to be a Canadian book?!?!

Of the 51 photographs here, nearly all have U.S. photographers, even if the copyright source in some cases is not American. And that price tag for 51 shadows of substance seems exorbitant to me. I scraped away with fingernails at the book's spine. I think it's a cloth binding, but the imitators of cloth are getting so expert I'll never know for sure until the cardboard simulacrum dissolves into dust.

In a Canadian Garden (Viking Studio Books, 176 pages, $45.00 cloth) was edited by Nicole Eaton and Hilary Weston; photography is by Freeman Patterson. It's a compendium of 35 articles by fairly well known Canadians, with accompanying colour photographs of their gardens. The list includes Arthur Erickson and Barbara Frum; I expect most other contributors are pretty well heeled too.

The visual sense is here assaulted and almost overwhelmed by masses of flowers and greenery. It seems indubitable to me that much of the time we take landscape for granted, as backdrop for ourselves; and the human eye tends to focus on other people. But when you abstract vegetation and the flowery results of chemical fertilizer and water into photographs, the result is almost like staring point-blank at a movie screen: it's striking, but is it art (as Kipling said, or something like that)?

A book like this is bound to be a bit self-serving to the contributors; but the photography is quite marvellous. Printed in Italy — would that be part of the reason, or economics? And here at Ameliasburgh, my one nasturtium now seems forlorn and anthropomorphically neurotic.

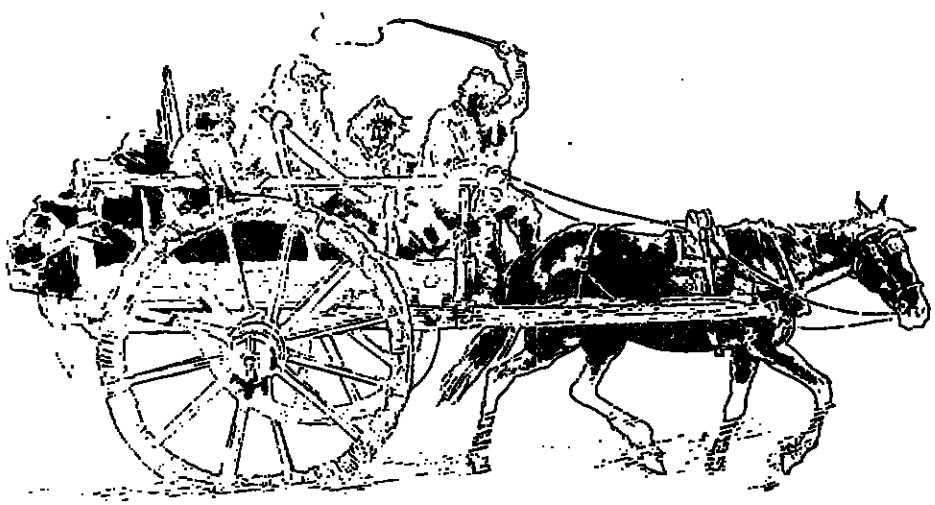
It's impossible to do justice to **Empire of the Bay** (Viking Studio/Madison Press Books, 224 pages, $45.00 cloth) in the space available. Peter C. Newman outlines the history of the Hudson's Bay Company and its "true and absolute Lordes and Proprietors" in one large volume instead of the original three. The paintings and photographs included here are wonderful. A dog team emerges from the Arctic onto the book's title page. And there's the same well-known painting of Henry Hudson adrift in pack ice; his eyes are riveting. A sketch of York Factory in 1853 is very nearly alien.

And the H.B.C. heroes of exploration: Henry Kelsey, who described his prairie adventures in bad doggerel verse; Anthony Henday, ex-smuggler, explorer of the west; Samuel Hearne, who crossed the Barren Ground to the Arctic sea on foot, accompanied by a Chipewyan chief, Matonabbee, who became his friend; Alexander Mackenzie, the first European to cross North America by land, and whose name graces our northern river that empties into the Arctic Ocean.

The quality of Peter Newman's writing has sometimes been the subject of snide remarks. Don't you believe it! Newman is an excellent writer, the proof of that obvious in this book. He sacrifices no accuracy to achieve his colourful prose. There could be no better guide to the long history of the H.B.C. ("Here Before Christ"), the commercial venture that became a nation.

In **Endangered Species** (Key Porter, 288 pages, $34.95 cloth) the editor, Monte Hummel, has 21 conservationists writing about the Canadian wilderness areas from east to west. The peril to such areas and their wildlife is, of course, man himself; and the same irresponsible primate has the responsibility for removing the peril. Some of the steps that must be taken are admirably outlined in this book. There are also some photographs that demonstrate both land and wildlife are worth saving.

This is a fairly expensive book with, presumably, a not-too-large printing. One wonders if its readers will be those people with most responsibility for remedial steps: of *course*, all of us are responsible for conservation, as we are for pollution. And those are nice, proper, and expected words on problems for which there are no easy answers.



From Empire of The Bay

Fred Bruemmer's **World of the Polar Bear** (Key Porter, 160 pages, $35.00 cloth) is both celebration and explication. Since Bruemmer is a veteran master, his photographs seem nearly edible and magnificent at the same time. He outlines the history of polar bears (Neanderthal man worshipped them; Vikings hunted them; Romans kept them for sport), their everyday life, and his own experiences among them. "— to Europeans and Egyptians" — how did they get in here? — "their pelts were highly prized as the most luxurious of furs." Twenty some years ago an H.B.C. factory on Baffin Island offered to sell me a skin for a hundred bucks. That seemed expensive, although even then they were selling for much more. I bought seal skins instead (they were and are bread and butter for the Inuit), and had a coat made for my wife. Bruemmer says a symbiotic relationship exists between the great bears and seals; on the garbage dumps at Churchill, Manitoba, there is also a relationship with human beings. As for this book, I could hardly recommend it more. I'd buy it even if I weren't reviewing it.

The 18 stories and articles in **Christmas with Stephen Leacock** (Natural Heritage, 111 pages, unpriced) are taken from earlier books; a few are previously unpublished. Leacock addicts, if such still exist, be advised that here is a bountiful Christmas dinner, and drinks afterward without hangover. On the back cover blurb John Colombo says: "We urgently need . . . some new Christmas cheer (and) Stephen Leacock is our man."

Well, maybe. But I'd prefer to dine with Ebenezer Scrooge myself. And recall Ron Everson's story of accompanying Stephen Leacock to meet William Butler Yeats at the latter's hotel room in Montreal:

Leacock: (timidly to the great man) "I write too."

Yeats: "A pity. So few read."

Well, anyway: Merry Christmas. □

FILM NOTES

City streets

Little films, like Alanis Obomsawin's powerful new documentary, No Address, *made the Festival of Festivals for our critic this year*

By Morris Wolfe

Friday, September 5: Attend screening of *Under the Glacier*, an Icelandic film by Gudny Halldorsdottir, based on the novel *Christianity at Glacier* by her father, Halldor Laxness, a Nobel prize-winner. It begins delightfully — like a Bill Forsyth film. But after 40 minutes strange things start to happen. Two reels are shown in the wrong order. That doesn't help. All the women in the film, it becomes increasingly clear, are caricatures. The one exception is Ua, a beautiful ageless temptress (troll?) with magical powers, who destroys the central character in the film as she has countless other men. Feminists in the audience are offended, given that the film is by a woman from a country with a women's party and a woman prime minister. Later I catch up with Gail Singer's vibrant documentary about Paraskeva Clark, *Portrait of the Artist as an Old Lady* (1982). It's part of a retrospective of Canadian women film-makers. Clark, who was then 81, is asked at one point in *Portrait* if she knew Norman Bethune. "Knew him," she replies in her heavy Russian accent, "I *fokked* him." She rails against the Group of Seven for continuing to paint landscapes in the 1930s when there were social issues to address. Kay Armatage's *Artist on Fire* (1987), about Joyce Wieland, is much less satisfying. Whenever Wieland speaks directly to the camera, the film is terrific. But the numerous critics and other artists whose views on her work are trotted out just get in the way.

Saturday, September 10: *Beyond Gravity*, the story of a gay love affair, by New Zealand film-maker Garth Maxwell is first rate. Unfortunately, the film's length (48 minutes) won't allow for theatrical distribution, and its beautifully done love scenes will keep it off television. *Beyond Gravity* was paired with *Lover Boy*, an Australian film written and directed by Geoffrey Wright, about a relationship between a 43-year-old woman and a 16-year-old boy. The relationship is believable and moving. A long scene consisting of a single shot in which the woman (Gillian Jones) tells her young lover (Noah Taylor) that they have to stop seeing each other is riveting. But then Wright decides that what we need after all that intimacy is some good old macho blood-letting. The woman's ex-husband and young lover, therefore, hack away at each other with a broken bottle. Atom Egoyan's *Speaking Parts*, like *Family Viewing*, is a cold film. Nonetheless, I find it much more affecting. We are all victims of technological society, the film suggests, reduced to bit parts in an increasingly dehumanized drama we have no part in shaping. Somehow we have to find ways to escape our growing isolation and touch each other.

Sunday, September 10: *La Petite Voleuse* by Claude Miller, with a screenplay begun by François Truffaut shortly before his death, is a haunting female version of *400 Blows*. Janine is 16; the trouble *she* gets into is more serious than that of Antoine Doinel. *La Petite Voleuse* is marred only by its pat conclusion. Paul Cox's *Island*, about three women, one from Greece (Irene Papas), one from Australia and one from Sri Lanka, is set in the Greek islands. The film reflects on our growing rootlessness and quietly celebrates the simple decency of people wise enough to stay put in this beautiful landscape. *Termini Station* by Allan King is a kind of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* set in Kirkland Lake. The film's greatest strength is a superb performance by Megan Follows as Micheline, the angry, foul-mouthed daughter of Colleen Dewhurst and Gordon Pinsent. Its greatest weakness is the script, particularly the decision to turn Micheline's brother and sister into caricatures, thus robbing the film of some of its potential emotional depth.

Monday, September 11: See two more films in the Canadian women film-makers series. *Incident at Restigouche* (1984), by the native film-maker Alanis Obomsawin, documents a violent dispute over salmon fishing rights at a Micmac reserve on the Quebec–New Brunswick border in 1981. The weight of the government, the police, and the courts came down on the native people. One Indian in the film commented that the Parti Québécois government, then in power, was calling for separation from Canada, but what it was doing to the Micmac was far worse than what Canada had done to Quebec. *Home Feeling: Struggle for a Community* (1984) by Jennifer Hodge is a film about a much maligned, largely black, community in Toronto's Jane-Finch area. Hodge, herself a black, presents the perspective of the people who live there. Their views on police discrimination, for example, are ironically confirmed by a black policeman on the Jane-Finch beat who turns out to be more racist than any of his colleagues: young black men in the area are all presumed to be guilty until they can

prove otherwise. Toronto's police cars declare "To Serve and Protect." Serve and protect whom is the question this tough film asks. *Black Mother Black Daughter*, a short film by the black film-makers Sylvia Hamilton and Claire Prieto, chronicles the struggle in Nova Scotia — largely by black women — for blacks to take pride in their heritage. The film contains some lovely music by the a capella group "For the Moment."

Tuesday, September 12: Can't remember when I last saw Mireille Dansereau's *La Vie revée* (1972) one of Canada's earliest feminist films. Although its colour is fading, its charm and energy remain intact. *La Vie revée* is about two young women who've been conditioned by the media to spend almost all their time fantasizing about men who will rescue them from their humdrum lives. Eventually they learn to stop dreaming and start living. The closing credits are shot over magazine pictures of the dream life being torn from their walls. It's good to see Beryl Fox's work again. I'd especially looked forward to her CBC documentary *The Mills of the Gods: Vietnam* (1966), the film for which she's best known. It doesn't stand up all that well. But we've all seen so much documentary footage from Vietnam that it's not surprising. However, another CBC documentary by Fox, *Summer in Mississippi* (1964), moved me to tears. The quiet eloquence of Schwerner's wife and the simple honesty of Cheney's mother as they speak of two of the civil rights workers who were murdered is quite overwhelming.

Thursday, September 14: The photographer Paul Strand is the subject of a feature-length documentary by the Canadian film-maker John Walker. The trouble is that *Strand — Under the Dark Cloth* would be a much better film at about two-thirds its present length. Strand was an intensely private man and none of the people Walker interviews — his wives, his friend Georgia O'Keeffe, etc. — has all that much that's interesting to say about him. *The Vacant Lot*, Bill MacGillivray's new film (his last was the excellent *Life Classes*), is not well-attended. Word is out that it's not very good. And in some ways it isn't. But it's à courageous film with unknown actors, many of them weak, in a good script that explores some bleak truths about the family (it's dead) and young people (they have little future). The film, set in Halifax, is a kind of *Goin' Down the Road* revisited. But what it suggests is that it's not even worth trying to go down the road any more. There's nothing out there.

Friday, September 15: Alanis Obomsawin's new film, *No Address*, about homeless natives in Montreal, is the most powerful new documentary I've seen at the Festival. Each of the individual natives the film lovingly focuses on has a grim and moving story to tell. One has had a child taken from her; another doesn't know how to fill out an application to ask for help. All have forgotten who they are and have none of the skills needed to survive in the city. What's happening to them, Obomsawin suggests, is a form of cultural genocide.

Sunday, September 17: I reflect on the Festival. I'm glad I avoided the big films, those that are certain to be released commercially. The line-ups are worse than ever and it's not worth fighting them. In any case, it's little films like *Beyond Gravity* and *No Address* that make the Festival for me. Projection continues to be a serious problem; one shouldn't have to yell "focus" at professional projectionists. This year's Festival catalogue at 320 pages was bigger and less helpful than ever. Too many entries read as if they were written by P.R. people rather than film critics, and that makes it difficult to decide what to see. We need an anti-catalogue. □

On the farm

In the best of all possible worlds, readers of Dan Needles's first novel will get the jokes and *the message, and the book will win the Leacock Award*

By Dayv James-French

JUDGING by Lloyd Abbey's account, whales have lives very similar to yours and mine; that is, one day is pretty much the same as the one before. **The Last Whales** (Random House, 384 pages, $22.95 cloth) tells the story of three generations of blue whales and their search for security against the threats of predators, pollution, and the insanity of human destructiveness. In size and tone, it suggests an episode of *Wild Kingdom* narrated by Joyce Carol Oates:

> A steam-like fog covered the ice-floes and the ping-pong calls the whales passed back and forth bounced out and off her like a ball striking the body of a catatonic man. The others — the Sperms, Seis, Fins — had shifted their ground, so that the blankness of her mind remained unbroken the few times she looked outside her eyes.

Abbey doesn't entirely resist anthropomorphizing his whales and a family of dolphins who have escaped captivity as experimental subjects for the navy, but his protagonists are unnamed, and the text is sometimes too thick with "the bull," "the cow," "the calf," and the resultant *hes* and *shes* for smooth reading. The pace of the novel picks up with the advent of nuclear night and the whales' adaptation to new conditions for survival. Abbey is perhaps too optimistic here, but his narrative is a compelling one. The size and rhythm of his prose, however, may limit the audience for *The Last Whales* to those who are already passionate about the subject.

In Sandy Frances Duncan's **Pattern Makers** (Women's Press, 204 pages, $8.95 paper), Yvonne moves into the refrigerator, only to awaken one day to discover that the outside world has become a desert — a fact that eludes her husband, Martin. This may or may not serve as an image of self-preservation on the shifting sands of male-female relations, but it launches Yvonne on a quest for inner peace, aided by two other women. Jane, whose victimization has caused her to turn into a red-haired turtle (with only enough room in her shell for a make-up bag and a small mirror), says, "Women can get used to anything." Mirabelle has been so generous that she's lost her fingers, toes, arms, and legs; she left home (using a vacuum cleaner hose to push herself along on a skateboard) before losing her hair.

There's a lot of hair in the book. A spider, predictably introduced as "big, hairy," slowly wins their confidence after Jane equates its creative function with mythological goddess figures. Thereafter, the spider is a welcome companion and remains neuter, oddly so in a work that so clearly embraces the feminine. Jane and Yvonne both have husbands named Martin, and two children each, but these are introduced as distractions to the women, portending violence and disturbance. A couple of bad men, called First and Second, are tricksters, carnival performers whose pride in juggling serves mainly to set up Jane's dismissive, "Balls are boring."

Perhaps, at a time when feminist and lesbian literature is entering the mainstream, and sometimes having its themes co-opted by the patriarchy, female separatists will find the fantasy of *Pattern Makers* — I never thought I'd use the word — *empowering*.

Walt Wingfield was chairman of a Bay Street brokerage house before buying a hundred-acre farm in southern Ontario's Persephone Township. His diary-like letters to the local newspaper editor are collected by Dan Needles in **Letters from Wingfield Farm** (Key Porter Books, 160 pages, $21.95 cloth). It's difficult to believe the letters were written by a CEO, even a fictional one; they're clearly stated, devoid of jargon, immediately comprehensible, and quite charming. The city slicker encountering the canny and often duplicitous natives has rarely been so well served. There's no condescension, only a deft understanding of the kind of dealings Donald Trump would elevate to Art, crafted into fine tales of the give-and-take necessary for survival.

Needles successfully avoids the obvious traps of sentimentality, and Wingfield has no romantic illusions of the hazards of raising sheep:

> Dogs run them to death, wolves sneak in at night and kill them one at a time. They get stuck in fences, roll into holes and can't get out, they eat wild cherry leaves and keel over. Sometimes they read an old copy of the *Globe and Mail*, get depressed and just lie down and die.

But he doesn't know what he's getting himself into when he buys 150 oddly dark "French" geese.

There's a sub-text to the humour in *Letters from Wingfield Farm*, about self-reliance, community, and the vanishing sense of responsibility people feel for the land. In the best of all possible worlds, Needles's audience will get the laughs *and* the message (and the book will win the Leacock Award).

Harry Fleet is intensely self-absorbed as the fortysomethingish narrator of Kent Baker's **A Man Wanders Sometimes** (Stoddart, 224 pages, $22.95 cloth). The appearance of an old woman in a rocking chair on the beach outside his rural Nova Scotian home begins his examination of the past, which — judging by the tonelessness of his exposition — was less interesting than he thinks. Everything is mediated through a scrim of psychobabble and lofty abstraction. His partner, Joan, shares his ability to converse in the manner of an encounter group:

> "I'm really scared, Harry."
> "I know." I put my arm around her shoulder. Her breasts spread like sponge against my chest. "You never beheld yourself."
> "What's to behold?" she says. "I am what I am."
> "What's that?"
> "Human," she says with authority through the tears. "Human."

The only concrete detail in that passage is Joan's breasts — and so it is with the novel. Chronology and geography are murkily defined; there's no clear sense of character, as though the story were being told years after the fact by a man intent on concealing some truth. Fleet's attention is only completely focused when the subject is breasts. These are "like melting mountains," "jellyfish," and "twin gourmet globs, these two delectable, done-to-a-tee tastees."

Baker sums up the vague and inconclusive presentation of *A Man Wanders Sometimes* in his own style:

> Still there is acceptance. Nodding resignation. It is natural enough in the scheme of things. Not wholly expected, of course, but natural enough. And merely temporary. Not a reflection on anyone or anything, just the way it goes. It isn't the taint that shows when dreams are soured, just the way it is, and how can anyone be blamed for that?

How, indeed? □

RACISM IN PUBLISHING

I WON'T comment on all I found offensive in Brian Fawcett's "Notes from the Inner Circle" (August-September). I won't even comment on the judgement of the editors in publishing it; especially since the author is an advisory editor, the act of publication appears to condone his ideas.

The statement that I found most offensive (and most revealing of the structure of Mr. Fawcett's thought) was that writers from minorities have trouble getting into print because it's a market absurdity to publish books when the audience is so small. I'm shocked at the implication that "audiences large enough" (i.e. WASP?) are only interested in the world expressed through their eyes and imaginations, relegating all other viewpoints to the "multicultural."

This kind of attitude covers up and renders silent the influence minority writers can have within our culture(s), when they're allowed to be heard. My own knowledge of and love for the English language as a living vehicle of thought and expression whose uses transcend barriers of WASPishness, was nurtured and challenged by a Caribbean-Canadian writer, Claire Harris, who taught me grammar. Her experience is therefore somewhat seeded in mine. Audiences not large enough? It makes me angry. I who have been waiting over a year to read Marlene Nourbese Philip's book, *She Tries Her Tongue*, which won the Casa de las Américas Prize and is still not in print in our shared country, even though I'm sure many publishers have seen it. I've heard her read from it twice and I'm mad as hell that I have to savour the memory of those short readings instead of being able to buy the book. For that matter, I waited many years for Claire Harris's books. And others I'm still waiting for. Their work is part of — and informs and challenges — the culture I participate in, and I need to read their books.

Perhaps if there were more members of "minorities" (human beings who aren't large enough to form an audience, like angels or the heads of pins) working for publishers, on juries, in granting agencies, perhaps if publishers were required to report their hiring practices as other companies using public funding are, I'd have those books right now.

It's doubly surprising to see a critic of free trade, who realizes that the unbridled working of a dominant economy/culture (U.S.A.) on us would be devastating, latch on to these same market forces to defend the lack of access to publication of people from different cultures.

I think Mr. Faucet should realize that it's possible the structure of his own thought and imagination are imbedded in the dominant white patriarchal order. Maybe he should turn off his tap and listen to what those from outside the order are saying. Rather than saying the angels aren't large enough, why not ask why the pinhead is still the measure?

Erin Mouré
Montreal

THE QUESTION of whether racism exists in Canadian writing/publishing seems to me admirably answered by Brian Fawcett in his column "Notes from the Inner Circle." The answer is a resounding "Yes!" The racism emerges in Fawcett's tone, his metaphors, and his reasoning. The tone is one of pure condescension. While Lenore Keeshig-Tobias "browbeat[s]" the audience and displays a "delicious absence of irony," Dr. Moiz Vassanji is "sensible and modest" because, although he points to the existence of racism, he admits to the pressures of the marketplace as well.

Most unfortunate is the metaphor Fawcett employs to lend his article continuity: sacred cows, cattle, cattle-call, cattle prod. The sacred cow image, in this context, is offensive enough; the cattle prod, better known recently as an instrument of crowd control in South Africa than as a device for herding cattle, is shocking.

Finally, there is a peculiar logic in the final two paragraphs. If non-white writers have no audience (or too small an audience to turn a profit for the publisher) because the Canadian readership is not interested in what they have to say, why would that same readership be interested in stories about them written by white writers? A lot of what sells is a product of marketing that suggests both the context and the importance of the work it promotes. Publishers do have a responsibility to promote writers; the cry of the market-place is merely an excuse.

As for the Women's Press matter, Fawcett (and interested readers) might turn to Marlene Nourbese Philip's article in *Fuse* magazine (April-May 1989) for a thoughtful and thorough discussion. The matters arising from events at the Women's Press bring to mind the immense popularity of John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me*, the account of racism in the American South by a white writer who dyed his skin and lived as a black man for a period of time. For over 20 years this book was (and in some places continues to be) on school curricula in both the United States and Canada, while books such as the black writer Richard Wright's *Black Boy* were not.

A telling, perhaps unconscious, mark of racism is difficulty hearing what others have to say; another is an inability to "understand" the issues. Fawcett's column is a telling piece indeed.

Leslie Sanders
Toronto

Brian Fawcett replies:
LESLEY SANDERS's letter demonstrates precisely the attitudes I was talking about: in particular, the demand for self-censorship.

Erin Mouré, however, has a point — but I'm guilty of some bad writing, *not* as charged. I didn't mean to imply (as perhaps I seemed to) that publishing the work of minorities is pointless; and my essential argument is valid. We live in a market-driven economy and culture, to which nobody at the Writers' Union annual general meeting was able to offer coherent alternatives. I pointed these facts out, but that doesn't mean I'm backing the market-place — I don't, and my record on the subject is long, loud, and clear. Mouré's accusation that I'm a "structural" racist because I don't agree exactly with her point of view is a trick worthy of Richard Nixon. It isn't worthy of a Governor General's Award winner and it simply exacerbates the problem all Canadian writers share: how to oppose the general obliteration of cultural specificity that is taking place.

Incidentally, *Books in Canada* does not operate through an editorial collective, and my views don't — and shouldn't — necessarily reflect those of the other editors. The magazine's purpose is to stimulate discourse concerning books and ideas, not to present "correct" or unified cultural values.

LOST IN THE ATWOODS

IN HIS Field Note on the writers' conference in Weyburn (June-July, 1989), Dave Margoshes mentions Dennis Cooley telling "a joke popularized by Margaret Atwood about a brain surgeon and a poet. . . ." I don't know when and where this joke originated, but I do know that Margaret Laurence mentioned it in the famous speech she delivered at Trent University in 1983, *My Final Hour*. Her version: "I am fond of the story about the brain surgeon who, meeting a novelist at a party, says, 'Oh, you're a novelist, eh? When I retire I plan to take up novel writing.' 'How interesting,' the novelist replies. 'When I retire, I plan to take up brain surgery.' "

So could it be that Margaret Laurence was the one to popularize this joke, and not Margaret Atwood? If Cooley did his homework well before he and David Arnason made the last interview ever with Margaret Laurence for *Border Crossings* in the spring of 1986, he should know.

Margaret Atwood seems to be in the limelight a lot and her survival theory has many adepts in Holland. I wonder whether this is so because information-gathering Dutch literati stop in Toronto and have no idea what is happening westward of Ontario, especially in British Columbia. They don't seem to know that Atwood's theory is not the almighty last word on Canadian literature, nor do they seem to realize that in a country the size of Canada it is almost impossible to generalize about Canadian literature,

Letters may be edited for length or to delete potentially libellous statements. Except in extraordinary circumstances, letters of more than 500 words will not be accepted for publication.

and that in British Columbia "writers have more often shown relations between man and nature as harmonious than as hostile" (Allan Pritchard in *Canadian Literature* no. 94, 1982). This harmony with nature, stemming from pioneer days when many immigrants in B.C. thought they had landed in Paradise and, despite the usual hardships, integrated happily, produced and produce a literature far removed from the negative survival themes.

I am not a literary scholar, I am a translator, at present involved in translating Margaret Laurence's Manawaka series into Dutch. This work brought me to Canada for research, where I got acquainted with and interested in other Canadian literature. I don't pretend to know much about it, but the little I learned makes me react with annoyance every time Atwood is quoted as if she wrote the Canadian literary Genesis. I guess I am an atheist when it comes to Atwood's Word.

Edith van Dijk
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

CanWit no. 142

By Barry Baldwin

NORWICH at the foot of an English love letter stands for Nickers Off Ready When I Come Home. Competitors are invited to provide similarly lustful acronyms based on Canadian cities. Example: Tumid Organ Really Outstanding Now Take Over. The prize is $25, and entries should be sent to CanWit no. 142, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide St. E., Suite 432, Toronto, Ontario M5A 3X9. Deadline for entries is December 15.

RESULTS OF CANWIT NO. 140

The request for clerihews on prominent Canadians (living or dead) evoked an entry modest in quantity and quality. Some competitors did not understand the form, although the example provided should have been clear enough. However, a number of efforts caught the right mood, including those of the winner, Edward Baxter, who is to be congratulated for submitting items in both our languages.

Louis-Joseph Papineau
Always knew when it was time to go.
He sat out the battles of '38
Down in the States.

Robert Bourassa
A bien des ennuis, n'est-ce pas?
Il fait chaque nuit le même rêve
Que le Québec entier est en grève.

Honourable Mentions

Samuel de Champlain
Canoed in the rain
And contracted pneumonia
While discovering Huronia
— Tom Hurka, Calgary

Pierre Berton
It seems quite certain
Mined more gold from the Yukon
Than the panners long gone.
— Mary Benham, Winnipeg

SOLUTION TO ACROSTIC NO. 23

Then I laid it on the line: "Ladies and gentlemen, there is a survey coming out this weekend which puts us nineteen points behind the Tories." You could have heard a pin drop. But then it was business as usual. "What," I asked, "are we going to do to get back in the game?"

Keith Davey, *The Rainmaker*, Stoddart (General)

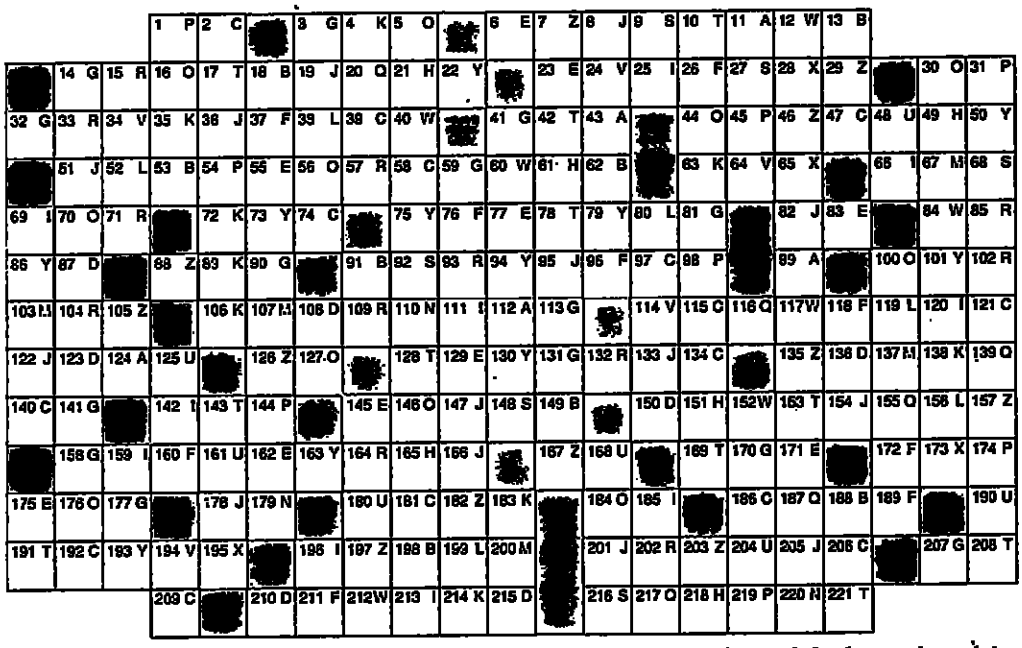
RECEIVED

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:

Adagio, by Felix Leclerc. Bibliotheque Quebecoise.
Alder Music: A Celebration of Our Environment, by Gary Saunders, Breakwater.
Allegro, by Felix Leclerc. Bibliotheque Quebecoise.
Amanuensis, by Phil Hall, Brick/Coldstream.
The Anarchist Papers 2, edited by Dmitrios I. Roussopoulos, Black Rose.
Andante, by Felix Leclerc. Bibliotheque Quebecoise.
Anna's Red Sled, by Patricia Quinlan, illustrated by Lindsay Grater, Annick.
Anne of Windy Poplars, by L.M. Montgomery. M & S.
Apartment Seven: Essays Selected and New, by Miriam Waddington, Oxford.
Aphra Behn: The English Sappho, by George Woodcock, Black Rose.
The Ballad of Mr. Tube, by Pierre Houde, translated by Alan Brown, M & S.
Banked Fires: An Anthology of Newfoundland Poetry, edited by Tom Dawe and Elizabeth Miller, Harry Cuff.
Barefoot on the Prairie, by Ferne Nelson, Western Producer Prairie Books.
Benjamin and the Pillow Saga, by Stephane Poulin, Annick.
The Beothuk of Newfoundland: A Vanished People, by Ingeborg Marshall, Breakwater.
The Best of The Spirit of Cooking, by Paul Warwick, The Spirit of Cooking Publishing.
A Big City ABC, by Allan Mcak, Tundra.
Bill Mustard, Surgical Pioneer, by Marilyn Dunlop, Dundurn.
Bluenose Master: The Memoirs of Captain Ernest K. Hartlig, Hounslow.
Casey's Carousel, by Laurel Dee Gugler, illustrated by Veronkia Martenova Charles, Black Moss.
The Cat's Night Out, by Hanne Brandi, illustrated by Niels Bo Bojensen, Breakwater.
The Celestial Corkscrew, by Ralph Gustafson, Mosaic.
Child of the Holocaust, by Jack Kuper, Seal.
Cold Blood II, edited by Peter Sellers, Mosaic.
A Collection of Memories, by Jessie Mifflen, Harry Cuff.
Communication For and Against Democracy, edited by Marc Raboy and Peter A. Bruck, Black Rose.
Cry of the Eagle: Encounters with a Cree Healer, by David Young et al., U of T.
Effie's Bath, by R. Thompson and E. Fernandes, Annick.
Egg-Carton Zoo II, by Rudi Haas et al., Oxford.
Familiar Amphibians & Reptiles of Ontario, by Bob Johnson, Natural Heritage.
Feminism: From Pressure to Politics, edited by Angela Miles and Geraldine Finn, Black Rose.
The Fine Art of Murder, by Anthony Quogan, Harper & Collins.
Folksongs of New Brunswick, by Edward D. Ives, Goose Lane.
Freedom and Authority, by William R. McKercher, Black Rose.
A Gathering of Ghosts, by Robin Skelton and Jean Kozocari, Western Producer Prairie Books.
Getting the Most Out of Your Child's School, by L. John Gasson and E. Paul Baxter, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.
The Gift of Love, by Gloria Guenther, Kindred.
God, Scepticism and Modernity, by Kai Nielsen, University of Ottawa.
Good-bye to the Sugar Refinery, by Patience Wheatley, Goose Lane.
The Great French Revolution, by Peter Kropotkin, Black Rose.
Green Woods and Blue Waters, by Harold G. Paddon, Breakwater.
High Spirits: Strange and Uncanny Tales, by Robertson Davies, Penguin.
Highway Geology of the Hawaiian Islands, edited by Robert Michael Easton et al., Easton Enterprises.
The Honey Drum: Seven Tales from Arab Lands, by Gwendolyn MacEwen, Mosaic.
Houses of Snow, Skin and Bones, by Bonnie Shemie, Tundra.
I'll Do It Myself, by Jirina Marton, Annick.
Immigrant, by Stephen Gill, Vesta.
Individual Family Community: Judeo-Psychological Perspectives, by Reuven P. Bulka, Mosaic.
Kesten, by Yves Theriault, Bibliotheque Quebecoise.
L'Appelante, by Yves Theriault, Bibliotheque Quebecoise.
Le Sorcier d'Anticosti, by Robert Choquette, Bibliotheque Quebecoise.
A Legionnaire's Journey, by Leslie Aparvary, Detselig.
The Lightning Bolt, by Michael Bedard, illustrated by Regulo Ricci, Oxford.
Martin Meeker and Pauline Lagrande, by Else Breen, illustrated by Vivian Zahl Olsen, Annick.
Memoirs of a Revolutionist, by Peter Kropotkin, Black Rose.
Moons and Waves and Other Poems, by Stephen Gill, Vesta.
Monsters, He Mumbled, by sean o huigin, illustrated by John Fraser and Scott Hughes, Black Moss.
Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution, by Peter Kropotkin, Black Rose.
My Cow Bessie, by Gabrielle Roy, translated by Alan Brown, M & S.
The Mysterious North: Encounters with the Canadian Frontier, 1947-1954, by Pierre Berton, M & S.
A New House, by Cecile Gagnon and Darcia Labrosse, translated by Patricia Claxton, M & S.
No Greater Love, by Sheila Martindale, Moonstone.
No Hay Fever & A Railway, Willa Walker, Goose Lane.
Nonbook Materials: The Organization of Integrated Collections, by Jean Weihs, Canadian Library Association.
Norman's Snowball, by Hazel Hutchins, illustrated by Ruth Ohi, Annick.
A Northern Alphabet, by Ted Harrison, Tundra.
Nothing Too Good for a Cowboy, by Richmond P. Hobson Jr., M & S.
Now Back to You Dick: Two Lifetimes in Hockey, by Dick Irvin, M & S.
Oscar Wilde: The Double Image, by George Woodcock, Black Rose.
The Oxford Book of Canadian Military Anecdotes, edited by Victor Suthren, Oxford.
Pale as Real Ladies: Poems for Pauline Johnson, by Joan Crate, Brick.
Partners in Enterprise: The Worker Ownership Phenomenon, edited by Jack Quarter and George Melnyk, Black Rose.
Peas Please, by Andrea Wayne-van Konigslow, Black Moss.
Planet Harbor, by Brian Bartlett, Goose Lane.
Redfaced Sheep, by John B. Lee, Brick/Coldstream.
Riding on the Roar of the Crowd: A Hockey Anthology, edited by David Gowdey, Macmillan.
River Rats: The People of the Thousand Islands, by Shawn Thompson, General Store.
Rooms: Milongas for Prince Arthur Street, by Renato Trujillo, Goose Lane.
The Sand Horse, by Ann Turnbull, illustrated by Michael Foreman, M & S.
Scoop Jones, by Katie Gillmor Ellis, Prentice-Hall.
A Short Walk in the Rain, by Hugh Hood, Porcupine's Quill.
Simon and the Wind, by Gilles Tibo, Tundra.
So Much to Tell You. . . . by John Marsden, Western Producer Prairie Books.
A Story of Jean, by Susan Gaitskell, illustrated by Laurie Lafrance, Oxford.
Straight No Chaser, by Jack Batten, Macmillan.
Ten Big Babies, by Robert Priest, illustrated by Katherine Hekner, Black Moss.
To Asmara, by Thomas Keneally, Lester & Orpen Dennys.
Trails of the Avalon: Hiking in Eastern Newfoundland, by Peter Gard and Bridget Nesme, Gallows Cove.
True Poetry: Traditional and Popular Verse in Ontario, by Pauline Greenhill, McGill-Queen's.
Twelve Kids One Cow, by Ken Ward, Annick.
The Two Psychiatries: The Transformation of Psychiatric Work in Saskatchewan 1905-1984, by Harley D. Dickinson, Canadian Plains Research Center.
Unexpected Fictions: New Icelandic Canadian Writing, edited by Kristjana Gunnars, Turnstone.
Upper Cape Poems, by Douglas Lochead, Goose Lane.
Women Married to Alcoholics, by Morris Kokin, Macmillan.
Women and Counter Power, edited by Yolande Cohen, Black Rose.
Wonder Struck II, by Bob McDonald and Eric Grace, CBC.
Writing Saskatchewan: 20 Critical Essays, edited by Kenneth G. Probert, Canadian Plains Research Center.

CanLit acrostic no. 24

By Mary D. Trainer



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

A. Water nymph — 124 99 112 11 43

B. Football cup named after this Governor General: 2 wds. — 149 53 91 188 198 18 13 62

C. Comedy team: 3 wds. — 186 192 134 2 74 58 115 209 / 208 47 181 140 39 97 121

D. Tasty marine aquaculture products — 108 136 150 87 123 215 210

E. B.C. site of annual world class airshow — 77 145 23 162 55 171 83 129 / 175 6

F. CBC's new TV channel — 98 76 172 160 26 211 118 37 / 189

G. Tennis star: 2 wds. — 113 41 177 59 14 32 81 158 / 207 90 141 131 170 3

H. Eighth part of a circle — 49 218 151 21 165 61

I. Insurance company formed in 1870s: 2 wds. — 196 120 25 69 142 111 66 213 / 185 159

J. This company plagued Alberta investors: 2 wds. — 210 122 95 154 133 36 19 178 / 8 166 205 82 147 51

K. Long river rising in the Columbia Icefield — 63 72 4 183 35 89 106 138 / 214

L. Transparent acid — 80 199 156 52 38 119

M. Genus of plants in the lily family — 107 67 137 200 103

N. Single — 110 179 220

O. Summer '89 Manitoba disasters: 2 wds. — 44 184 146 5 30 16 127 56 / 70 176 100

P. LSD user — 174 54 1 144 219 31 45 98

Q. Stirred abortion controversy — 116 217 187 155 20 139

R. Governor General 1921-26: 2 wds. — 102 164 33 57 202 85 132 93 / 109 71 15 104

S. Energize — 92 68 216 9 146 27

T. Goods & Services Tax: 2 wds. — 42 169 208 17 128 153 76 10 / 191 143 221

U. Monk — 125 48 190 204 161 180 188

V. Resolve, disentangle — 114 64 194 34 24

W. Set right — 152 117 212 12 60 84 40

X. Watched sharply — 28 195 173 65

Y. Take quickly and secretly, especially without permission: 3 wds. — 86 193 50 101 163 94 22 75 / 79 130 73

Z. Rabbit: 2 wds. — 135 29 167 203 46 157 126 7 / 68 197 182 105

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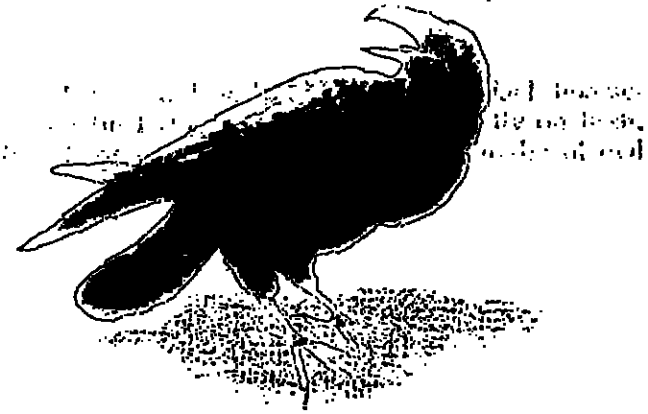

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