

JOAN GIVNER ON ALL THE GLITTERING LITERARY PRIZES

A National Review

November 1994 \$3.25

BOOKS IN CANADA



KENNETH

J. HARVEY

Closing in for the Kill

Sorry About the Delay: JULIE JOHNSTON'S

Long Road to Fame and Fortitude

E.G. PACI'S *Discipline of Discovery*

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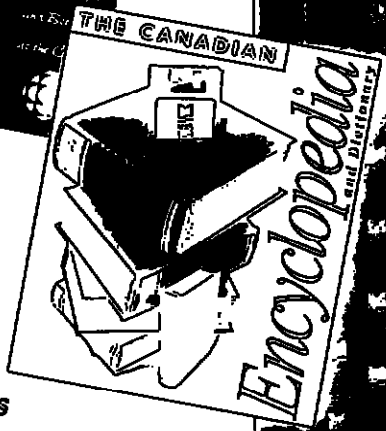
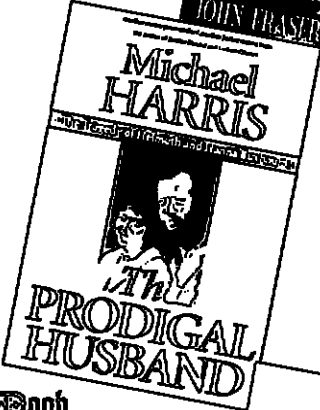
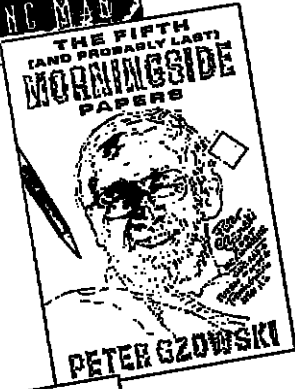
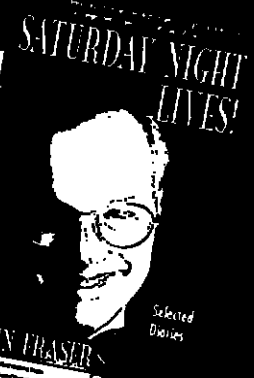
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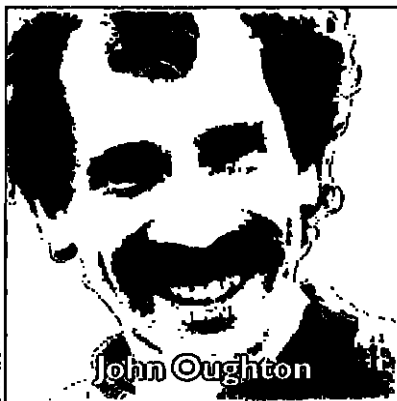
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Jack Batten's latest book is *Class of '75* (Macmillan). Dan Bortolotti is the reviews editor of *Paragraph* magazine. Robin Britt is a Toronto freelance writer. Mary Dalton's most recent poetry collection is *Allowing the Light* (Breakwater). Anne Denoon is a Toronto writer and editor. John Doyle is a Toronto journalist. Brian Fawcett's most recent book is *Gender Wars* (Somerville House). George Galt is a Toronto writer. Maureen McCallum Garvie is a writer living in Kingston, Ont. Carole Giangrande is the author of *Missing Persons* (Cormorant), a collection of short fiction. Joan Givner's most recent book is *The Self-Portrait of a Literary Biographer* (University of Georgia). Sheryl Halpern is a Montreal writer. Julie Jenkinson is the managing editor of *Border/Lines* magazine. Julie Johnston's latest book is *Adam and Eve and Pinch-Me* (Lester). Janice Kulyk Keefer's latest book is *Rest Harrow* (Random House). Mary Millar is a writer living in Kingston, Ont. Colin Morton is an Ottawa poet; his novel, *Oceans Apart*, is forthcoming from Quarry in the spring. John Oughton's new collection of poetry, *Counting Out the Millennium*, will be published by a press in Texas next year. Janet Power is a photographer living in Burnt Head, Nfld. Nancy Reid is a Toronto illustrator. Diane Schoemperlen's latest book is *In the Language of Love* (HarperCollins). Fred Sharpe is a Toronto puzzle enthusiast. Fiona Smyth is a Toronto artist; she writes and illustrates *Nocturnal Emissions* (Vortex). Glenn Sumi is a Toronto writer and editor. Merna Summers's most recent book is *North of Battle* (Douglas & McIntyre), a collection of short fiction. Carolyne A. Van Der Meer is a Montreal writer. Martin Waxman's collection of stories, *Everything in Winnipeg Begins in a Car*, has just been published by Black Moss. ○

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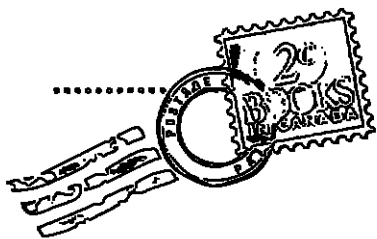
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THE ASSISTANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO
THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE,
TOURISM AND RECREATION IS ACKNOWLEDGED



Letters

Avoiding Labels

IN HIS INDIGNANT RESPONSE to my review of Brian Fawcett's *Gender Wars* (Letters, September), Stan Persky wonders where I've been for the last half-century while he and the rest of the clued-in literati have been arguing about genre and postmodernism. Mostly I've been trying to avoid labels. True, I can only account for the last 20 years or so, but during that time I've read and reviewed enough books to know that there is no limit to the amount of literary theory some writers and their friends will come up with to justify their own inability to tell a story that will engage readers. As Isaac Singer said, "the various schools and 'isms' of literature were invented by professors. Only small fish swim in schools."

Storytelling is, I recognize, a rare and considerable talent, but that's no reason to pretend it's not a necessary one for a novelist. What's more, Persky should be careful about associating Fawcett with Naipaul, Kundera, and Calvino. It might make *Persky* look "provincial and bush-league." To paraphrase the remark made to Dan Quayle in the vice-presidential debate, I've read Naipaul and Fawcett is no Naipaul.

Joel Yanofsky
Montreal

"Victorian" Values

IT WAS WITH A GREAT DEAL OF satisfaction that I read Victoria Branden's two articles, "Get That Grin Off Your Face!" (February) and "No Sex, Please, We're Gents" (Summer). Her sharp analysis has accurately described my own feelings of discomfort and embarrassment when first reading *A Jest of God* many years ago, and since then while reading the awkward step-by-step descriptions by many writers of what was never

meant to be a spectator sport. The shock value of such explicit details has long since petered out. Alice Munro is one of the few writers who manages to write about sex and make it an integral part of her stories.

In spite of all the clinical descriptions, the act of sex is still somewhat of a mystery, and for purposes of fiction, better left so. Anyone supporting these opinions, of course, stands in danger of being labelled quaint and prissy. Lynn Crosbie's rude condescension in "Sexual Positions" (September), her savage reaction to Victoria Branden's essays, is revealing. Someone once said that in any argument, the one who gets mad first loses. Well, Lynn Crosbie is certainly mad, very mad.

Doreen Sookacheff
Victoria, B.C.

SO LYNN CROSBIE FINDS Victoria Branden's views "horrifying"? Dear me. I think that such a label is better attached to postmodernism, deconstruction, and radical feminism. How'll we ever find a common ground? And one more question: I wonder why you felt it necessary to publish a "Rebuttal" to Victoria Branden in the first place. Almost no other articles get "rebutted." Do I detect a note of shame at sticking up for "Victorian" values? Shame!

Paul R. Sheppard
Brockville, Ont.

Allowed To Be Good

IN HER REVIEW ARTICLE "OUT in the World" (September), Diane Schoemperlen's observation that the new writers of Canadian short fiction appear to be well travelled, well read, and "citizens of the world" is a thoughtful one.

One would think that this quality, especially when combined with writing talent,

should be a condition for pride and excitement. Yet world class, for Schoemperlen, does not seem to coexist with excellence. To berate Patricia Robertson's fine debut collection, *City of Orphans*, for being (as I read it) *too good* ("each sentence honed to a level of intense perfection") is to somehow fall back on a (sadly) typically Canadian reaction: this is really good; there must be something wrong with it.

Instead of such paranoid suspicion (or jealousy?) perhaps reviewers in this country might wake up and at least give grudging credit where outright praise is due. Robertson is one of the most exciting new voices to emerge in years. Aren't first books *allowed* to be this good?

Rhonda Batchelor
Victoria, B.C.

One Brick Shy of a Load

IN MY PREVIOUS LETTER, WHICH you kindly printed in the September issue, I inadvertently left the name of John Donlan out of the list of Brick Books editors. It doesn't matter that you listed me as being from Toronto, whereas I still live in London, but that error might as well be corrected while we're at it.

Stam Dragland
London, Ont.

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.

Books in Canada offers sincere thanks to the North American Watch Company of Canada Ltd. for the donation of a prize for our booth at the 1994 Word on the Street: Toronto Book and Magazine Fair. The winner is Marie Muckleston.

BY PAUL STUEWE

Closing in for the Kill

Kenneth J. Harvey knows what he wants, and it looks like he's going to get it

KENNETH J. HARVEY BURST ONTO THE CANADIAN LITERARY SCENE IN 1990, when his collection of short stories *Directions for an Opened Body* (Mercury) earned a Commonwealth Prize nomination. Since then, the 32-year-old Newfoundlander has published *Brud*, a novel short-listed for the SmithBooks/Books in Canada First Novel Award, and another short-story collection, *The Hole That Must Be Filled*, both published by Little, Brown. His most recent book is *Stalkers* (Stoddart), a thriller. He spoke with Paul Stuewe in Toronto.

BiC: Let's start out by talking about *Stalkers*, a novel that is a bit of a departure from your previous work.

Kenneth J. Harvey: What it's about, the moral of the story, is "take care of your children or else someone's going to swallow them." *Stalkers* is about runaway children, abused children, who fall into the hands of people who make pornographic videos.

BiC: Nonetheless, some people will read *Stalkers* and say that this is just an excuse for a lot of sex and violence.

Harvey: Of course.

BiC: Will they be right?

Harvey: Partially. I do think I'm giving people something that they want. As far as I'm concerned, the killer in me is the killer in you. But the main reason I wrote *Stalkers* was to get away from literature for a while. I've been submerged in Canadian literature — for the last couple of years I've read almost nothing else, and then of course I've been writing — I have four novels and a collection of short stories ready to be published. So I said "Enough." The type of literary fiction I do is so intense that I can only work on it for a few hours a day; the title story of my collection *The Hole That Must Be Filled* (Little, Brown, 1994), for example, required a kind of dense eloquence that had to be sustained without sounding melodramatic. It took me two years to write that story.

But what's happened now is that some people have read *Stalkers*, a literary agent among them, and said, "This is all you

should be doing — why would you want to write literary stuff when you can write a thriller as good as this?" I sat down to write a thriller because my literary style had come to seem a bit claustrophobic, you're dealing with your own turf, your own characters, and you can only do so much with that.

BiC: So *Stalkers* should have been subtitled "Harvey Takes a Holiday"?

Harvey: Yes. *Stalkers* is written in a more accessible, mass-market style, but I think my literary style is in there too. Nobody in Canada is writing thrillers like this, formula thrillers intended to sell. I'm not talking about polite Canadian mysteries, I'm talking about thrillers. Joy Fielding is the only Canadian writer who's done them. In Canada publishing is such a literary business . . .

BiC: True, it's still quite genteel, to the point that even Canadian mystery novels tend to be less graphically violent and sexually frank than their foreign counterparts. Even when we slaughter one another we like to do it politely.

Harvey: The idea seems to be "Excuse me, sir, I'm Canadian, please let me sit down here, I won't make any noise." If you're Canadian and you write something like *Stalkers*, you're considered a whore by the literary types. But I believe that if you're a writer, you should be able to write almost anything, just as musicians can play almost anything — they make a living playing weddings or whatever and then spend the rest of the time working on what they really want to do.



Janet Fournier/Janet Fournier Productions

.....

BiC: But you're not planning on giving up on literature, are you?

Harvey: No, not at all. I'm just putting the finishing touches on a literary novel narrated by a husband and a wife, one of whom is a paranoid schizophrenic but the reader doesn't know which. And I've almost finished another short-story collection, *The Flesh So Close*, which will be coming out in 1996.

BiC: Your first book, *Directions for an Opened Body* (Mercury Press, 1990), is a wonderful collection of short fiction that hardly anyone except *Books in Canada* reviewed, even though it was nominated for a Commonwealth Prize.

Harvey: When that book came out political correctness was just becoming significant, and there's a lot of stuff said there — as well as in *The Hole That Must Be Filled* — that isn't politically correct. In "Ballerina," a husband is accused of sexually abusing his daughter. He hasn't, and the only reason he is being accused of it is so that his wife can get back at him. There are a lot of things like that in the book, maybe that's why no one reviewed it.

I've always had a problem with people who say you can't write about some things, you can only hint at them. As far as I'm concerned, you can write about anything you want to write about, as graphically, as explicitly, as you feel necessary. You can spend four pages writing explicitly about your fingerprints, that's fine, but it becomes a problem if you describe sexual acts in the same detail. Why would anyone complain about explicit violence or explicit sex whereas they would never complain about explicit fingerprint description? There are two basic human drives: one is reproduction, the other is eating. And you'll find food or eating described in some detail in most fiction. And yet if you pick up a book in which sex occurs, forget it, fade to black, it will probably end almost before it begins.

.....

BiC: Let's talk about your novel *Brud* (Little, Brown, 1992), which might be described as your metaphysical or religious opus. *Brud* is a simpleton who functions as a kind of litmus test, it's the way people react to him that propels the plot along. What part of Kenneth Harvey does *Brud* come from?

Harvey: That book was a gift. I just sat down and wrote the first draft in five or six weeks, although it wasn't published until eight years later.

BiC: Distrust of, perhaps even fear of, the city is a major aspect of the novel.

same sensibility that wrote *Directions for an Opened Body*, but there are some major differences. It seemed to me that there was a significant increase in descriptive detail and graphicness, as well as some lessening of ambiguity and subtlety — everything was more explicitly spelled out.

Harvey: Some of that was a backlash to the political correctness phenomenon. The story "The One," for example, is written from a woman's point of view, and there are no holds barred, no literary holding back; but there's a sense of mysticism in it, too, that people have generally overlooked in talking about my work. When I

up in Newfoundland, which was in a city — St. John's — that no one was writing about.

BiC: One of the images that mainland Canadians have of St. John's is that the police force does not carry guns, which probably leads us to think that it must be a quiet, drowsy place.

Harvey: It isn't. It's a hard place. There are drug dealers, prostitutes, crazy people, people walking up and down the streets carrying baseball bats. "Small Ones Disturb the Biggest," one of the stories that will be in my next collection, is based on an incident a police officer told me about, just an unbelievable thing. The policeman went into a house where a guy had been impaled by a crowbar, was pinned to the wall

BiC: So there are times when life can be even worse than a Kenneth Harvey story.

Harvey: Oh yeah! (*laughs*) A lot of my stuff comes from life, from things that I've seen or been told and have turned into my own kind of fiction.

BiC: Who were the mystery and thriller writers you read before writing *Stalkers*?

Harvey: Mickey Spillane, Raymond Chandler, Mary Higgins Clark — I love them all. But it's not so much that the writers you read influence you as that they turn on lights that are already in your head.

BiC: Mickey Spillane? Who's usually dismissed as a crude, fascistic, ultra-violent meathead by more genteel mystery readers?

Harvey: Yes, I like him. But I also like Tolstoy and Paul Bowles.

BiC: Spillane's kind of writing doesn't seem to exist in Canada.

Harvey: No. On the other hand, there are a lot of Canadian writers who never should have been published, and are published only because they're stroking the right body parts and hanging around with the right people.

BiC: Would you care to name names?

Harvey: No, they know who they are.

You have to get out there and market yourself — no one else is going to do it for you'

Harvey: I'm a firm believer in living in the country; it wasn't until I moved out to the country recently that I gained a sense of epiphany, that I could sense perfection. Cities are about being territorial, invading someone else's space. There are too many people in too little space. *Brud* leaves the country to come into the city, where everybody starts leeching off him and all the conflict begins. He is a holy figure, I suppose he symbolizes a simple God — not in a derogatory sense, just that God must be simple, which is why the meek will inherit the earth, and why we aren't as distant from the animals as we like to think we are.

BiC: And then, after you appeared to have become more literarily respectable by talking about themes and symbols and so on, you quickly disabused your readers of that notion by publishing a short-story collection called *The Hole That Must Be Filled*. These stories are clearly from the

was on tour promoting *The Hole That Must Be Filled* I noticed that younger people were really enthusiastic about it; there seems to be a strong backlash against political correctness, especially among young people. Many of them find it easy to identify with the book — I think they see the hope in it. Some of the stories are very grim, but there's humour in them, too. When you're down low, either you get a sense of humour or you're dead. That's why in Newfoundland, where we've gone through really hard times, we've learned that the only way to get through adversity is to have a sense of humour.

BiC: Speaking of Newfoundland, you've been quoted as saying that you're consciously reacting against the idea of being regional, or quaint, or some sort of cute anecdotalist.

Harvey: It's more inadvertent than conscious, more of a reaction to where I grew

BiC: Who are the Canadian writers you do like?

Harvey: Terry Jordan. He's a new voice I really, really like. Timothy Findley is one of the few people who write "big books" that I actually enjoy reading, that I can't put down — he has his own voice, but he also writes in very different styles, and he knows how to hold the reader's attention. I like Mavis Gallant, Alice Munro, Sharon Butala, Douglas Glover, I think Alistair MacLeod is one of the greatest writers of all time.

BiC: Let's go back to your observation about the youthfulness of your audience. You're no Methuselah yourself, you're in your early 30s, you could even fake being a member of Generation X

Harvey: Yecch! I've no time for that, I can't relate to it, I think it's just pop culture and it'll soon disappear just like every other pop-culture fad.

BiC: Are you part of a generation?

Harvey: I guess I'm a '70s person. It's really weird, the '60s was all peace and love, everyone loved everyone else, the '70s was drugs and self-destruction, *Bright Lights, Big City*. But nobody will know who Jay McInerney is 10 years from now, just as nobody will know who Doug Coupland is 20 years from now. Maybe they will transmutate and become something else, but they're writing about such topical things that they're going to date very quickly. But I've never been into pop culture, which is what writers like McInerney and Coupland are all about.

BiC: But you're a Mickey Spillane fan, surely he's pop culture?

Harvey: I suppose so, but he's stood the test of time. If people are still reading Doug Coupland in 20 years, okay, he'll have passed the test too — although I don't think he will. But to get back to the generation question, in the '80s everyone wanted to live forever, people started saving them-

selves, and now in the '90s ugly has become beautiful, it's okay to be a loser, there are pop songs about "You're the ugliest thing I've ever seen, I think I love you."

BiC: I'm not so sure that's true of pop culture in general, which still seems to be obsessed with Michael Jackson's sexuality and murder among the glamorous O. J. Simpson set. But I suppose it's an aspect of pop culture — MuchMusic might give it five minutes every couple of hours.

Harvey: As far as music goes Canada is really surging now, the Tragically Hip and Bryan Adams are big all over the world. The Tragically Hip are incredibly talented and there's no doubt that they're Canadian, but they also do their own thing and say whatever the hell they want. I'd like to think I'm the same way — I'm proud to be Canadian but I see that as a freedom, not a limitation.

BiC: Speaking as a cultural nationalist, I'm concerned that we don't get overwhelmed in the process, especially by the United States, when we start orienting ourselves to other cultures.

Harvey: I'm concerned about it, too. I'm a firm believer in limiting the number of channels coming in and foreign movies and so on.

BiC: Canadian-content requirements are precisely the reason why we have such a successful — artistically as well as commercially — music industry. As far as literature goes, we've got an unsatisfactory compromise in which we subsidize production but don't do much to assist distribution and consumption. As a result we produce a large number of books that aren't carried in most bookstores and simply aren't available to potential readers.

Harvey: Part of it is the writers; you have to think about what people want to read, about what you can write for them without compromising yourself. This is a business, even though some people don't seem to

realize that. This is one of the reasons I find publishers so frustrating. If you call your publisher and want to get some information about your book, they go "Uh...um... why do you want to know that?" "Bad author," they think, "difficult person," "what business is it of his?" "Why should he want to know what we're doing with his life?" That's their mentality. I've dealt with several publishers now, and they're all the same, they all say the same things. I've been thinking of writing an article about it, although I suppose I might get tarred and feathered and drummed out of the business. But it's true, if I wanted business information from my associates — and I've operated several businesses in other fields over the years, so I think I know what I'm talking about — and was told the kind of thing publishers have said to me, I'd question their competence. I mean, if you ask a publisher how many copies of your book were printed, they say something like "I don't know ... we gave away so many we can't remember ... it was either 2,000 or 3,500, somewhere around there." Then you ask them if there isn't *someone* who knows, and they spin their gears for a while and still can't come up with the answer. Publishing is one of the most screwed-up businesses I've ever been involved with.

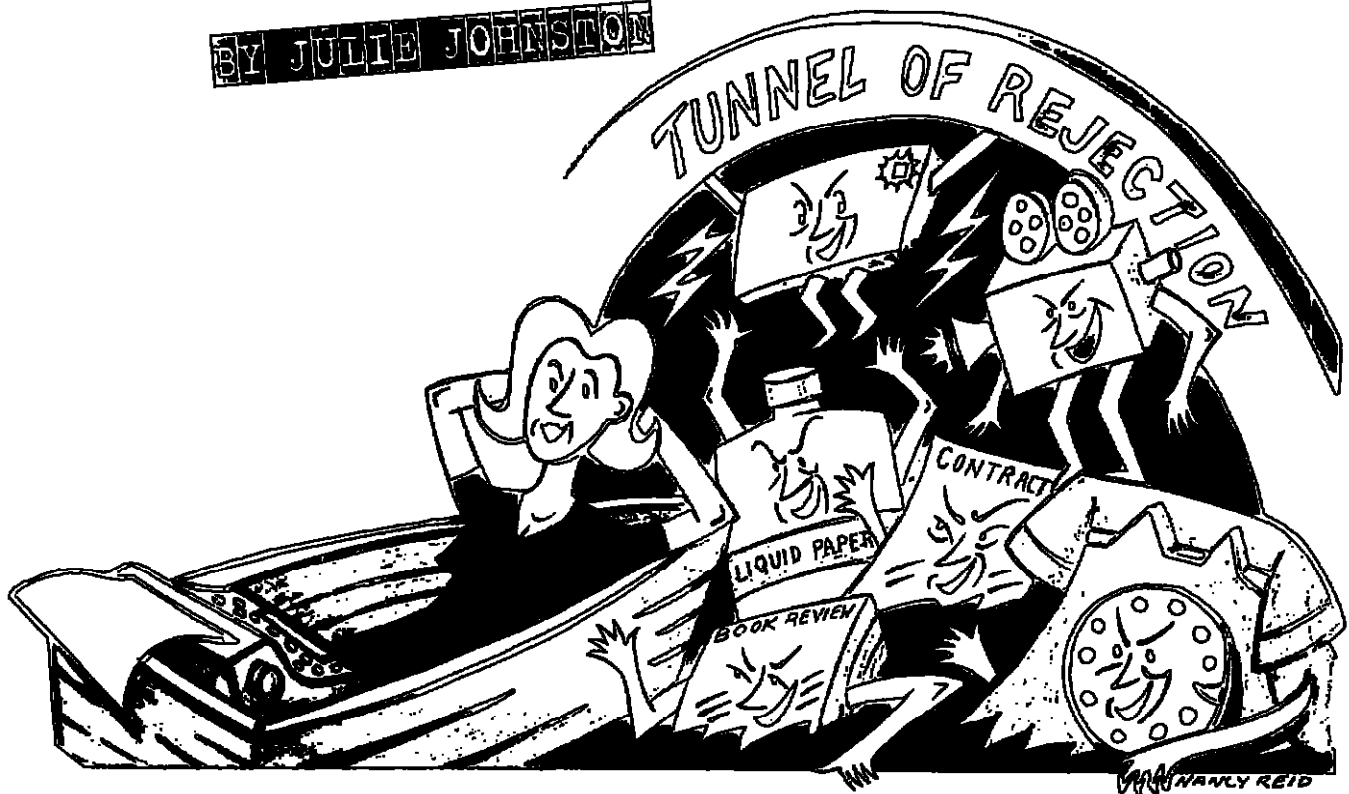
BiC: Which must be part of the reason why you spend so much time and effort promoting yourself.

Harvey: Some people think this makes me a "bad boy," but I don't go out there and say things and get myself quoted just because I like to shoot off my mouth. That's not what I do. I only say things that I believe to be true and that no one else is saying. I don't think this is a game. And when I do have something to say, I know how to say it so that the media will pay attention and pick up on it. You have to get out there and market yourself — no one else is going to do it for you. ○

Sorry for the Delay ...

But if at first you don't succeed
in getting your novel published,
you'll have to try, try again

BY JULIE JOHNSTON



Jan. 24, 1984

I have just returned from an interview with Timothy Findley, who is writer-in-residence at Trent. I'm writing this down immediately. He said one of my stories was "just a killer" and another was "wonderfully moving." He said, "Time to do something longer, a novel or a book of connected short stories ... Keep bombarding Canadian editors ... Don't write for yourself, but don't write for a set audience. The audience comes to you as you write." Okay. I've paid my dues in terms of getting published and getting rejected. I'm ready to write a novel.

Mar. 6, 1985

I've been thinking about why I haven't seriously tried to

write a novel. Maybe it's like my indecision about starting an M.A., a question of dedication. No, it's a question of energy. It's easy to be dedicated if you love what you're doing. It's the energy required to maintain the degree of dedication to complete the thing that bothers me. In the case of a novel — do I have enough energy to remain dedicated for a year, two years, three? To something that may never see the light of day?

Feb. 2, 1986

Well, I've written a novel. Four hundred-odd hand-scrawled pages! It's about an adolescent and is quite good, but not the kind of children's book that actually sells. Maybe there's too much adult irony. Maybe I wrote it for myself.

ILLUSTRATION BY NANCY REID

It's set in 1947. Writing about the past is like eating comfort food. It's heartening.

Apr. 3, 1986

Sent a synopsis and the first 50 pages of *Hero of Lesser Causes* to Lester & Orpen Dennys. Read that this publisher is interested in quality hard-cover material only. Not sure whether I'm being a realist or an egotist?

Letter from L&OD dated

Sept. 5, 1986

"I must apologize for being so slow in getting back to you about the sample of *Hero of Lesser Causes*. It's a most appealing work." They said to send the whole manuscript.

Letter from L&OD dated

Oct. 17, 1986

"Thank you very much for letting us read your novel. I apologize for the slowness over it. It is a delightful story in many ways, and Keely is a strong and original character...." However, "I regret to say that we are not prepared to make you an offer at this point." Rats! They felt it had great potential and would offer me advice. I am to meet with the editor in Toronto to discuss the manuscript's problems. This is very generous, actually. A glimmer of hope.

December 1986

Have rewritten *Hero* and sent it back to L&OD.

Apr. 9, 1987

Sent *Hero* to James Lorimer.

June 18, 1987

Wrote L&OD to see what's up with *Hero*.

Letter from L&OD dated

June 24, 1987

"I do apologize for the delay" (six months). "Sorry to say it's not for us... We have little experience in the YA market and therefore have to be cautious... Best

of luck." Manuscript returned. (And all the Royal Irish best of luck to you, too.)

June 1987

Hero returned from Lorimer. Thanks but no thanks. June is a dirty month.

September 1987

Sent *Hero* to the Colbert Agency. No dice. Buried *Hero* on the bottom shelf of my cupboard. And wept. They all hate my writing and they hate me too.

Spring 1988

Started a new novel, which seems to be about hunger and alienation. I feel pretty good about attempting another novel. It's like getting back up on the horse after it's bucked you off.

Aug. 6, 1988

Watched an eclipse of the moon. I think it will make its way into my new book. My main character is turning out to be a bit cynical.

Oct. 30, 1988

Resurrected *Hero* and showed it to Budge Wilson, who has had several children's books published. She was very encouraging.

November 1988

Finished the first draft of new novel about a sarcastic 15-year-old and have stuck it in a drawer to simmer. Once again revising *Hero*. I am such a masochist.

Jan. 17, 1989

Sent *Hero* to Greenwood.

May 17, 1989

Hero came back. Severe depression. Can't write.

May 24, 1989

Budge heard that L&OD has hired an editor for children's books. She advises me to phone and mention the earlier interest shown in *Hero*. I may live to see another day.

May 25, 1989

L&OD's new editor, Kathy Lowinger, asked to see the whole manuscript as well as the first editor's comments. I'm pretending not to hope. Instead, I consider the number of postal workers whose wages I'm supporting.

Aug. 22, 1989

Letter from Kathy L. "Sorry for the delay," she begins. This is apparently the standard editorial opening line. She is interested in *Hero* and wants to work with me to get it up to publishing level.

Oct. 6, 1989

Kathy L. phoned after I sent her four revised chapters and said, "If the rest is as good, I think we have a book here." My heart thumps. I think I love this editor-person more than life itself. I go around laughing out loud.

Apr. 24, 1990

I have done a total rewrite. Deep-sixed eight extraneous characters and ditched several fascinating but confusing subplots. Drove to Toronto to deliver the manuscript. Supporting Shell gas now, rather than the post office. Again, Kathy said, if the rest is as good as the first few chapters, etc. The old scary IF. Better not count my chickens. But wait! I *have* counted my chickens, dammit. They aren't going to drop me flat now. K. said I would hear soon. I live beside the phone.

May 31, 1990

I have had five anxious weeks of waiting but K. finally phoned to say they would publish *Hero*. I went out onto the veranda roof and shouted the news to my neighbour, who was raking her lawn. I think she wonders what kind of substance I'm abusing. The reason for the delay was that L&OD has been sold! Not to worry, K. said, all projects will go ahead, including mine, which is to be published in the fall of '91.

June 1990

Waiting for written confirmation that my book will be published.

August 1990

Waiting for a contract.

September 1990

Contract came. Wrong one. It was for an illustrator. Sent it back.

October 1990

Got a contract, this time for an author. A step in the right direction. Rumours are flying about L&OD's future being precarious.



Dec. 19, 1990

L&OD has not sent back my co-signed contract. When I phoned, the contract person said everything was fine and that they would call me back. I'm not convinced. I thought the mere promise of a book to be published would be my redemption. It isn't. I need evidence.

Jan. 3, 1991

Still no contract. Phoned K. to find out what's going on. I've dropped Shell Gas and Canada Post and am now supporting Bell. Talking to K. at L&OD was like talking to someone at a funeral parlour.

Their jobs are in jeopardy. She said she will help me place my manuscript with HarperCollins, General, or Greenwood.

Jan. 9, 1991

K. phoned at 6:00 p.m. to say that Hees International, the corporation that owns them, has sacked them all. L&OD is entering into a sales and marketing services agreement with Key Porter Books to handle their backlist. She said Key Porter might be interested in my manuscript and that they would call me on the 14th. It's my manuscript, but good grief, it's their jobs! Hard to see things in perspective sometimes.

Jan. 14, 1991

Key Porter didn't call. Getting good at waiting. I'm back at the helm. I've stopped feeling sorry for myself and intend to publish or perish. As the first half-century of my life draws to a close, the latter seems a distinct possibility.

Mar. 4, 1991

Key Porter is only lukewarm about *Hero* because of the cost involved in producing a small number — 3,000 books. They said to try elsewhere.

Mar. 13, 1991

Had a letter from Key Porter saying they may do it if they can get a co-edition in the United States to make it profitable. I am at liberty to withdraw it and try other publishers. I think I've been on this merry-go-round before. Phoned K. yet again. Getting a feeling for this game. When in doubt get on the blower.

Mar. 27, 1991

K. thinks *Hero* needs more work to establish it from a child's point of view. Maybe put it in the first person. Not a difficult job, K. maintains, but advises not doing anything until I get a contract from Key Porter. Someone will call me.

Later. No one called me. This is either a lame-brained soap opera or an epic

tragedy. My stress level has reached new heights.

April 1991

I am a driven woman. Obsessed. I'm reworking the point of view in *Hero* and putting it all into the first person. What a major overhaul! If it were on a computer, people tell me, it would be ten times easier. I am running out of Scotch tape and lose my scissors daily. This won't be ready for the fall for any publisher. Time to stop hoping and face facts.

End of May 1991

K. and I nit-picked the manuscript all morning. Had coffee with Malcolm Lester. I think I now have a promise of a contract for publication probably in the spring of '92. We'll see. Long ago I took all those chickens I had counted and stuffed them back into their eggs.

June 5, 1991

Perhaps the penultimate chapter is about to be written on the saga of publishing *Hero*. Malcolm Lester is starting a company under the aegis of Key Porter, with his own imprint. K. has been hired as senior editor. (She hung in and it paid off.) I also hung in. With any luck, I too will be paid. Cash dollars would be nice. My contract will be in the mail next week! I've certainly heard that before and don't plan to hold my breath.

June 25, 1991

Bought a computer and love it. I love the machine's shining little pale blue face and the engaging way it politely asks me to "please wait." Feeding new novel into it, which should save wear and tear on my sanity. It's about a girl named Sara Moone. No title as yet. Its structure seems flat. Need to bounce one story-line off another. Make connections. It's there, I think. Just have to work it out.

July 22, 1991

Signed a contract with Malcolm Lester

to publish *Hero of Lesser Causes*. I'm relieved. Cynical, but relieved. Also grateful.

October 1991

Working on Sara Moone novel. It is such a luxury to write and know it's a job, a livelihood. (I mean it could be if I ate sparingly and didn't mind living in a tent.) I feel like a real person. I exist. In writing these novels about young people, I think I'm raising and looking at ghosts. Keely, the bungling overachiever. Sara, the cold cynic with a soft heart. Both of them pondering their own existence in much the same way I ponder mine.

January 1992

The year of the book! I am physically ill. Nothing immediately terminal. Stress and aging. How bloody marvellous.

Went to the dinosaur display at the ROM. To understand that there have been at least four ice ages and that we are now in an interglacial period really pinpoints our existence. I'm an invisible speck and yet I keep wondering if anyone will read my book after I'm dead. More important, will anyone read it while I'm alive? It's incredible how the human mind clings egocentrically to its own tiny space.

February 1992

Almost finished the fourth draft of the Sara Moone novel. As I was driving to the lake, alone, an old rhyme flew into my head from God knows what cerebral holding tank. *Adam and Eve and Pinch-Mel Went down to the river to bathe! Adam and Eve fell in! And who do you think was saved?* Its treachery fits my story. Needs tinkering with, but it's the layer I wanted to reach.

Mar. 6, 1992

K. definitely wants the new novel although it needs work. She phoned to say my *Hero* books are in. I lay on the floor and listened to Bach. I don't think life can possibly get any better than this.

Mar. 12, 1992

The last chapter. My books arrived. Tension of a 10-month pregnancy! When I looked at my book for the first time this despicable thought swept over me. I don't love it. I've gone through all this turmoil and sweat and anxiety and I don't love it.

Mar. 20, 1992

Three unrelated people said they liked my book. I'm beginning to smile at it affectionately.

Summer 1992

Little, Brown has bought the rights to *Hero* and will publish it in the United States. Melanie, my American editor, phoned from Boston to ask for changes. Spelling, yes. Simplification of ideas, no. She feels American kids won't get some of the irony. Canadian kids may not get it, either, but they might like a challenge. Let them puzzle it out, discuss it; even, heaven forbid, ask an adult. I don't think young means simple-minded.

Friday the 13th of Nov. 1992

This must be the epilogue. Someone phoned from the Canada Council to tell me that *Hero of Lesser Causes* has won the Governor General's Award. I screamed and jumped up and down. Then I told my family and we all screamed and jumped up and down. Then later, much later, when I was alone with a sore throat from screaming. I lay on the floor and listened to Handel at full volume. Rejoicing music!

Dec. 3, 1992

I thought I was bloody wonderful, there, for a day or two. I think, however, I've been put firmly in my literary place. The GG winners were asked to strut their stuff in both official languages at a gala reading at the National Library the day after the awards ceremony with the exception of three cate-

gories — translation, children's literature, and illustration.

There now! I've had my little whine. As the writer of a book for children I may not be as equal as some, but by George I'm moving in the right direction. Any Canadian writer who can't find something bitchy to say about the GGs ain't worth a pinch o' coonshit.

Dec. 9, 1992

Should, but can't, stop adding to this adventure story. With awards come interviews, which leave me on the brink of



heart failure. For 14 years I've shuffled in to my typewriter safe in my anonymity and now, suddenly, people start reading what I write and listening to what I say — the outpourings of a disorderly and, at times, deranged mind. What if I start spewing out unadulterated, perfectly formed horse droppings? Oh, God, what if I started believing them?

Dec. 14, 1992

I welcome the postman, now. He is not, as he so often has been, the bearer of bad news who would have done well to guard his back after delivering those dreaded self-addressed return envelopes. He chooses instead to bring me letters of

congratulation from people whose lives have touched mine as far back as childhood. This is joy and I know it.

Jan. 31, 1993

Health becoming worrisome. How ironic! I've been writing my brains out, especially the past six years, finally have a book published, win a magnificent prize, and now Fate confronts me with the old shears poised over the thread of my life. Heh, heh, heh! I hear her chortle.

Feb. 5, 1993

Refuse to have the energy sucked out of me at this stage. Back to work. Contract for *Adam and Eve and Pinch-Me* came. No mistakes, no agonies, no waiting. The writing life, it seems, can be straightforward.

Feb. 28, 1993

Recently talked about and read from *Hero of Lesser Causes* to an interested group of adults who didn't run out screaming or throw up because it was a children's book and who actually seemed to relate to the postwar time frame in *Hero* and to the fact that the protagonist's brother had to cope with paralysis following polio. There was one exception. A woman asked me how dare I write about polio when I had never suffered from it myself. This sounds suspiciously like the problem of voice appropriation, which lurks everywhere it seems!

June 14, 1993

Hero is to be published in France. The translator wrote to ask if he could change the game of baseball in small-town, post-war Ontario to soccer, as he knows of no French translation for baseball terminology. I sent him a French-Canadian baseball translation. Soccer indeed!

Early September 1993

Now have a laptop computer. Beginning, also, to think covetously about modems and fax machines and all

those 20th-century trappings. "Do you have a pen?" someone asked recently. I stared blankly back.

Hero has won the IODE children's book award! The honour is wonderful, but why pretend? The money is magnificent, especially with all four kids in university.

Trip to Alberta in mid-August but saw little of it as I had to polish and fine-tune *Adam and Eve and Pinch-Me* to meet Kathy's deadline at Lester Publishing, and Stephanie's (my new American editor) at Little, Brown and Co. LB and Co. had been promised the manuscript, but Melanie, my first American editor who has recently gone from Little, Brown to Orchard Books, also wants it. Little, Brown won't let us out of the option clause, however. Oh, the convolutions and peregrinations of it all! I love it.

It's a curious paradox that you have to write a book in order to learn how to write a book. Fortunately for me, Kathy is demanding. A badly edited book teaches a writer nothing.

Oct. 22, 1993

I am apparently the kiss of death in the publishing industry. Shades of L&OD. Little, Brown has let go a huge number of staff, among them Stephanie, my editor. Her replacement on *Adam and Eve and Pinch-Me* seems to be a nameless, disembodied team of editors that wants to change "CBC radio" to "public radio" and "Mounties" to "police" — little Canadian flavourings I want to keep. We will fight this to the death. Something to be said for small companies.

November 1993

My various editors are a hardy lot. Stephanie has been hired by Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers as Vice President and Editorial Director.

Dec. 31, 1993

I've started a new novel.

Jan. 14, 1994

Cast out to sea with this new novel and am in danger of drowning. I know where it's going, but I don't know why. The things I write with the greatest conviction are the things I want to explore in my own life. Don't understand why I feel compelled to write about prophecy. It must stand for something else. Youth lives in the present. Maturity faces the future and tries to second-guess it. Maturity sees consequences and youth sees only the action.

Feb. 8, 1994

I dreamt I was behind a glass window watching gigantic waves roll toward me. With each wave I felt a sense of awe, as if I would be overwhelmed by something bigger than I'd ever experienced. But I was protected by glass. All day I've wanted to smash something.

Mar. 13, 1994

Back from my reading tour in Yellowknife, Hay River, and Inuvik. Maybe not my big awesome experience, but certainly the next best thing to it. Striding across the frozen tarmac, briefcase in hand, to a waiting DC-3. temperature at -43. Eee! — for exhilaration. Could take more of that!

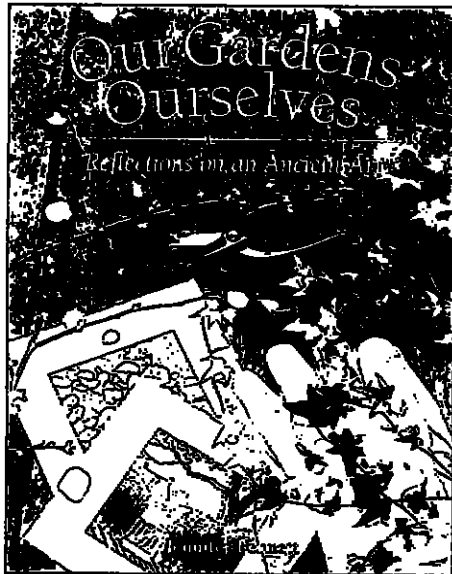
Apr. 2, 1994

Adam and Eve and Pinch-Me has been published and launched. I felt about it as I did watching each of my children go off to university. Have I provided her with survival skills? Will I be calm if she fails?

July 12, 1994

Once again deeply into novel number three. Not sure whether it's for a youthful audience or a mature audience. I believe Timothy Findley had something to say about audiences, once, a long time ago. Just looked it up. "The audience comes to you as you write." Yes. ○

◆ FAD LIVES ◆



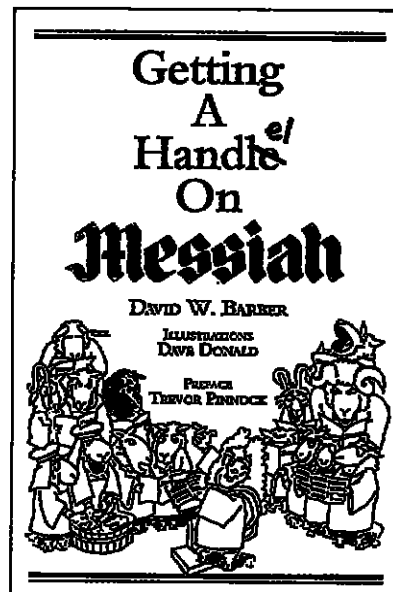
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BY JOHN OUGHTON

Spirits in the Sky

Whether it's Native sites, northern lights, or cartoon insights, the season's gift-book givers have much to choose from



**From
Spirit of the Land**

GIFT BOOK SEQUELS ARE less common than the Hollywood variety, but when the first title obtains good sales and reviews, why not? Saskatchewan's Courtney Milne follows up *The Sacred Earth* with **Spirit of the Land: Sacred Places in Native North America** (Penguin, 210 pages, \$55 cloth), which offers glowing colour prints, accompanied by informative text about the Native sites.

The places range from the well known (Niagara Falls) to the charmingly obscure (Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump). Milne's eye for colour and composition remains assured. There are some excellent landscapes here, both those

shot "straight" and others using special effects such as filters and camera movement. What set my reviewing teeth on edge is an occasional New Age-type preciousness: Milne is a little too anxious to inject spirituality, with shafts of light telling us the place is holy, rather than letting it speak for itself.

More to my taste is Candace Savage's **Aurora: The Mysterious Northern Lights** (Douglas & McIntyre, 144 pages, \$29.95 cloth). Gift books should instruct as well as impress, and here Savage leads an informative historical tour of the magnetic phenomenon so familiar to Canadians. Illustrated with excellent colour photographs and earlier engravings and drawings, Savage's text documents

the place of the aurora borealis in folk beliefs (the Norwegians thought the lights shone from young women's souls), superstitions, and scientific debate. Ironically, a scientist named Birkeland, who argued that the phenomenon was caused by solar winds eddying around the earth's magnetic field, was right; and the renowned Lord Kelvin was wrong. Savage includes funny and eloquent quotations from the likes of Robert Service, and also discusses the southern lights. This book will make a fine gift for anyone interested in astronomy, the North and South poles, and hallucinogenic visuals.

What better accompaniment to the northern lights than a coyote's howl? Coyotes have been classed as pests, hunted and trapped in thousands for government rewards and by gruesome methods. Yet their range has extended during the last century from a narrow band in the West to almost all of the United States and southern Canada. Wayne Grady admires these quintessential survivors, and argues compellingly in *Coyote: Voice of the Wilderness* (Douglas & McIntyre, 190 pages, \$29.95 cloth) that coyotes have often been unfairly denigrated. They do prey on livestock, Grady says, but eat far more rodents than they do farm animals.

The lucid text incorporates quotes from other writers (including Mark Twain, who described this rather handsome animal as a "long, slim, sick and sorry-looking skeleton") and a wealth of detail about the coyote's life, habits, and importance as a trickster figure in Native stories. Given how elusive coyotes are, the colour plates testify to the skill and patience of North America's nature photographers.

Roloff Beny probably was not, as he once claimed, "the greatest photographer in the world." But he could make the world appear rich, dramatic, and sensual. His special gift was for the forms of classical architecture and sculpture, and he demonstrated

exquisite taste in framing his views. Yet he wore leopard-skin vests and suits that looked like the wallpaper in a Greek restaurant.

Now, a decade after Beny's death, with nearly all of his titles out of print, he is commemorated in *Visual Journeys* (Douglas & McIntyre, 256 pages, \$55 cloth). Beny was many things: genius, poseur, opportunist, sycophant of the rich and famous (including the Shah and Shahbanou of Iran), loyal friend of Peggy Guggenheim and others. Mitchell Crites, who edited the book, includes not only Beny's best images and early paintings, but also an incomplete autobiography and snapshots — often bizarre — of him. There are comments from others, ranging from press-release hyperbole ("Beny ... has been lavished with countless international honours") to warts-and-all realism ("Did I say he could be tiresome? Tiresome beyond belief").

Three books explore the beauty of specific areas. *Gatineau Park: An Intimate Portrait* (Dynamic Light, 144 pages, \$49.95 cloth) examines the area just north of Ottawa. Here black bears and maple trees compete for attention with the ruins imported by MacKenzie King to decorate Kingsmere. The photographer/writer J. David Andrews collaborated with Brenda Carter, a wildlife painter, to produce a varied portrait of this beautiful part of Ontario. Andrews is best at photographs of frost- and mist-laden landscapes, while Carter's strength is in appealing but unsentimental animal portraits.

A similar partnership animates *Canada's Royal Garden: Portraits and Reflections* (Penguin, 150 pages, \$35 cloth), in which the writer/photographer Norman Track teams up with the wood engraver Gerard Brender à Brandis



From Gatineau Park: An Intimate Portrait

Gardens, the largest botanical gardens in the world, but not a major tourist draw due to its location just outside Hamilton, Ontario. This survey of the Gardens' history, seasons, and flora, with essays from its naturalists, is a treat for gardeners and botanists.

Finally: look up in the air, it's

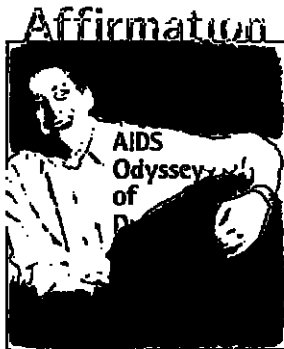
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NEW STAR BOOKS

not a Junior Birdman, it's another landscape photographer! This time, in *Where the Eagle Soars* (Raincoast, 128 pages, \$29.95 paper), it's the official Snowbirds lensman Russ Heint snapping British Columbia's islands from dizzying angles. Some shots turn fields, shores, and cities into abstract patterns; in others, the camera appears to be so close to the sailboat or people pictured that a collision seems imminent. Heint finds dramatically lit vistas to focus on and, thanks to gyro-stabilized cameras, usually gets them sharp, despite the vibration and motion of flight. Fliers, B.C. addicts, and those who prefer low-level armchair flights will enjoy this book.

Cartoonists are a reliable source of inexpensive gift books. This season, Canada's best and fiercest editorial cartoonist, Aislin, offers his 25th collection, while the *Calgary Herald's* Vance Rodewalt weighs in with his first. *Put Up & Shut Up* (Robert

Davies, 160 pages, \$15.99 paper) isn't Aislin at his greatest, but even average Aislin offers enough genius to entertain long after the news stories that inspired his *Gazette* sketches have faded. Aislin, whose vitriolic pen made even Tories-in-power tremble (Barbara MacDougall called his work "not only personally offensive but frightening on behalf of all Canadians"), here etches memorable images of Mulroney's retirement from politics, the Oka crisis, and Robert Bourassa's rudderless politics. Some of the sketches look rough, drawn under the pressure of deadlines; but they all work, and the best are potent indeed. The book feels a little crowded, throwing in previously unpublished work and sometimes as many as four cartoons to a page. It also includes an occasionally amusing but who's-gonna-read-it-all accompanying text by Hubie Bauch.

Rodewalt: With Weapons Drawn

(Temeron, 128 pages, \$16.95 paper) is more playful, less vicious. Rodewalt's style is rather comic-strippish, showing traces of his tenure with *Cracked* and *Mad* magazines. Some of the cartoons work only for an Alberta audience (jokes about Don Getty's former riding or Ralph Klein's adviser). Others take a telling shot at global issues: humanoid piggies building an Everest of trash; the Pope, wearing rose-coloured glasses, accompanied by the news item that "the Vatican states uncontrolled population growth not the cause of poverty." A cartoon about a poll that revealed Americans consider Canada the ninth most important country in the world also strikes home: an apologetic elephant smoking a cigar in bed and saying to an angry beaver "I thought you knew there were ... others." Rodewalt, a stylish caricaturist, is a good journeyman cartoonist with occasional moments of brilliance. O

We've got household gods, vast Arctic landscapes, Canada's strongest new voices and the best parties in town



***A Rage of Poppies*, Ethel Harris**

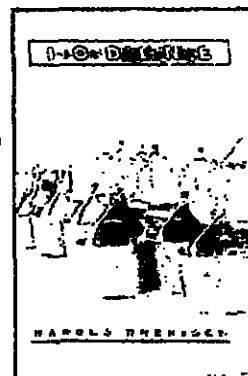
Harris takes the reader through the author's life from childhood to middle age. Her subtle and precise use of language to describe the loss of a child, a sister and her parents makes these poems resonate long after the book has been put down.

WOLSAK & WYNN 0-919897-39-8 \$10.00 pb

***Iodine, or, A visit to Jake's Kero Confectionery during the Elks' rodeo parade, 1963*, Harold Rhenisch**

These poems throb and disturb and exhilarate as they move from narrative to descriptive to meditative. Combine this with his unique brand of humour and you end up with one of Canada's strongest new voices. Rhenisch was born in a blizzard early in 1958 and raised on an orchard in BC's Similkameen Valley.

WOLSAK & WYNN 0-919897-40-1 \$10.00 pb



***Spells For Clear Vision*, Neile Graham**

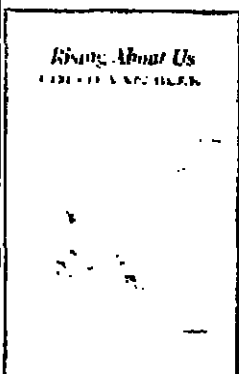
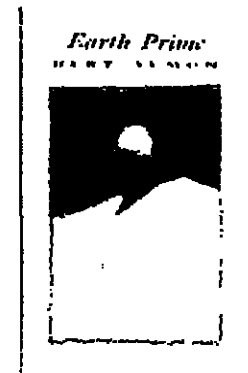
'I believe in the common magic / of forests and household gods' writes Neile Graham in the title poem of this book. She writes of trying to see clearly, articulating ways of living in a modern, often blinding world. How she sees her world will alter how we see ours.

BRICK BOOKS 0-919626-74-2 \$11.95 pb

***Earth Prime*, Bert Almon**

Almon's poems are centred in local, apparently unremarkable moments which are addressed with such a fine, ironic eye that they suddenly yield their innate comedy, tragedy, paradox, tenderness. 'Poetry,' he writes, 'is a message slipped under the door / You don't even have to read it / It wants to tell you about danger / life and death and good parties.'

BRICK BOOKS 0-919626-69-6 \$11.95 pb



***Rising About Us*, Edith Van Beek**

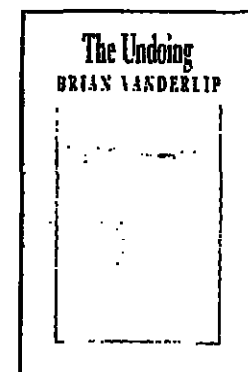
'Occasionally humourous, always alert, Edith Van Beek's poetry, whether dealing with the immediate domestic scene or with the vastness of Arctic landscapes, combines an engaging simplicity and directness with a sure sense of verse movement and cadence, and above all, with something worth saying.'—Christopher Levenson, *Art*

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***The Undoing*, Brian Vanderlip**

'*The Undoing* travels the "everywhichway" of experience, enthused by both the sweetness and the passion of discovery. Vanderlip revisits the complexities of family, explores the silences of God and celebrates the glories of tomato sandwiches, Amsterdam hotels and sleeping lovers. What a splendid journey!'—Barry Dempster

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BY MARTIN WAXMAN

The Discipline of Discovery

Some authors tell you so much about their work that reading it seems anti-climactic; F. G. Paci lets his characters do the talking for him

LIKE THE EXPLORERS WHOM HIS protagonist Marco aspires to emulate, the author F. G. (Frank) Paci is on a voyage of discovery. And his vessel of choice is pen and ink.

He has published six novels, all with Oberon Press. His last three, *Black Blood* (1991), *Under the Bridge* (1992), and *Sex and Character* (1993), are

old son and considers himself to be a dedicated father and husband. "My wife and son are a continual wonder to me," he says, then adds, "I couldn't have done it without my wife. She reads the final draft and makes comments She's very supportive but I can tell by how much support she gives me whether my work is good or not."

If you judge by the critical response Paci's books have received, there's no question about the quality of his work. Some of the adjectives used to describe his writing are "extraordinarily vivid" (*Globe and Mail*) and "powerful ... believable and affecting" (James Reaney). Paci's novels have been consistently well reviewed in newspapers across the country, and he has been told by his publisher that there is a circle of people who know of F. G. Paci and look forward to the next book. The trouble is that the average reader has no idea who he is, let alone what they're missing.

That's because Paci isn't a big believer in self-promotion. "I'm not the type of writer who goes out and hustles his work," he says. Certainly he did some readings and interviews when his first books came out. He appeared at Harbourfront in Toronto, travelled to Edmonton, Ottawa, his hometown of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, and even a conference in Erie, Pennsylvania. But it got to the point where "I physically could not read my own work in public; I couldn't even talk about it."

"At the beginning," he adds, "I thought writing was for the hero types, who used it as a means to gain wealth and recognition and women. But it's the opposite of that."

INSTEAD OF GOING TO THE INDIES BY OVERLAND trek like Marco Polo, I'd go by water like Columbus and Cabot, Verrazzano and Vespucci. Except the Atlantic would be an ocean of black ink in my voyage of discovery. And I'd sail from the homeland of my parents, who seemed completely oblivious of the changes occurring to me.

Under the Bridge

part of an ongoing series that centres on the life and struggles of Marco Trecroci. Paci recently completed novel four in the series, which is scheduled for release in 1995, and over the past summer he finished a draft of number five.

Frank Paci is a committed and disciplined novelist who gets up at 4:30 or 5:00 every morning to write. His first drafts, which usually take about six months to complete, are in longhand; he later types them up. "I need a couple of hours — but every day," he says, "I don't take time off from writing. Summer holidays, I'm working. At a cottage, I'm working. On Christmas morning ... I hate to say it, I'm always working. Unless there's a family matter."

Family is important to Paci. He has a 12-year-



F. G. Paci

With the clean white page in front of me, the smell of the ink and black coffee, the feel of the pen in my hand, I could've been Marco Polo himself, or Christopher Columbus, about to set off on a long journey with high expectations and yet total ignorance. I knew it would be a long journey and that I had little idea of the pitfalls and snares along the way—but I was filled with a tremendous sense of anticipation.

Sex and Character

Paci, like Marco in *Sex and Character*, started writing fiction while a student at the University of Toronto in the late '60s. And also like Marco, he was an Italian immigrant from Sault Ste. Marie, to whom Margaret Laurence, the university's then writer-in-residence, was a mentor. Her encouragement made him feel accepted and gave him the confidence to pursue fiction further.

After graduating, Paci wrote four novels, all of which remain unpublished, although an excerpt from the first appeared in *Canadian Forum*. He admits to being "pig-headed" back then. "Naive, too. I believed that everything I wrote was pretty good." He pauses. "I have many rejections from that time."

Paci describes this period as his apprenticeship, his "experimental stage." "A lot of my work was very derivative of peo-

ple such as James Joyce and Donald Barthelme. There was a wide disparity between me the human being and me the writer. I didn't have a voice. I was pretending to be who I wasn't. I was dealing with things I knew in the head and not the heart. I used to walk up and down Bloor Street and despair."

Why didn't you write about your background ... your family and roots ... You know, it took me ten years or so of living in Africa to realize that the real demons were

living in my own backyard.

— A fictional Margaret Laurence talking to the protagonist in *Sex and Character*

Frank Paci arrived in Canada as a child. His family settled on the west side of Sault Ste. Marie, in the shadow of the steel plant where his father worked. Some of Paci's first memories are of the factory skyline, the train tracks, and a bridge that was later torn down. It wasn't until the seventh grade, when his teacher held a reading contest, that Paci got interested in books. There was a collection of books at the back of the classroom that students were encouraged to browse through and read. Even though he didn't win first prize—he came second—this was a turning point for Paci. He soon became a regular at the public library and a voracious reader, even though he grew up in a house with no books—not even a Bible. Mastering the English language was his way of rebelling, of distancing himself from his parents.

Paci's novels portray the seemingly unresolvable conflict between father and son, a rift, not merely of ideals, but of cultures as well. But in life, Paci is immensely proud of the sacrifices his own father made. However, it was only when he travelled back to Italy in his early 20s that he began to grasp the tremendous hardships his parents faced by uprooting themselves. "I think it's the case for most children of immigrants, you can't see your parents unless you go back to their country of origin and experience their culture first-hand. My father made a good life for himself here and appreciates this country. He worked hard here." Paci feels it took a tremendous amount of will to emigrate, especially for his mother, who dislikes travelling and, until she arrived in Canada, had never journeyed far from her familial home.

Returning to one's ancestral roots is the subject of Paci's fourth novel. Some 20 years after he first arrives in Canada, his

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- A profile of controversial polymath JOHN RALSTON SAUL;
- Our editors' choice of their favourite books of 1994;
- Reviews of new gift books, sports books, cookbooks, children's books and young adult books and more!

.....

protagonist Marco travels to Italy to find out who he is and where he belongs, in an attempt to understand the father he continually denied.

Since my father never taught me how to behave. Since my father wasn't my real father, but a pretend-father sent to take care of my material welfare until I discovered my real identity — and thus who my real father was. Since my teachers obviously couldn't teach me everything about life — and certainly not the daring or dirty things that couldn't be mentioned in a classroom. Since all of these things were so obvious and limiting, I had to go to the movie screen or the television set to find my models. And to books. Since my mother and father couldn't even speak to me, I had to assume different origins, different ancestries, so that my genesis was as changeable as a movie marquee or a television schedule.

Black Blood

Himself a former steel-plant worker, Paci mines his own experiences and his family to create fictions that contain "many autobiographical moments." He writes of the stifling tension that can exist between a father and son in unflinching and painfully honest prose. And although he may alter certain factual elements to shape the stories, he remains true to their essence. It is this quality, in addition to his strong, unwavering voice, that gives his novels their strength.

In the series of books that centre on Marco Treccroci, Paci is attempting to deal with an individual's "evolution of consciousness": the progress from obscurity to relative illumination that in a sense mirrors Paci's own pathway. There's a confessional element to the books that is loosely based on the *Confessions* of St. Augustine

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and of Rousseau. The main character is on a journey toward the ultimate form of consciousness, trying to gain an insight into his place in the world.

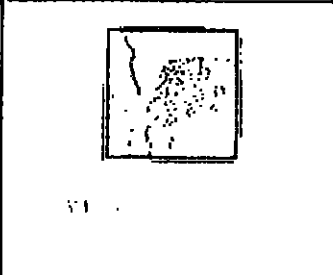
Marco is a bright but troubled boy who is searching for an identity he can call his own. "Growing up," admits Paci, "I was ashamed of my background. I always thought I was better than where I came from." Writing opened his eyes and gave him a personal sense of self. "It was the avenue that made me appreciate and accept who I was."

Over the years Paci has learned that he can't make judgements on his characters. Rather he has to patiently wait till the books are completed and watch as the characters evolve and their perceptions change. Paci believes writers should humble themselves, and let the characters speak. At first he had the idea that writers manipulated language for their own purposes, but he now feels it's the other way around. "You give yourself over to language, to your character ... and let that person live." For him there's a definite mystical element to writing, a "universal spirituality that transcends denomination." He feels it's important for children to be given a grounding in religion because it opens the door to a vast array of rituals and values. "When you're young, religion is a sensual thing."

In writing about what he knows, Paci understands that there are probably some people who may be put off by the "Italianness" of his subjects. But Paci doesn't shy away from his past. "I think I seriously began to find my voice with *Black Madonna* (1982), and solidified it with *The Father* (1984), *Black Blood*, and *Under the Bridge*." He laughs. "Although it's really up to the reader to say that." He hopes that there's enough similarity between the lives he chronicles and the world at large.

"Everyone is born with a certain religion and language. You shouldn't be put off by the particularity of a protagonist."

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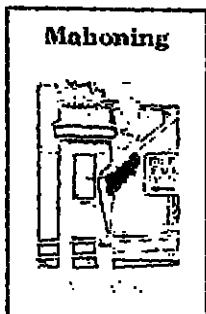


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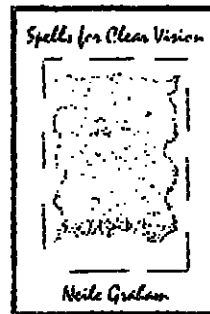


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He gave me a funny look. "What're you, a bloody vampire?"

"No, I'm the Bookman," I said, perhaps revealing too much.

"The Bookman? What's that? A new cult hero from Northern Ontario?"

Sex and Character

Eloquent, soft spoken, thoughtful, and intense, F. G. Paci leaves the distinct impression that he is a man who is at home with himself. He's able to laugh at life. He works hard. Always has. He has a master's degree in English and teaches high school full time. In addition to fiction, he's developing a screen adaptation of *Black Madonna*. He likens the process to "writing alongside" the book. Many scenes coincide with things that happen in the novel, but the script is a "different entity" in which he has to bring out the internalized drama in visual terms while paying

close attention to how it's going to sound. "I was raised on movies," he says. But he would much rather be writing books.

Paci approaches his craft as a labourer might treat his job, with quiet determination and pride. The rewards are in the work. In the constant and never-ending work. He's still a big reader. These days, in addition to philosophy and theology, Paci admires the work of writers such as Paul Theroux, David Plante, and Frederick Barthelme, who "aim for great simplicity at the expense of their ego."

"One thing I firmly believe is that to be a good writer you have to burn away the ego."

It bothers him that his books aren't that readily available; he'd like to see them in more bookstores. When he goes home to Sault Ste. Marie, he's not F. G. Paci the author but "son of..." or "brother of..." "Up there you're a hero if you make it to the NHL," he says. "So I'm well aware of the reality."

"My life as a writer is a secret life," he says. "I work before people are awake. It's very separate from my roles as husband, father, and teacher." He jokes that he has a secret identity — "Clark Kent by day, Bookman by early morning."

Looking to the future, he remarks, "There's still a long way to go in my writing. I'm still on a journey — nowhere near the end of it." Then he recalls Margaret Laurence once saying "she wasn't going to write after *The Diviners* because she was written out. I can't imagine myself stopping writing. But maybe there is a time to fall silent."

Silently I slunk up to my room, turned on the light and sat down at my desk. Rat-tat-tat. Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat. The letters made clean black impressions on the white page.

Under the Bridge ○

All the Glittering Prizes

*There are lots of awards available for aspiring writers
— if they're willing to pay the price*

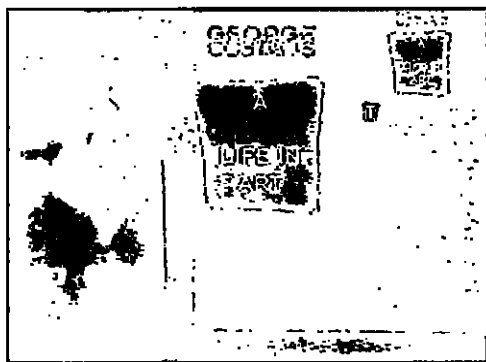


THE CREATION OF THE GILLER Award earlier this year sparked much discussion of the number of Canadian literary prizes. There are so many, according to Val Ross of the *Globe and Mail*, that journalistic skills are severely taxed to find new ways of "announcing who won what." The overriding question seems to be: do we need all these prizes?

Partly the scepticism arises from the sense that competitions are unreliable gauges of literary excellence. We are all well versed in the annals of misjudgement. We know that Virginia Woolf

never won the Nobel Prize and that Sinclair Lewis and John Galsworthy did. When Nadine Gordimer won the Nobel, she was the first woman to do so in decades. And Woolf was so scornful of literary awards that she refused to accept even an honorary degree.

Yet it seems to me that if you work in the arts you have to accept that subjective and erroneous judgements go with the territory. It is the nature of great art to be ahead of its age and to be sometimes hard to recognize even by generally astute and careful judges. Time is the great adjudicator.



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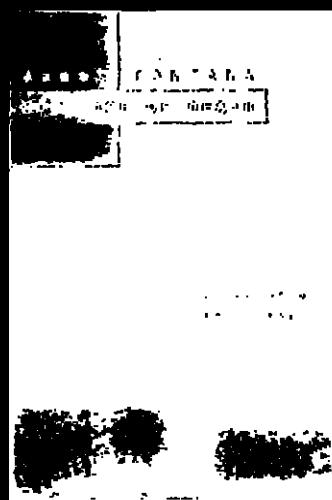
lightenment and catch the interest of those not usually interested in literary discussion.

But practically speaking, the prizes are financially useful, especially in Canada, where sales and material rewards are significantly smaller than in Britain and the United States. This applies not only to the big prizes but to the smaller ones offered so often now by literary periodicals that one journal last year designated its annual contest: Another Bloody Fiction Competition. There are few Canadian outlets that pay hundreds and thousands of dollars for stories, but prizes sometimes increase the purse and bridge the gap. These competitions I enjoy not just as a spectator but as a contender, and they appeal to my gambling as well as my competitive instincts. I send in rotten entries sometimes in the belief that they are just lotteries, and good pieces in the belief that they are measures of excellence. If I win, I tell myself it is a question of luck. At the same time, I do know that for a person to hit the same jackpot twice indicates real talent. (I have never hit the same jackpot twice.)

So much for my addiction to competitions! But now I want to lodge a complaint. I am really dismayed by the entry fees that, for short-story competitions, are inching up steadily towards \$20. The fees in playwriting competitions, in both the one-act and full-length categories, are \$35.

This trend strikes me as alarming because it excludes so many groups — the beginning writers, those without jobs who are trying to live by their writing, the indigent, and the retired on fixed, limited incomes. It is no help that the entry fees are tax deductible when there is nothing to deduct from.

So I ask. What is the purpose of the fee? Is it to attract excellent submissions? To make sure that submissions are of a high quality and from committed artists? To cover the costs of the compe-



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but that's little consolation if you're already dead when your work is finally acknowledged.

All the same I have to confess to a great weakness for literary competitions as for all kinds of sweepstakes. After all, I hail from the land of the Grand National and the football pool. I like the suspense,

the publicity, and the discussion generated by the Governor General's Awards, the Booker, the Pulitzer, and the Nobel. I enjoy equally the sense of outrage when the wrong man wins and the sense of elation when the best woman does. I like the interminable arguments that ensue and I think that they sometimes result in en-

.....


tion or to provide basic financing for the journal?

The fact is that the revenue from these fees is considerable. Four hundred entries at \$15 amounts to \$6,000. Sometimes the prizes amount to as little as \$500 in total and I suspect the judges' honoraria amount to about the same. Thus, the income would be about \$5,000. And the journals running these competitions are funded by the Canada Council and by other local funding agencies.

Often the contestant is rewarded by a subscription to the journal, a partial compensation for the fee. While on the surface it seems reasonable that those who submit to a journal should help support it, I find something unpleasant about this form of coercion. Young writers cannot afford subscriptions to all the journals they submit work to, nor should they be expected to subscribe.

When the Writers' Union of Canada recently advertised a short prose competition for young writers I felt that I could not encourage my students to enter. They would have profited from doing so, but for many of them the fee would have been too steep. Surely the Writers' Union can offer a competition for young writers without exacting a charge of more than \$10. I am amazed that *Grain* advertised a competition in two categories — postcard story and prose poem (each less than 500 words) — offering three prizes amounting to a total of \$500 and asking \$20 entry fees.


I would like to offer some suggestions. In order to cut down handling costs, why not ask entrants to submit three copies of the entry? Most writers have word processors and could easily send multiple copies, even without needing to have them returned. Keep the entry fees in these competitions down to \$10. If that is not possible, have different fees for different age groups, as theatres do. Try to get the competition wrapped up and the



W In inter we tell stories

and make clothing, snowshoes and toboggans. A pipe maker can spend the entire season perfecting a finely decorated stone pipe. In *Metepenagiag*, archaeologist Patricia Allen and artist Roger Simon offer surprising glimpses of life in a Micmac village more than 2,000 years ago.

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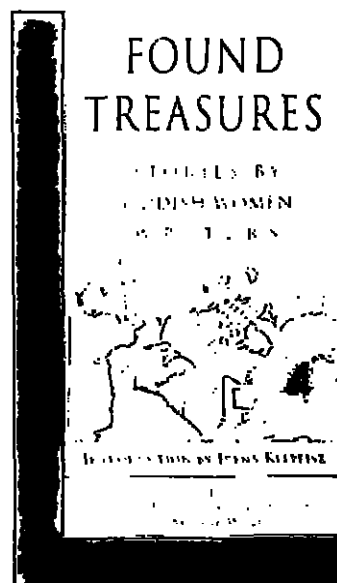


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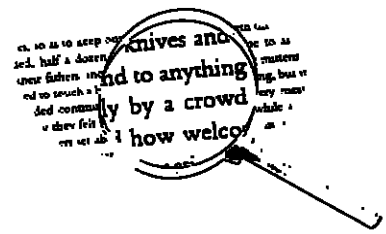
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winners announced in three months so that writers do not have material tied up endlessly. And if there is a desire to use competitions to sell subscriptions, consider making a year's subscription a condition of publication and let it go at that.

Let us keep as many competitions and prizes as possible, but let us also think of

ways to make them work to encourage new talent and reward excellence. I should like to see evidence that as literary competitions proliferate, they are serving the writing and reading public and not just providing easy financial cushions for journals with limited subscription lists. ○



Surfing toward Bethlehem

WHEN I JOIN A PARTY, IT WILL be the Liberals." That quote, attributed to Pierre Trudeau by an old friend, is among several biographical surprises in this book. Other commentators have suggested that before he ran for parliament in 1965, Trudeau had little interest in party politics. But the quote is remembered from the early 1940s, when Trudeau

**TRUDEAU AND OUR TIMES:
VOLUME 2, THE HEROIC DELUSION**
by Christina McCall and Stephen Clarkson

McClelland & Stewart, 460 pages, \$28.99 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 5417 3)

Reviewed by George Galt

was in law school. Around the same time he was regarded by some of his peers as "most likely a future premier of Quebec, perhaps a second Laurier."

Christina McCall and Stephen Clarkson also give a revealing account of Trudeau's five-year friendship with Thérèse Gouin in that period. She was the granddaughter of a Liberal Quebec premier and daughter of a Liberal senator. "To their friends they seemed a golden couple, striking in appearance and fluent in both languages, their social and intellectual confidence proclaiming a new French-Canadian upper class easily the equal of the English in refinement and ability."

Trudeau wanted to marry Thérèse. But she broke with him in 1947, and later married one of his friends. Trudeau's demands on her had appar-

ently been too outdated, too severe. He had insisted on a traditional wife, someone who would devote herself to household matters and children. She had other plans. (She became a professor of child psychology at the University of Montreal.) The break was, according to these authors, "the worst psychic shock of his young manhood."

We last heard from McCall and Clarkson in 1990, when they published volume one of their Trudeau opus, *The Magnificent Obsession*. Volume two was scheduled for the fall of 1991. The fascinating tale of Thérèse Gouin and much other new material helps to explain the long delay. With this second volume the authors' graceful writing, sharp intelligence, and exhaustive research seal their own place in our literary history as the Trudeau era's political chroniclers *sans pareil*.

But it must be said that, even with the fresh digging into Trudeau's younger days, this book may not be the compelling narrative for lay readers that the first volume was. The first dealt with Trudeau's personal intellectual odyssey, culminating in the defeat of Quebec's 1980 sovereignty-association referendum and the creation of Canada's 1982 constitution. The drama was intense, the struggles Herculean, the strategies Machiavellian, and the political atmospherics almost operatic. By contrast, the new book

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deals largely with the making of social and economic policy, less colourful territory.

For anyone seriously interested in Canadian history from 1968 to 1984, though, McCall and Clarkson are indispensable. As they did in volume one, and as McCall did earlier in *Grits* (her account of Canadian Liberals and Liberalism), they set their observations brilliantly in context, so that we are offered not only a chronicle of Trudeau, his inner circle, his cabinet, and his party, but also an acute reading of the vicissi-

big breaker of conservative, free-market chic that was crashing over Europe and North America.

This book returns time and again to a central tension within the Liberal party, the tug-of-war between welfare Liberals and business Liberals. It was a struggle that the interventionist, left-leaning wing of the party lost as the economy deteriorated in the 1970s. They mounted an offensive again in 1980 and appeared to be winning for a couple of years, then lost again as the Reaganites put the screws to Trudeau and the 1982 recession pro-

agement than I would be on their evidence. They let him off much too lightly on the public debt, which now threatens to cripple the welfare state he championed. And they seem to accept without censure that Trudeau and his followers blew hundreds of millions on the department of regional economic expansion (DREE), which too often meant pouring tax dollars into preposterous pork barrels such as the heavy water plant in the loyalist Allan MacEachen's riding. (Academic studies have since shown the DREE program was largely a failure.)



tures of the public mood.

As the authors demonstrate, the Liberals managed for years to surf their way across Canadian public sentiment without accomplishing much on bread-and-butter issues. Their beach boys, crafty Jim Coumts and quixotic Tom Axworthy, kept Trudeau's team afloat despite recurring hostile waves. When the boss jumped onto dry land in 1984, he watched an exhausted, wobbly-kneed party wipe out behind him. Had he stayed, he too would almost certainly have been swamped by the approaching

vided indisputable evidence that easy post-war economic prosperity was history.

In which camp was Trudeau? The answer seems to be that he presided over both camps but was the captive of neither, a position — though the book doesn't say this — that gave him the political fluidity he needed to pursue his main objective, which was to hold the country together without promoting nationalism of any stripe.

McCall and Clarkson are more respectful of Trudeau's economic man-

The authors do fault Trudeau for failing to cultivate Canada's economic independence, and apparently believe he should have reoriented "the economy in the more autonomous direction prescribed by Mitchell Sharp's ambitious Third Option," by which the economy was to be liberated from its overreliance on Canada-US trade. I'd love to know how this could have been done (maybe Trudeau would have liked to know too) in an economy that has been increasingly, every decade since 1920, integrating with that of the United States. What

kind of massive state intervention would be necessary to wean Canada, even partially, from North American trade? And what prime minister could ever persuade Canadian businesses to forgo the profits and Canadian consumers to forgo the comforts of a continental economy?

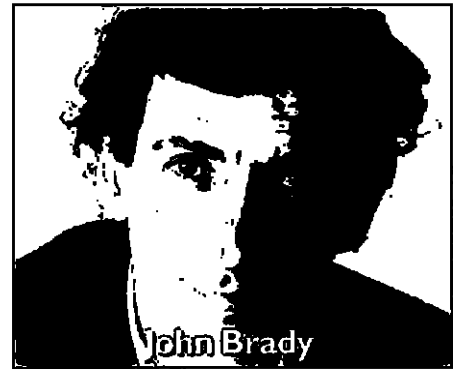
But McCall and Clarkson are especially shrewd in their assessment of one of Trudeau's greatest weaknesses as a Canadian prime minister — his ignorance of and indifference to American culture. "I think Pierre was in fact not much interested in North American ideas in any form," a long-time friend observes. Essentially European in his education and intellectual outlook, Trudeau has apparently never paid much attention to American public discourse and couldn't have cared less about its television, movies, books, and popular press.

For anyone charged with standing on guard for Canada, I'd say that's a far more dangerous flaw than any predisposition to continentalist economics. And surely it's one reason the Liberals let English-Canadian culture down so badly in the Trudeau era. Apart from making the world safe for *Maclean's* magazine (a dubious achievement in my view) by rejigging one tax provision, the government paid scant attention to any cultural question other than language rights. The CBC drifted, and film-distribution policy languished. The CRTC allowed CTV to violate countless licensing commitments, and the cabinet complied. With the average viewer now watching more than 1,000 hours of TV per year, such things matter. I don't mind whether my daughter's generation drinks Florida orange juice or wears American running shoes made in Thailand. I do care what images they absorb and what books they read. We all should. But Trudeau apparently didn't. *Tant pis.* ○

Go Fourth and Multiply



Gail Bowen



John Brady

A COLDER KIND OF DEATH

by Gail Bowen

McClelland & Stewart, 240 pages, \$24.99 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 1482 1)

THE GOOD LIFE

by John Brady

HarperCollins, 288 pages, \$25 cloth (ISBN 0 00 224407 1)

Reviewed by Sheryl Halpern



ONE OF LIFE'S GUILTY, addictive pleasures can be reading murder mysteries. You can go through the Agatha Christies or Ruth Rendells the way you go through the soft-centred chocolates in a Laura Secord box.

Best of all is a murder mystery featuring a favourite detective: you get to puzzle out whodunit, sifting through clues and doing body counts, with a likeable (if peculiarly logical and bloody-minded) companion. If it has suspects worth wondering about, atmosphere, and just enough suspense, you're set. (The test of a mystery is whether you stay up all night to finish it and don't skip to the end.)

Both Gail Bowen and John Brady have committed serial murder mystery for the fourth time. Alert the fans of sleuths Joanne Kilbourn and Matt Minogue: the new episodes are out.

Bowen's *A Colder Kind of Death* begins on a chilly Hallowe'en in Regina,

Saskatchewan, with a coincidence that is more trick than treat. Getting ready for her stint on Nationtv's "Canada Tonight," Kilbourn happens to see on a nearby television monitor that Kevin Tarpley, who'd been jailed six years earlier for bludgeoning Kilbourn's politician-husband, Ian, to death, has been shot in the prison courtyard by an unknown sniper. Upon coming home to unwind, she finds a letter from Tarpley, complete with Biblical quotation, apology, and cryptic warning.

Worse, she finds herself being stalked by Maureen Gault, Tarpley's mean-mouthed widow. Worse still, Maureen is soon found dead in a parking lot, strangled by Kilbourn's favourite silk scarf. The police close in — politely (Kilbourn, after all, is a broadcaster, a respectable mother of four, and the widow of a prominent MP).

So Kilbourn goes into what her friends call her Nancy Drew act. She watches an old Nationtv videotape, and retrieves old telephone messages. She dumps out the contents of her husband's old wallet — and goes ballistic with hurt and jealousy (why is that picture of a young woman and her baby slipped behind a family photo?). She puts ads in the Personals, and drives out to a deserted hunting lodge.

Kilbourn, in fact, is a bit like a grown-up Nancy Drew in her doggedness. Except that

.....

she's not a rich-girl fantasy: she's 49 years old, pragmatic, organized — the sort of person who writes and follows "to do" lists.

Her "to do" list is so long that it's amazing that she has time for murder investigations. She teaches political science at the local university, does weekly telecasts, emcees a former premier's testimonial dinner, visits old friends, dates the handsome, perceptive Cree police inspector Alex Kequahtoway. Most important, she has two children still living at home.

Sherlock Holmes never stopped halfway through a case to do the laundry for the Baker Street Irregulars, but Kilbourn has to detect and take care of domestic details. It's dizzying to watch her: she discovers who really murdered Ian, then referees a back-seat argument; spots a videotaped clue, and goes home to make grilled-cheese sandwiches. What other investigator checks out a lead *and* makes "flowerpot cakes" (recipe included) for her adopted daughter's birthday party? It's murder mystery, *Chatelaine*-style. The narrative and dialogue ring true — matter-of-fact, Canadian. But there are lapses into cliché: a newly married friend is "the happiest man in the world," a rock group is a "blast from the past," and the last chapter features a newborn child and snow for Christmas. There's also a headlong fall into improbability: while doing her research, Kilbourn pulls up to a house and is immediately handed a box of vital photos by its new owners. Hmm. Tailed by a silver Audi, Kilbourn keeps sniffing out clues, turning up an improbably named prison chaplain, a retired principal, an angry Ukrainian and his daughter, and odd happenings in Chaplin, Saskatchewan, population 400. What she exposes is not some crime kingpin, but her own comfortable assumptions about friends and family, and motives for more than one murder. She also uncovers traces of blackmail, affairs, bigotry, illegitimacy — and sets off a spectacular suicide.

The denouement proves so satisfying (tying up loose ends left around since

J U N E CALLWOOD'S

Margaret Atwood, Phil Fontaine, Maureen Forrester, Farley Mowat, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Charles Pachter, Rosemary Brown, William Hutt, Karen Kain in conversation.

Stoddart
publishers

NATIONAL TREASURES

Deadly Appearances) that the reader hardly minds that Bowen has performed literary sleight of hand, switching one unsolved murder for another.

As for *The Good Life*, set in Matt Minogue's gritty Dublin, sure and it has atmosphere. It's so Irish it needs subtitles (biro? gobshite? culchie? and don't feel like an iijit if you can't decipher the idiom). It's also got a corpse: not-so-darling Mary Mullen the prostitute, dumped in the canal one fine summer night.

The suspects include her sad junkie boyfriend, who's hiding out in Phoenix Park, her Da, an alcoholic wife-beater who may or may not be Born-Again, and her accountant friend with the Mercedes. There's also her tight-lipped flatmate, whose biker boyfriend knows the local mobsters, and a photographer who snaps pornography on the side.

Pity poor Minogue. At work, he's bogged down by this case, and whipsawed

between Chief Inspector James Kilmartin and the new murder squad floater Tommy Malone. At home, he's baffled by his daughter, Iseult, who may be marrying or having a baby or both, driving all concerned to hysterics and diplomacy.

There is some suspense: the plodding of the police alternates with the panic of lost souls. But there's no mystery in the air — just the day-to-day tedium of police routine, run-of-the-gin-mill thuggery, prostitution, and drugs.

There's a jolt at the end (keep your eye on Malone's jailbird twin). Ah, but you won't stay up the night wondering, except about Minogue. The Inspector can be haunted, complex, brilliant (read *A Stone in the Heart*), but here, well, he isn't. Matt Minogue, this isn't your most challenging case at all, at all.

Details, details. Diehard Minogue fans, lucky Kilbourn fans, put your trenchcoat collars up and head out to the bookstore. It's murder out there. ○

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The Centre: Can It Hold?

SELLING ILLUSIONS: THE CULT OF MULTICULTURALISM IN CANADA

by Neil Bissoondath
 Penguin, 236 pages, \$16.99 paper
 (ISBN 0 14 023878 6)

Reviewed by Janice Kulyk Keefer

NEIL BISSOONDATH HAS discovered the root of all evil in contemporary Canada: not economic collapse or the devastation of our environment, but multiculturalism. Bissoondath contends that multiculturalism has cost Canadians any fixed sense of who we collectively are by eradicating that centre that we yearn to have “bind” us. Equating multiculturalism with apartheid, racialism, and ethnic ghettoization, he

accuses it of destroying that unifying, Anglo-centric “old Canada” so many of us supposedly found so comforting. The only alternative to multiculturalism Bissoondath deigns to sketch out, however, is a vaguely envisioned Canada

where inherent differences and inherent similarities meld easily and where no one is alienated with hyphenation. A nation of cultural hybrids, where every individual is unique, every individual distinct. And every individual is Canadian, undiluted and undivided.

The trouble with *Selling Illusions* is not only that Bissoondath, despite his claims to be free of ideology, is pushing a liberal and

laissez-faire individualism that went out about the time of the Great Depression; he also never defines for us in any persuasive or significant manner just what it means to be pure “Canadian,” other than to possess a colder climate and to be quieter and more peace-loving than Americans. His exemplary Canadian immigrant experience turns out to be that of the Ignatieff family, whom he turns into Slavic Horatio Algiers. Yet it’s his own attitudes toward both his country of birth and country of adoption that Bissoondath is really trying to sell, and this leads him into some slippery manoeuvres. Thus he attacks other Canadian writers, notably activist members of the Black, Asian, and Native communities, for attempting to curtail or destroy freedom of expression and imagination, while he himself is unaccepting of writers whose imaginations are energized by a sense of double belonging to here and “there” — artists who may be third-generation Canadians, but for whom ethnicity has everything to do with an inextinguishable historical and cultural awareness of the countries their families chose to or were forced to abandon. One of the most puzzling aspects of *Selling Illusions* is, in fact, Bissoondath’s blindness to the fact that Canada’s embrace of multi-rather than bi-culturalism has greatly assisted the emergence and positive reception of writers such as Kogawa, Ondaatje, Mistry, and Ricci, who have explored cultural difference and the dynamic of ethnicity with all the power, sophistication, and vision that Bissoondath’s caricature of multiculturalism, Toronto’s “Caravan,” lacks.

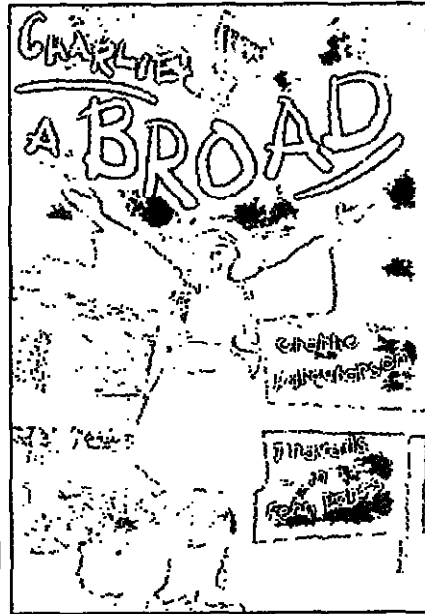
There is nothing particularly new or inspiring in this book, which is more a compendium of right-of-centre truisms and the multicultural equivalent of suburban myths than a vigorous polemic. Parts of the book are difficult to digest, not because of the complexity of Bissoondath’s ideas, but because of the infelicity of his prose. Mixed metaphors abound: his diction is sometimes faulty, as when he uses the term “corollary”

where "opposite" would be the logical choice, or describes the fears of certain Canadians regarding non-European immigrants as "legitimate" when one would hope he means "strong" or "real." His vision of Canadian campuses being invaded by the equivalent of Nazi stormtroopers who shut down free discussion is bizarrely exaggerated, and his presentation of certain anti-multiculturalists disingenuous: Doreen Kimura, for example, he introduces as the eminent neuropsychologist she is, but he neglects to inform us that as the president of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship, a neo-conservative organization opposing the post-structuralist "paradigm shift" in the humanities, and linked to right-wing American organizations like the National Association of Scholars, she is of precisely that species of "ideologue" he otherwise excoriates.

While Bissoondath does acknowledge that the "old Canada" had its virulently racist moments, and while he occasionally makes valid points about the excesses of some present-day anti-racists, his presentation of multiculturalism is badly flawed by his inability to distinguish between what Linda Hutcheon has called the ideal and the ideology of multiculturalism. The ideal I would describe as a global phenomenon that, far from being Trudeau's brain child, is as much a part of the late-20th-century *Zeitgeist* as is postmodernism. It has been discussed as a positive and necessary development by thinkers of the calibre of Adam Michnik and Jürgen Habermas. The ideology as we know it in Canada can be linked to the state's attempts to control and trivialize the efforts of those formerly marginalized or silenced to empower themselves. Debunked the latter must certainly be — junked the former should not and cannot be. In trying to throw out the baby with the bathwater, Bissoondath himself ends up sailing down the drain, while the baby cries out, as lustily as ever, for some truly enlightened attention. ○

You thought you knew him, but that was before he won the lottery...

CHARLIE'S A BROAD



Now that he's intimately acquainted with Canajan jogfree and histry and yes, even the unyverse — our man Charlie Farquharson and lovely wife Valeda are doing that nineties thing and "going global." Thanks to a lottery win, their foray into foreign affairs takes them to Cuba, Parea and even Great Britain, where they go in search of some long-lost ancestors. A must read for all fans of this great Canadian institution.

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CANADA

What Love Has to Do with It

DESPITE HIS MERITS AS a writer, Dany Laferrière is famous because of a single title.

Mention his name and only a few people blink. But mention the words *How to Make Love to a Negro* and you get smiles of recognition.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the subject of fame is at the heart of one of Laferrière's new books, enticingly titled *Why Must a Black Writer Write About Sex?* In some ways a sequel to *How to Make Love to a Negro*, this book is looser, compiled of musings, ramblings, and rantings on American life. (Born in Haiti, Laferrière fled to Montreal in 1978 and now lives in Miami.) Approached by an American magazine to write "a long piece"

WHY MUST A BLACK WRITER WRITE ABOUT SEX?

by Dany Laferrière

Coch House, 198 pages, \$16.95 paper (ISBN 0 88910 482 4)

DINING WITH THE DICTATOR

by Dany Laferrière

Coch House, 210 pages, \$16.95 paper (ISBN 0 88910 480 8)

Reviewed by Glenn Sumi

on their country, the author — now a minor celebrity — is told, "Remember, you're the flavor of the month. You bum around a little, they pick up the tab, you write down your impressions."

These "impressions" — some a few paragraphs, others several pages — form the body of the book, and they're dashed

Douglas Fetherling.



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"*The File on Arthur Moss* is a mysterious parable of seduction by a power that only watches and collects facts, that eschews the overt exercise of force in preference to the subtler forms of corruption, that subverts and deforms facts as it grasps them. It is a kind of neo-Orwellian thriller about our future—which is now."

—*Douglas Glover*

Cary Fagan.

In a final desperate attempt to free herself from her stalled life, part-time Bohemian Sheila Hersh travels to Vienna to learn more about an obscure poet who has come to fascinate her. The city's ancient streets and aromatic cafés work an unexpected magic on Sheila—and make this novel an enchanting piece of work



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off with such brio that they're hard to stop reading. Criss-crossing the country, Laferrière lets loose on topics like interracial dating, the American South, the strange fruits of fame, and black celebrities. Written in his familiar *provocateur* style—part Bukowski, part Baldwin—his stream of rhetoric will leave you giggling. He flirts and toys with us, playing on prejudices and giving voice to taboo statements, such as:

One day the whites will be replaced by the blacks. The blacks will be the worst imperialists the world's ever seen because they suffered so much. Never let people who've been through hell rule the world.

I don't know a single white who doesn't start salivating when the issue of interracial copulation is raised. As long as there's at least one taker, I'll have work in America.

Here and elsewhere, the author is an opportunistic poet blessed with a philosopher's insight into the complexities of the truth. He sits back, observing the Rodney Kings and Magic Johnsons of the world, then stands up, ready to cash in on the follies, foibles, and liberal pretensions of the white people around him.

But the final image in the book—that of a smiling Black man, outfitted in stereotypical garb ("dancing in his Reebok shoes ... a green and yellow beret sitting lightly on his head")—hints at something more dangerous: "And what about that green thing he's holding? Is that a hand grenade

or a piece of fruit?" This obvious nod to Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem" ("What happens to a dream deferred? / Does it dry up / like a raisin in the sun? ... Or does it explode?") reveals the anger beneath the satire. Laferrière might be funny, cynical, and playful, but he's nobody's fool. The truth about the American Dream, deferred or not, is not a pretty sight.

The thought and craft that went into *Why Must a Black Writer Write About Sex?* is absent from Laferrière's second new book, the more traditional *Dining with the Dictator*. Set in Port-au-Prince during Duvalier's rule, the book is basically a childhood memoir that's longing to be a political allegory.

The year is 1971, and young Dany is an obedient child, raised by his mother and aunts, absently doing his homework and dreaming of the day when he can visit the house across the street. (This house, headed by a woman named Miki, is a virtual palace of estrogen, inhabited by a harem of Haiti's most beautiful young women.) When his friend Gégé castrates a member of Duvalier's secret police, Dany flees for his life, thinking he'll be tracked down, and camps out in Miki's house. Over one weekend, he witnesses

these women as they claw their way through men, sex, relationships, money, and each other.

As the title suggests (incidentally, the original French title was *Le goût des jeunes filles*), Laferrière is comparing the country's repressive political climate to the social behaviour of a group of women. It's not a comparison that holds up well. *Certainly the women are rambunctious*: they talk about sex, they curse, they spy on each other, and they're constantly arguing. One of them even pounces on Dany and says, "I'm going to eat you alive." But it's odd, and in questionable taste, to compare them to the terrorizing Tonton Macoutes.

The problems with plausibility are compounded by the book's rather passive and uninteresting narrator. Laferrière's books ordinarily have a strong central consciousness that puts a funky spin on ordinary events. Unfortunately, we're not given much access to the young Dany's thoughts. There are too many scenes where seven women talk, argue, and complain. And even after 200 pages, these women remain pretty indistinguishable, with neither their speech nor their physical appearance creating any individual sparks.

Only one section comes alive. In "The House Across the Way," we're given a reflective passage where Dany looks across the street, imagining the ordinary details of his former life. He remembers moments with his mother and snatches of conversations with his aunts, and unravels a story about his philandering father. It's a perfect piece of writing, gently nuanced, lyrical, and psychologically apt. Since one of Dany's aunts is named Gilberte, and the chapter begins with the words "I slept poorly last night," the word Proustian seems not out of place.

It's too bad the rest of the book doesn't achieve this high standard. ○

Graveyard For Dreamers

Joan Baxter



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by Joan Baxter

Breeding in His Bones

IT CAN'T HAVE BEEN EASY to write the first full-scale biography of Robertson Davies, actor, dramatist, editor, novelist, academic, Nobel and Booker Prize nominee, iconoclast, late bloomer, and national treasure. Davies is now 81 and, counting his first appearance on stage at the age of five in Thamesville, Ontario, has been hugely productive in astonishingly varied ways for most of them. So long and prolific a life makes the searching out and assimilation of the vast amount of documentation assembled here a major undertaking.

As Judith Skelton Grant observes, if Davies had stopped writing in 1961, when he became Master of Massey College, he would have been only a minor figure in Canadian literature, credited with plays and articles, enlightened editorship of the *Peterborough Examiner*, and the elegant but comparatively slight novels of the Salterton trilogy. It was not until 1968, at the age of 55, that he began *Fifth*

ROBERTSON DAVIES: MAN OF MYTH

by Judith Skelton Grant

Viking, 735 pages, \$35 cloth (ISBN 0 670 92557 3)

Reviewed by Mary Millar

Business, first novel in the Deptford trilogy and basis for his subsequent literary reputation. The crucial questions for his biographer, and the ones most readers will be interested in, are, Why did it take so long? and, What prompted this spectacular new development?

To get at the answers has taken Grant 10 years of research and interviews. More than 70 of these interviews were with Davies himself, and his comments and stories are among the best parts of the book. We are never likely to get more verbatim Davies input to a biography. There are, however, hazards in dealing with a living subject, especially one who has an exceptionally retentive memory but whose creative imag-

ination can often subtly shape what he remembers. Grant's approach is to tread delicately, balancing Davies's exuberance with scholarly factual checking, often in footnotes that set up a continued but muted counterpoint. This is understandably tactful but, like much else in the biography, overly respectful; later interpreters will want to probe more deeply into delicate subjects, such as his marriage or the discontent under his regime at Massey College, which receive only positive treatment here.

Given, however, that Davies apparently dreads confronting painful memories, he seems remarkably open about deeply felt formative influences like family background and early relationships. Some of this can be guessed at from *The Manticore* or *Murder and Walking Spirits*, as can his distaste for the narrowness of pre-war Ontario from *What's Bred in the Bone*. What Grant's biography provides is a solid mass of data on experiences traumatic and improving, Welsh and Scottish forebears, schooldays at Upper Canada College, Queen's, and Oxford (where he was known as "the *Isis* Idol"), a particularly

poignant romance in the 1930s, the *Peterborough Examiner* and Little Theatre, Canadian publishing and journalism, Jungian psychology.

There is also, thanks to access to Davies's work notebooks and diaries, careful charting and exhaustive discussion of almost everything he has written, minor and major. This is heavy going at times, partly from sheer bulk, partly from a style that can turn very leaden in its anxiety to get everything in. The main phases of the life — the theatre, newspaper editing, academic life, the three trilogies — are dealt with thematically, which makes for orderly development within each section but sometimes obscures Davies's characteristic many-sidedness, more often simultaneous than consecutive.

The pattern that emerges, however, is clear, and it is a more tormented one than public appearance might have suggested. Davies's life has been a long and sometimes anguished effort to shake off parental dominance. (Even now, he says, he can still hear Florence and Rupert Davies giving their opinions on what he

is doing.) His mother, like Dunstan Ramsay's, was "fearful and life-denying," and his "Three Fathers," Rupert Davies, Tyrone Guthrie, and Vincent Massey, kept him postponing for publishing, theatre, and academe his fullest self-realization as a novelist. The need to construct defensive masks lies behind the fascination with performance that is one of Davies's major themes but which, as a character trait, has led to accusations of arrogance or role-playing. Only later in life, with years of experience behind him and inspired by his study of Jung, has he been able to confront and integrate his warring inner forces and find the true self that creates the novels.

It's a convincing thesis, a little defensive but impressively substantiated, although, with at least one more novel in the works, all the evidence isn't yet in. Nevertheless, Grant's biography, for its scope and detail, will be indispensable for anyone working on Davies or simply fascinated by his creative processes. Keeping in mind that, as another iconoclast, Lytton Strachey, put it, "Discretion is not the better part of biography." ○

A Certain Recklessness

BELLYDANCER: STORIES

by Sky Lee

Press Gang, 208 pages, \$16.95 paper (ISBN 0 88974 039 9)

Reviewed by Merna Summers

SKY LEE'S FIRST NOVEL, *Disappearing Moon Café*, gave many readers their first knowledge of the colourful past of Vancouver's Chinatown, a world of single men, of exploited labour, of missions to gather the bones of dead Chinese and ship them back home to China. There was a wonderful, and often poetic, immediacy to the scenes of that novel, and Lee emerged as a writer born to make language dance.

Her new book is different: still well worth attention, but different.

First off, *Bellydancer* is a collection of stories, not a novel, and Lee handles the two forms very differently. Secondly, most of the characters in the new work are not Chinese ... although many seemed to this reader far more exotic than anything encountered in the earlier work.

The three bellydancer stories of the title involve char-



acters whose lives in one way or another revolve around that of Seni, an erotic dancer of apparently formidable attractiveness. There is her manager, of whom Seni says: "Al and I go back a long road of you hurt me, so I hold out on you. Old friends, so to speak." There is a former woman lover, who writes of Seni in language that is lush, adoring, sentimental. There are "the trailer park girls," women who work as dancers in good times, turn to prostitution in bad. As one of them says: "We all getting on. We more like housewives. Same ol' fellas over and over again. Only they stay longer, brawl less, sleep more and pay more."

But the strongest stories in the collection, for me, were not the bellydancer stories, but "Safe Sex" and "Nancy Drew Mysteries." In "Safe Sex," a young woman has a supernatural experience, a visit from a phantom lover, while riding on the Tsawwassen ferry. The narrator says,

I have simply decided that this is my story of enchantment. Which is not the same as a fairy tale. In fairy tales, the heroine lives happily ever after, after being released from her enchantment, but I don't believe that. I think the poor sap spends her life trying to get back.

In "Nancy Drew Mysteries," a powerful story, a disturbed and isolated young woman has been living as the mistress of a rich man, a "kept woman" in the old way. She is now pregnant, fearful, and in hiding. We learn in another story, "Blooded in Brazil," that her fear is well founded. She is now being stalked by a hit man.

There are lesbian relationships in most of the stories in this collection, and the author depicts an amazing variety of women. We meet old women and young women, depressed victims and noisy brawlers.

As there is an art in writing stories, so there is an art in assembling collections,

THE TIME
OF THE
KINGFISHERS



David Watmough

THE TIME OF THE KINGFISHERS

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and it must be said that the stories in this collection do not always do much to enhance one another. They are not all equally accomplished, and the reader comes away with the feeling that perhaps less would have been more. That said, one wants to add that Sky Lee is a bold writer,

one whose talent appears to come accompanied by a certain recklessness.

I would heartily recommend *Disappearing Moon Café*, the novel that established Sky Lee as a writer worth watching. *Bellydancer*, though less satisfying, shows that she still is. ○

Sensing Connections

THAT THE FIRST TWO poets chosen for Oxford's new series of Canadian "selecteds" both are women is a fair reflection of where poetic energy has been running strongest in recent years. But these books in no way represent a literary "movement." While Roo Borson's work extends the already-long modern lyric tradition, Erin Mouré's explorations of the postmodern sensibility are unique in English-Canadian poetry.

NIGHT WALK: SELECTED POEMS

by Roo Borson

Oxford, 63 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 19 541092 3)

THE GREEN WORD: SELECTED POEMS

by Erin Mouré

Oxford, 96 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 19 541077 7)

Reviewed by Colin Morton

A selected volume, even from a poet in mid-career, should give the reader a broad enough overview to see the poet developing over a period of years or decades. *Night Walk* doesn't really provide that. With only a few brief and tentative poems from Roo Borson's first two books, the selection gives the impression that her sureness in *A Sad Device* (1981) arose quickly. Memorable lines and sensuous images capture a whole setting and mood. Birds, flowers, rain, the night sky. Borson obsessively reworks these traditional images as objective correlatives for a pervasive melancholy or *ennui* that she observes both within and among the people around her. Her strongly visual poems are like muggy California nights, weighed down with sensation, "saturated with consciousness," often immobilized by it.

The title poem of her 1989 book, *Intent*,

or *the Weight of the World*, adopts a refreshingly personal, even confessional tone. For the most part, though, both her highly wrought free verse and prose poems hold the world at a distance through technique. Elegantly ornamented sentences mute emotion (a poem called "Lust" is, ironically, written in the subjunctive).

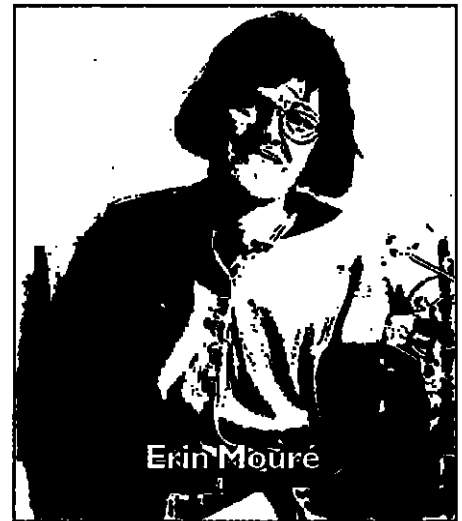
Borson serves up hauntingly beautiful images throughout: "The moon: a hoof-print in ice" (from *A Sad Device*); "After dark the flowers let their other scent into the air, as if thinking aloud" (from *The Whole Night, Coming Home*). But by the evidence of *Night Walk*, it is difficult to say whether her writing will grow beyond the field she has already cultivated very intensively.

The Green Word raises a contrasting question — not whether Erin Mouré will continue to develop, but how far her readers will be able to follow her. Already she has moved to the edge, where communication often falters. Combining everyday situations with highly intellectual structures, her poems set out to destroy the distance, which Roo Borson so carefully preserves, between subject and object.

For instance, in "Seebe," a poem from *WSW* (1989), Mouré sets up the reader for a lesson in poetics by describing in some detail a dramatic incident, then abruptly derailing her narrative:

The poem has fallen apart into mere description Here we have only my assumptions Because the speech is the writer's speech, and each word of the writer robs the witnessed of their own voice, muting them.

No writer can give more than a partial accounting of events. Most acknowledge



the limitations of subjectivity and work with them, whatever ambivalence they may feel. Yet Mouré seems to be trying to escape this ambivalence, to achieve unmediated expression. To this end she disrupts language to dislocate the reader from the hierarchical subject-object assumptions of traditional syntax.

Her poems do what she challenges herself to do in a passage (not included in *The Green Word*) from *Furious* (1988): "To use a kind of compression, so compressed that the links between the image / phrases break down, but the whole poem still retains its connection." Her poems frequently dispense with narrative and syntactic links, engaging the reader as a par-

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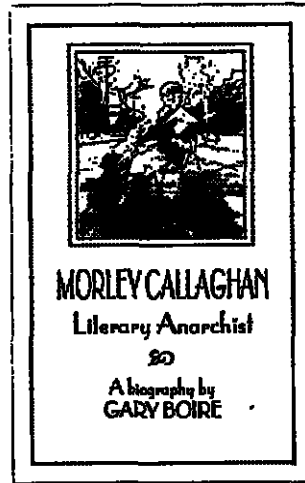
participant in creating meaning. In the process the poem's "subject" becomes not so much the "meaning" to be derived but the act, the reader's act, of making those connections, supplying those links.

The Green Word shows how consistently Mouré has challenged the reader to participate in making connections, how furiously she has compressed experience from the very beginning. The earliest poem in the book, from *Empire, York Street* (1977), employs in a simpler and thus more readily observable way some of the techniques of her newest work. The poem, "Hazard of the Occupation," holds in suspension two, three, or more patterns of words and images. A child's arm is severed, "flesh as thin as words"; a table breaks; shingles fly off a roof; "words rearrange" meaning on the page; like the poet herself, "the hummingbird refuses to / land on the roof." Parallel thoughts and actions engage the reader in the process of creating metaphor, not as a mere part of speech but as the organizing force, the structure of the poem.

A similar process can be found working in the poems from Mouré's most recent book *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love* (1992), but on a larger scale, requiring the reader to perceive and synthesize more disparate information, including text from facing pages (as if that were possible) simultaneously. Disparate subjects are "pulled thru" similar syntactic patterns until those patterns become not merely carriers of meaning but the terrain of meaning itself.

The onus rests with the reader to do the carrying, to interact with the text and become a poet in the act of reading. It's a rigorous workout; it can leave you breathless, head reeling, ready to relax into a Roo Borson poem and let the sensations wash over you. My advice is to buy both books, alternate between them, and continue reading until Oxford brings out the next books in this series. ○

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Embarrassingly Honest

IT IS DIFFICULT TO WRITE about Israel without incurring criticism from, and/or creating controversy among, Jews and Arabs. Because the groups are so highly polarized, the chance of being politically correct — in both the old and new senses of the word — is slim at best. Bronwyn Drainie's *My Jerusalem: Secular Adventures in the Holy City* is an often embarrassingly honest account of her life in Israel for two years. *My Jerusalem* is cogent and insightful as a travel/guide book. However, a fair, carefully written, and responsible cultural critique it is not.

Drainie writes engagingly — even if her "reflections" are occasionally insipid and a little long-winded, they're worth the breath. Also, the sense of history she weaves into her book is readable and incisive. However, to comment on Israel one has to be meticulous around the issue of identity politics: one has to clarify the position of the writing subject. Drainie accomplishes this to a fault, caricaturing, at times,

MY JERUSALEM: SECULAR ADVENTURES IN THE HOLY CITY by Bronwyn Drainie

Doubleday, 224 pages, \$27.95 cloth (ISBN 0 385 25474 1)

Reviewed by Julie Jenkinson

Arabs and, especially, Jews. Consequently *My Jerusalem* is rife with unwarranted generalizations. Her expectations of what she arbitrarily terms a Third World country are sometimes shockingly naïve: so what if you can't find bagels "in Jerusalem, a deeply oriental town"? At times it's hard to believe that Drainie, married to the Middle Eastern correspondent for the *Globe and Mail* and a cultural commentator for the *Globe* herself, has brought little more than diaristic observations to bear on Israel.

Most disturbing in *My Jerusalem* is Drainie's seeming intolerance for "otherness." She attempts to justify her lack of tolerance by stating "we" — itself a gen-

eralization — “visualize distant parts of the world in such broad, clumsy strokes, full of blurry generalizations and simplistic dichotomies; up close, the realities are invariably more complicated and more interesting.” Unfortunately, this awareness does not seem to guide Drainie in her commentary, her unjust criticism of others.

Living in a different culture, especially one with such complex cultural and political differences, with hopes of recreating one’s own home comforts, is unrealistic. However, Drainie and her family tried their best to emulate middle-class Western standards by moving into a cushy spot, the paradisaical neighbourhood of Yemin Moshe, one of the loveliest, most exclusive parts of the city. Their house, although she claims her neighbours might disagree, “was the best house on the best street ... clearly more perfect than all the others.” While she tries, too, to enmesh herself in the culture and “experience” the lifestyle of Israelis and Palestinians, she ends up feeling appalled by much of what goes on

— particularly when it comes to ultra-Orthodox Jews. Her criticism is sometimes immature and sarcastically cruel. For example, when describing ultra-Orthodox Jewish women, she comments, “they had removed their head scarves and replaced them with nasty, sharp-edged hats that emphasized all the worst features of their high-domed foreheads and round moon-like faces.” Her references to their recreational activities, their garb, their mannerisms, their sense of material values, are derogatory. Although at the beginning of the story she claims she is a “non-practising half-Jew, on her mother’s side” (her mother is Jewish and her father is Anglican), what becomes apparent in *My Jerusalem* is Drainie’s insecurity about her relationship to Jewishness. Arabs, mind you, don’t escape unscathed either, especially the women, whom she sees, for the most part, as “giggly, shy and bland.”

Stereotyping does allow Drainie to be witty. Religious customs and the must-miss, that is to say, over-visited, tourist attractions

are skewered robustly. She takes the romantic out of clichéd romanticism very well. Of the Church of Nativity she writes, “it is simply a gloomy cavernous barn crammed with ornate hanging oil lamps and soot-covered wall decorations ... the scene completely unbelievable and verging on the silly.” *My Jerusalem* is a good guide book to guide one away from the plethora of commercially packaged holy sites.

In concluding her story Drainie reflects on a shocking encounter with an Arab “friend” who declares that, “as the Koran says, we must kill the Jews ... all the Jews in the world.” Drainie bravely confronts him and finally “comes out” as a Jew — and not a half-Jew either. His harsh confession/belief, it seems, may have altered her sense of her religious self. That isn’t to say she experiences a reconversion: at the book’s end, Drainie can be found in a medieval cathedral in southwest France with Gregorian chants swirling around her head, praying, as the Bible enjoins her to, for the peace of Jerusalem. ○

Stuck in a Nightmare

THE PRODIGAL HUSBAND: THE TRAGEDY OF HELMUTH AND HANNA BUXBAUM

by Michael Harris

McClelland & Stewart, 480 pages, \$29.99 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 3956 5)

Reviewed by Jack Batten

YOU MAY THINK YOU’VE read this story before. It’s the one about the millionaire from London, Ontario, named Helmuth Buxbaum who hired a zonked-out lowlife to murder his wife in a plan so bizarre and cruel that it included Buxbaum as a willing eye witness. “No, honey, please, not this way,” the victim, Hanna Buxbaum, said to her husband in the moment before




the hitman shot her dead. But Helmuth, in the words of another lowlife who was along for the hit, "didn't blink an eye."

You probably *have* read the story before. When Buxbaum went on trial for first-degree murder in October 1985, it was, from a media point of view, the Paul Bernardo case of its decade. Newspapers covered it at length and in detail, and shortly after the end of the trial, which lasted four months and brought a guilty verdict, three quickie books recapitulated the crime and the courtroom proceedings. But you've never read the story in the way Michael Harris tells it. Harris has been so thorough in his research, so meticulous in accounting for every gruesome minutia and every loathsome character, so precise and graphic in relating the tale that reading *The Prodigal Husband* is the waking equivalent of getting stuck for a couple of days in a nightmare. I think I intend that as a compliment.

Helmuth and Hanna met in Canada, although, speaking of nightmares, both had survived childhoods of terrible deprivation in Eastern Europe during and after the Second World War. As a couple, the two appeared to share the same fundamentalist values and ambitions — hard work, lots of kids, religion. But when they made their fortune fairly quickly in the nursing-home business, Helmuth veered in fresh directions. Family and church were okay, but now, with all the money he'd accumulated, *really* disposable income, he decided that kinky sex and cocaine were more his speed.

Nobody, not even Buxbaum himself, whom Harris interviewed extensively, seems able to explain his switch from the sober life to the high life. Whatever the reason, Buxbaum was hardly subtle about his conversion. In no time, almost every hooker, pimp, and drug dealer in London knew about the easy pickings from the weird guy with the fat wallet

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and the lust for coke and babes. And when Helmuth casually elected to rid himself of Hanna — the principal motivation seems to have been the poor woman's failure to warm up to Helmuth's suggestions of oral sex — several regulars at Kelly's Bar on the seamy side of town stepped forward for the job. The deed was done, in daylight, by the side of a main highway outside London, and the guilty parties were so clumsy that the cops didn't need to be *Sherlock Holmeses* to solve this one.

Harris is especially effective at describing the trial, making the book, among other things, requisite stuff for courtroom junkies. The eloquent Eddie Greenspan represented Buxbaum at perhaps the most famous fee in Canadian legal history, a million bucks plus a quarter-million bonus for an acquittal. Greenspan, despite some brilliant scrambling, didn't collect on the bonus, and it was after the guilty verdict, after Buxbaum soured on Greenspan, hired a new high-profile counsel, Clayton Ruby,

and launched an appeal, that the legal manoeuvring grew even more intriguing.

At the trial, Greenspan had never raised an insanity defence, partly because Buxbaum forbade it, partly because Greenspan's psychiatrists didn't think Buxbaum was insane within the Criminal Code definition. At least that was Greenspan's story. Ruby said Greenspan had it wrong. He said that *his* psychiatrists tested Buxbaum and found him to be mad as a march hare. Ruby used this assessment to ask the Ontario Court of Appeal to grant a new trial where things would be done right the second time around. The relationship between Ruby and Greenspan got testy. The Appeal Court turned Ruby down. So did the Supreme Court of Canada. Buxbaum remained in prison, and the case was finally over.

There's just one thing I want to know: are Greenspan and Ruby still speaking?

It's the only question about the Buxbaum case that isn't answered in this remarkable and disturbing book. ○

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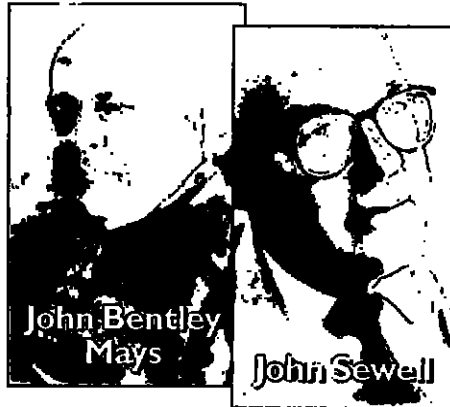
Wibing, 384 pages, \$29.99 cloth (ISBN 0 670 85356 9)

HOUSING AND HOMES: HOUSING FOR CANADIANS

by John Sewell

Lorimer, 240 pages, \$29.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper
(ISBN 1 55028 437 1 cloth, 1 55028 436 3 paper)

Reviewed by Brian Fawcett



anyone but Bentley Mays?

I think it was the piece on Toronto's buried waterways (included in *Emerald City*) that started to change my mind. It made me acknowledge that, as a newcomer to Toronto, I'd been learning things from his columns I couldn't find elsewhere, and that Bentley Mays was consistently pulling off one of the most difficult tricks a writer can take on: teaching while offering his readers sensory delight. From the beginning he's seemed equally comfortable with architecture, history, and

geography, and he's surprisingly astute about the shortcomings of urban planning. Best of all, he does his research with obvious delight and, frequently, with inspiration. Even his occasional outbursts of "sensitivity" are grounded in a testable landscape. The CitySites columns constitute a journalistic accomplishment of which both Bentley Mays and the *Globe* brain-trust ought to be proud.

Bentley Mays may have accidentally invented a new and extremely timely literary genre. It's somewhere between urban travel writing and criticism. Its newness lies in the fact that it is written not to attract tourists to the city (or to help them navigate a jungle), to propagandize prideful amenities, or to aggrandize a set of political wisdoms, but to create a more knowledgeable familiarity in those of us who live in Toronto. It's a rare and citizenly thing to try, and other cities ought to be envious.

There's a bonus here. The columns have been terrific, the book is better. No longer constrained by column length, Bentley Mays has fleshed out the component essays to their natural dimensions. Given the author's well-known loquaciousness, this might have resulted in disaster, but it hasn't. Mostly we get more and sharper detail, not blather, and even the occasional outbursts of blather are witty and kind of charming. I could name dozens of memorable essays, such as the centrepiece essay on Mies van der Rohe's Toronto-Dominion Centre (a.k.a. the Dark Towers), which manages to be kindly toward and insightful about modernism at the same time, or the essay on the imprint the glaciers have left on the landscape ("The Shape of the City"), but those are merely my personal favourites. I think it's better to simply point to the general richness, and let readers find their own delights.

The essays are set out under 16 overlapping headings, beginning with climate, landform, and pioneer history, then mov-

WHEN JOHN BENTLEY Mays began his CitySites column in the *Globe and Mail* a while back, I was somewhere on the dark side of sceptical. Why did we need this overly effusive cultural-tourist, an American to boot, art-speaking his sensibilities over a city racked by economic crisis and a visible loss of will? Obviously, we needed a critic with background, politics, and some edge. Why not John Sewell? Why not George Baird? Why not, well,

ing through depictions of contemporary cityscapes, and concluding with a wandering valedictory address about the future that concludes the book. It's an ordering that invites readers to ramble through the book's pages rather than goose-step along hunting for a single conclusion.

Such an ordering is appropriate. This is a book with a thousand useful insights, pronouncements, and observations, and startlingly few conclusions. In that way, it's like *Toronto itself*—in mid-flight, surprisingly generous, and in love with life. *Emerald City* is destined to become both an urban amenity on its own, and quite possibly a literary classic, the kind that readers will visit and revisit. I expect to be checking back with my copy for a long time.

John Sewell's *Housing and Homes: Housing for Canadians* isn't going to become a literary classic. It is turgidly written and so burdened by the ideological "factoids" and rhetoric that have been killing social democracy that one's eyes glaze over by about page 20. It invites readers to dump it on that ever widening shelf reserved for books about virtuous causes that we somehow just don't give a shit about. Doing that, however, would be a serious mistake.

Sewell is, arguably, the most intelligent functioning social democrat in the country, and *Housing and Homes* contains some very unorthodox and unbureaucratic ideas about housing. His most interesting (and un-social democratic) ideas concern municipal zoning practice, which has long been the exclusive province of brain-dead bureaucrats. Sewell wants to end the practice of designing (and controlling) neighbourhood design so that they will look good to real estate agents driving clients up and down the streets. He wants zoning opened up to encourage second units and asymmetrical design, and while he stops just short of scrapping the building code, what he has to say, if you can penetrate the dreary pall of his prose,

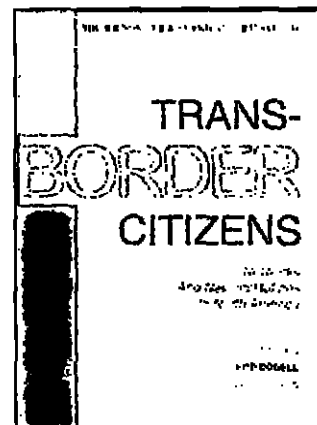
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is the most imaginative look at housing to come from a political figure in many years. His proposals for rebuilding the suburbs also echo some of the most radical thinking in urban design, and ought to (but probably won't) make the development industry stop and think.

So here's my advice. Skip the first and

last 50 pages of this book and chew your way into the meat of his arguments. The rewards are worth more than the trouble it takes. And for fun, imagine what would be produced if we could lock Sewell and John Bentley Mays together in a comfortable room for about a week and tell them to come up with a plan to save our cities. ○

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Words Worth Watching

ONE ON ONE: THE IMPRINT INTERVIEWS

edited by Leanna Crouch

Somerville House, 219 pages, \$19.95 paper (ISBN 1 895897 19 X)

Reviewed by Dan Bortolotti

SINCE IT FIRST WENT ON THE air in 1989, TVOntario's "Imprint" has benefited from being based in Toronto along with Harbourfront's International Festival of Authors, an arrangement that has allowed the show to interview writers from all over the globe without incurring travel expenses. Reflecting this influence, *One on One* comprises 18 interviews, all but three of which feature writers from outside Canada.

The dominant figure in *One on One* is Daniel Richler, the show's host until 1993. His interviews with Salman Rushdie and the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, probably the strongest in the collection,

not only reveal Richler's own insightful reading of his subjects' novels and essays, but provide the context necessary for an audience that may not have read this work.

By contrast, Guy Lawson, the present host of "Imprint," is a former lawyer without an extensive background in literary journalism. In Lawson's lone contribution, Douglas Coupland stings him after a particularly contrived question about types and archetypes: "Oh, you're getting all university on me." Leonard Cohen is more kind to a star-struck Barbara Gowdy, despite her gushing ("You're undeniably successful. Your albums sell in the hundreds of thousands"), and her requests for him to sing the lyrics to her favourite songs.

Clifton Joseph does his best with the punk singer Henry Rollins, whose inclusion here is suspect: "I never had much time for poetry," Rollins confesses. "I was always more interested in literature." By contrast, Joseph's lengthy interview

with the novelist and Vietnam veteran Larry Heinemann is the most emotional in the book, as the author describes how the horror of the war has informed his writing.

Leanna Crouch's editorial efforts are largely successful, though the placement of photos is less effective than it might have been. Rather than allowing the photographs to communicate the personal dynamics of the interview, they lapse into caricature: more often than not, unflattering shots of open-mouthed, pursed-lipped, or wildly gesticulating authors appear with ill-chosen and decontextualized captions. An image of a pensive William Golding bears the caption "The answer, I think, is I don't know"; an exasperated Rushdie is placed alongside "That's my problem." These photos serve not to complement the text but to remind the reader that this is still television, where intelligent discourse is next to impossible.

Crouch has also chosen to include the occasional bracketed editorial comment to describe the manner in which a question is posed or an answer delivered. This gloss is simply obtrusive when it interrupts the interviews with "[pause while the camera operator changes the video]," but it is effective in Richler's conversation with Martha Gellhorn, the 84-year-old chain-smoking war journalist:

Richler: You did this for sixty years. Looking back at it, have you made more than a squeak?

Gellhorn: [puffs on her cigarette] No.

Richler: Has it done any good?
Gellhorn: [blows out smoke] No.

Like "Imprint" itself, *One on One* is not a seamless production, but it is a largely engaging forum for the discussion of contemporary writing. And like "Imprint," it is at its best when Richler is in the interviewer's chair. ○

The Feminine Critique

KAY MACPHERSON WAS lured to Canada in 1935 by the offer of a job as a physiotherapist at a Montreal hospital, which paid the grand sum of \$40 a month. She planned to stay "for a year or two." In 1982, she was awarded the Order of Canada. This, and other subsequent honours, came in recognition of a lifetime of activism for world peace and women's equality. For the last 50-odd years, she has travelled the world, from Mexico to Greece to Russia to China to Vietnam, organizing and participating in innumerable marches, delegations, committees, commissions — and a few inspired stunts — all of which are described in *When in Doubt, Do Both*.

Macpherson dates the genesis of this autobiography to the year 1941, when she acquired a used typewriter and, in order to improve her typing skills, began keeping a record of her activities. But the book also includes accounts of her middle-class childhood in provincial England, her training in London, and her adventurous early years in Canada. These chapters, which show an indomitable personality in formation, are in some ways the most engaging. As a student, Macpherson had already been influenced

by the writings of Sidney and Beatrice Webb: in Canada, as an overworked physiotherapist coping with the polio epidemics of the early 1940s, she came into intimate, daily contact with human suffering, in a form that she could readily comprehend. "I always hated and feared being physically hurt, or knowing that

others were being hurt," she writes in her preface. This "led to the conviction that violence, oppression and war are unacceptable. I don't think I understood mental distress ... as easily."

After her marriage to Brough

Macpherson in 1943, and motherhood in 1944, she found herself in Toronto, a University faculty wife. By 1949, she had taken a time-honoured route to political action for women: the Home and School Association. Later came the Deer Park Residents' Association, the Association of Women Electors, the University Settlement Board, as well as a very unofficial but highly enjoyable series of convocations called the "Ladies' Liquid Lunches" — during which all mention of children, religion, and (usually) politics was banned by common agreement. Eventually, she would head the Voice of Women as well as the National Action

WHEN IN DOUBT, DO BOTH: THE TIMES OF MY LIFE

by Kay Macpherson

University of Toronto Press, 368 pages, \$50 cloth, \$18.95 paper
(ISBN 0 8020 0454 7 cloth, 0 8020 7473 1 paper)

THE GILDED GHETTO: WOMEN AND POLITICAL POWER IN CANADA

by Sydney Sharpe

HarperCollins, 320 pages, \$27 cloth
(ISBN 0 00 255276 0)

Reviewed by Anne Denoon

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Committee on the Status of Women.

Macpherson's very English modesty, her breezy sense of fun, her enjoyment and tolerance of others (along with a talent for hard work, of course), seem to have been her greatest assets. As president of VOW, she discovered she "was able to get along with almost everyone. And it struck me that this was not something everyone was able to do" She insists on giving credit wherever it is due, and rarely has a truly unkind word for anyone — even a polar opposite like Barbara Amiel, who when they met had just suffered a miscarriage, "and of course we had to feel rather sorry for her (maddening!)." Though this admirable inclusiveness makes the book an invaluable repository of names, places, and dates for anyone interested in the history of female activism, it may create a somewhat blurred effect for the casual reader. Another of her traits, Macpherson herself is the first to admit, is an innate aversion to introspection, which, she reports, inhibited her during "consciousness-raising" sessions. This tends to make her allusions to her apparently complex, and

potentially fascinating, private life impenetrably opaque.

Though she ran several times for federal office (once as an independent, later for the NDP), she clearly found the horse-trading required by party politics distasteful. Preferring to remain an adversary of power, she recalls with relish having been temporarily barred from the United States as a subversive under the McCarren-Walter Act, and on another occasion "flung into a Paris jail" (along with Thérèse Casgrain). When asked "what she had been up to lately" by the Governor General as he presented her with the Order of Canada, Kay Macpherson was happy to reply: "Revolution."

In *The Gilded Ghetto*, Sydney Sharpe takes up the subject of women in Canadian politics where *When in Doubt, Do Both* leaves off. Sharpe includes a brief, useful history of the advent of female suffrage for the benefit of the young (or the forgetful), but her main concern is the present, largely unhappy, lot of those women now in office. With a combination of anger, wit, cynicism, and

.....

muted optimism, she unveils some of the political and parliamentary rituals that regularly remind female members they are "travellers in a strange and alien culture," drawing on a fund of hilarious yet appalling anecdotes supplied by a long list of politicians. (Unsurprisingly, those no longer in office are the most candid.)

Sharpe's style is punchy and entertaining, and some of her views are provocative. The venerable notion that the female ethos has a naturally edifying effect on public life may be implicit in Kay Macpherson's world view, but Sharpe is wary of this concept, insisting that women's claim to power should rest on their simple right to equality, and never mind "gender solidarity." She also shies away from the idea that meaningful change can only come through the election of self-designated feminists, suggesting instead that a female "critical mass" — perhaps one-third of those elected, of whatever stripe — is the key. Currently, women occupy 18 per cent of the seats in the Testosterone Tabernacle (as Sharpe affectionately calls the House of Commons), the highest percentage to date, and whether this figure represents success or failure is of course a matter of interpretation. Two male champions of women in politics emerge in her account, and they make strange bedfellows: Brian Mulroney and Bob Rae. Her analysis of the Kim Campbell debacle, entitled "Tinkerbelle Spell," is astute and disturbing, whatever your opinion of our lone and fleeting female prime minister. And just in case you fondly imagine that the days are gone when a member of parliament (it was Judy LaMarsh) could be asked by a member of the press, "Are you a politician or a woman?" Sydney Sharpe is here to remind you that one of the questions posed to Campbell in *Maclean's* after her defeat was: "Have you found love?" ○

Flashes of Brilliance

WHEN ASKED TO LIST his interests for an author bio, Peter Unwin responded with "The north, all sports, especially baseball, hockey, kayaking and pretending I know how to fish. Love of animals, especially bears, wolves and underdogs." His description is certainly no less than accurate, for almost all of these things — including his mildly funny attempt at humour — are reflected in *The Rock Farmers*.



a serious teller of tales. In "The Woman-Hater of Bark Rapids," we enter the mental landscape of 40-year-old Paul Horton, who has a deep hatred for women, particularly feminists. He sends letters riddled with invective to the only four women he knows, then realizes afterwards that he has made a grave error. Unwin is not only capable of conveying to his readers the deep shame Horton feels; he also makes us share that shame.

This vividness and strong engagement are found in several other stories as well, particularly "La Vida," "Cloudberryes," and "Meeting on the Road." Unwin's flashes of brilliance are numerous in these selections, indicating that perhaps his forte is the portrayal of real-life — rather than exaggeratedly absurd — situations.

On the evidence of *The People One Knows*, Daniel Jones's writing is more difficult to categorize. Jones, who suffered from depression for many years, took his own life last February. Perhaps this collection of short fiction represents a commentary on his troubled life.

Clearly a writer of the highest calibre, Jones here weaves a unique blend of technical genius and acute vision. This is no great surprise; those who knew him were struck by his razor-sharp perception. He was hard on himself and hard on others, and this ability to squarely face reality is what makes his book so powerful.

In "The Poet's Wife," Jones zooms in on

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a would-be poet's jealousy of his wife's literary success. "Who I Am" deals with the narrator's realization that he is an ineffective teacher. In "A Torn Ligament," the protagonist confronts his consuming alcoholism and his inability to love. These stories share a common element in Jones's work — his capacity for revealing the baseness of human nature, the true weakness often lurking beneath airs and façades. He writes in the present tense, which lends a distinct immediacy to the stories. Essentially, we are there, watching; we are part of the action.

Jones's shrewdness can often be interpreted as a kind of cruelty. In the story "In Various Restaurants," he admitted it: "The stories are about people I know and have known. I reveal much about their personal lives. Other parts I make up, but only as it suits me. There is a cruelty involved." It is this very cruelty that brings Jones's stories to life. ○

THE ROCK FARMERS
by Peter Unwin
Cormorant, 157 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 920953 77 8)

**THE PEOPLE ONE KNOWS:
TORONTO STORIES**
by Daniel Jones
Mercury, 160 pages, \$14.50 paper (ISBN 1 55128 011 6)

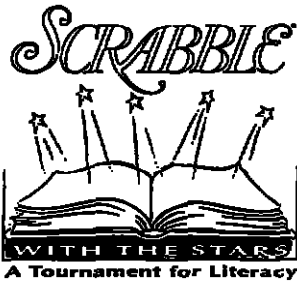
Reviewed by Carolyn A. Van Der Meer

Primarily a depiction of rural life in the small communities of Northern Ontario, this slim volume of 20 stories is described on its back cover as "told with a barely suppressed hilarity." Indeed, Unwin should have completely suppressed his hilarity, for his humour often fails to fire. In the title story, "The Rock Farmers," he shares the finer points of farming rocks, but overwrites his humour to the point that rock farming is no longer potentially funny, but rather ridiculous. His approach in "The East Bangor Cigarette Crimes" is similar. In his bid to create a believable small-town culture, he exaggerates, resulting instead in brash stereotyping. It would seem that Unwin wants to be viewed as a comic writer, but his real strength as a storyteller lies in his ability to create rich, sharply detailed prose, full of intense images.

In at least half of the stories in this collection, Unwin focuses his energy on being

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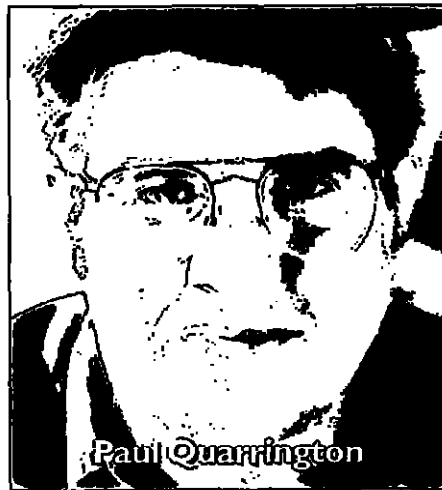
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trous card game with the pulp novelist (and soon-to-be-scriptwriter) J. D. D. Jensen. It's because of this mishap that Thom and Jeff end up working for Caspar Willison, a movie director cast in the DeMille/D. W. Griffith mould. Willison makes Thom a star and introduces him to the woman who's to become his one true love, the incomparable silent-screen star Thesba Doone. She and Thom make a fine pair until he learns that boss Willison has no part for him in his epic, *Civilization*. A major disappointment, since this is to be a "break-through" movie, no mere flicker, one which tells the stories of Crete, the Aztecs (featuring Thesba as a human sacrifice), and the Bible. However, Thom finally makes the cast when his riding skills snag him the part of the biblical Elijah. His fiery chariot ride is one of the descriptive gems of this book.

...And Its Discontents

PAUL QUARRINGTON'S NEW novel, *Civilization*, takes a wild-and-woolly look at our confusion of image and reality — not in the world of multimedia, but back in the early days of film. The book's title refers to a grandiose epic of the silent screen, and also to the rickety scaffolding upon which we humans act out bizarre and ridiculous dramas. All of this is handled with a light touch, as the narrative bounces back and forth like a jumpy camera from the days of the "flickers," giving us a look at a crew of starstruck zanies.

The story unfolds as a tale inside a tale. Thom Moss, former riding ace and cowboy-film star, is whiling away his time in prison — for what crime, we're uncertain — by writing a memoir called *Civilization*, titled from the aforementioned epic. A felon he may be, but stardom has its privileges. Thom wears silk prison garb and when he asks the warden for writing materials, he gets an ornate, pen-laden desk in his cell. He also gets



Paul Quarrington

instant feedback from the warden on the pages he's just written and we've just read. Thom's creation is a story after all, like the two-reel westerns that were his specialty. But a tale inside a book about a film is a sly nod to the '90s, and to our media jumble of fiction and reality.

Thom's adventures in the World (the name of a gargantuan film studio) begin when he and his buddy, Jeff Foote, get bounced off a moving train after a disas-

CIVILIZATION by Paul Quarrington

Random House, 309 pages,
\$27.95 cloth (ISBN 0 394 22414 0)

Reviewed by Carole Giangrande

There's more to come as the cameras roll — straight into the prison where Thom is doing time. Here the narrative works like the focusing ring of a camera, making the story he's writing converge with the real and imagined present. As part of his epic, Willison is going to film a condemned man acting the role of himself as he first murders his wife, then steps up to the scaffold for a live hanging. At this point, feckless Thom starts to realize the kinds of gods we worship and destroy, raised on the screen and made in our image.

Civilization is a comical read, taking dead aim at the dark side of our obsessions with media and stardom. No doubt it would make an equally fine and funny movie. ○

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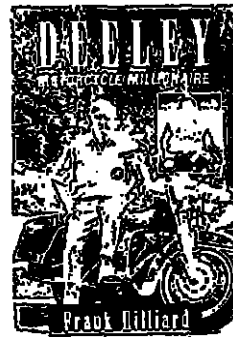
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as i read Emily Carr's words, my Montreal bus ride transformed into one of Carr's dense & lush west coast forests.

Briefs

Non-Fiction

IN HIS WINDY introduction to *Saturday Night Lives!: Selected Diaries* (McClelland & Stewart, 240 pages, \$24.99 cloth) John Fraser says solemnly, "To have such a forum was a privilege and I hope readers do not feel I abused it." Well, of course he abused it, and the *Diaries* that pillaged the editor's privilege were the most fun. Here we can read again about Fraser's agony at having to buy his wife a bra and about his collection of hymns. In fact, when the *Saturday Night Diaries* are separated from the magazine, it becomes clear that the very best are those that offer personal accounts of the life of the editor. Real diary entries, in other words.

Other, less welcome impressions of Fraser's *Saturday Night* also emerge. The *Diaries* reveal an editor with a far too hearty allegiance to School, Church, Monarchy, Mulroney, and various Captains of Industry. Looking back at *Saturday Night* during Fraser's tenure, the effects of these *haute* Toronto bourgeois biases were glaring. From 1988 to mid-1994, *Saturday Night's* coverage of key aspects of Canadian life was appallingly feeble, and in the areas of sports and popular culture the magazine deserved a failing grade. Fraser contrived to construct a Canada in which baseball, television, and popular music barely existed. Readers made giddy by the minute workings of the Governor General's office and in awe of the sons and daughters of established media stars were right at home.

It is still a shock to read here how Fraser praised and defended Brian Mulroney. Mind you, it isn't a surprise to be unmoved by his satiric suggestion for Atlantic Canada, a dubious play on Swift's *A Modest Proposal*. That *Diary* entry wasn't very funny the first time. Many others are

genuinely funny, moving (on the subject of China), silly, or sly. They're almost always engaging because Fraser is such a fogey, and full of it.

John Doyle

ONE OF OUR leading critical journals, *Essays on Canadian Writing*, has recently celebrated its 20th anniversary with a meaty double issue (#51-2, 398 pages, \$14 paper). As Michael Darling's candid interview with co-founders Jack David and Robert Lecker makes clear, *ECW* was conceived as a lively alternative to such terminally stodgy competitors as *Canadian Literature* and *Studies in Canadian Literature*; and if it hasn't always lived up to that promise, *ECW* has provided a forum where critics of all persuasions engage in vigorous scholarly disputation.

Other highlights include Lecker's authoritative survey of "Privacy, Publicity, and the Discourse of Canadian Criticism" and Linda Hutcheon's characteristically acute observations on "Eruptions of Postmodernity: The Postcolonial and the Ecological." Some self-indulgent autobiographical meanderings by George Bowering and a jargon-heavy essay by Gary Boire on sexual abuse could have been omitted without great loss, however; and in a class by itself, not unexpectedly, is John Metcalf's "Winner Take All," a withering critique of Morley Callaghan's prose style that unfortunately fails to acknowledge most of the other critics who have had similar insights. Metcalf may feel that he is one of a few voices crying in the wilderness, but he is in fact part of a growing chorus rather than a marginalized minority group — and as this issue amply demonstrates, it is *ECW* that has been in the vanguard of the contemporary reassessment of the old CanLit verities.

Robin Britt

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Power and Flow

A BATCH, THESE BOOKS, ONLY IN THAT they come bundled together for the reviewer's consumption. A *mélange* of moods and methods.

Peter Ormshaw's *The Purity of Arms* (Thistledown, 64 pages, \$7.50 paper) appears in Thistledown's New Leaf Editions, devoted to first books. Ormshaw's is an authentic voice. He recounts the pleasures of football; ponders Billy Bishop and war, shares observations of Cambridge and of various facets of Israel. His plainness lets him get away with what might otherwise seem coy, as in the titles "Picking Up Mom," "For Mom and Her Birds," "Dad's Chevrolet Bel Air." While some of the poems are predictable, others move beyond the descriptive to release fresh perceptions, as in "Running," which juxtaposes the consciousness of a man running, exhilarated, at night, and that of a woman in whom he (unwittingly and unwillingly) inspires terror. Another poem that goes past surfaces is "Son," about the world of Haasi Eichmann, son of Adolf. Several of the Israel poems explore past horrors and the ambiguities of fear and violence in a country at war. "Blood Rituals" is about reconciliation, about coming to terms with an anti-Semitic branch of the family:

*Their hands will not refuse your lips
against the places where the nails drove them
into fists too hard to pray.*

*You take your grandparents down
and their hands will be flowers, opening*

*around the darkness of their wounds.
Their bodies so light in their deaths
will gradually learn to daven in your brown arms,
and you will rock them like Jews.*

("Blood Rituals")

Another first book, Heather Browne Prince's *Knowledge in the Hands* (Goose Lane, 93 pages, \$12.95 paper), celebrates the sacred in the rhythms and rituals of country life. Hers is a quiet music, marked by a simplicity and clarity of language, and the honed quality of her lines. Occasionally one

gets a sense of a striving for effect, as in "a stoned mouthing" ("Here is the Smell of Smoke") or when the loon's "white / ringed eye" is said to "[mistress] a field" ("within the blood"). But far more often the poems succeed in creating a contemplative world. The poem that takes up almost two-thirds of the book, "A White Gift," identifies a barn with meditation:

*In the barn thought is held in beams.
In the barn my grandfather watches the light,
says it's time
to be getting in.*

"A White Gift" circles on itself, repeating images and stanzas, slowing time down. The grandfather is the guide in this place of "integrity in the barn. / In all things that remain":

*From over his head he plucks an egg;
out of the chaff, in the shafts of barn-light —
a white gift for me. He rubs it on his sleeve.
And winks.*

As the poem unfolds, the egg becomes time. "A White Gift" conveys the slow power and sensual delight of "knowledge in the hands."

Jason Holt's *Feeling Fine in Kafka's Burrow* (AB collector publishing, 78 pages, \$15.95 paper) is an imaginative universe away from Ormshaw's and Browne Prince's territories. The title suggests something of Holt's procedures with language: he disrupts its syntax and idioms, weaves cliché, neologism, and archaism with philosophical tag and lyrical image, to create a kind of murmuring meaninglessness that forces a reader to be carried by rhythm, to be aware of language as a symphony of murmurings. There are no poem titles; the book consists of stanzas that follow one another like waves. The structure proclaims what the shaping of language does: no climax, no hierarchy, no progression. Holt, an "idiosyncratic prometheist," finds no solace in love, in nature, in work, or in poetry: "lying in sheets i wait / ready to be cut into whatever panes / you wish to look through." Now and then the poems show Holt's youth; one can hear

Housman's young man at two-and-twenty. But this is an intelligent and irreverent book that does new things with words (in Ashbery and Donlan territory); it is, moreover, a book with a supple and assured music. Holt finds ways to feel fine in Kafka's burrow.

Jason Holt is dizzily eclectic in his dismantling of language. Ray Filip, in his new book, *Flowers in Magnetic Fields* (Guernica, 128 pages, \$12 paper), displays an equally dazzling range of reference in his poems — snapshots of the tawdriness and contradictions of contemporary culture. His poems roam Quebec, Vermont, Lithuania, America. At times I'm reminded of Paul Durcan, Ireland's pop surrealist ("Monty Python's Flying Circus Fights the Royal Canadian Air Farce," "If Charles Manson and Maurice Richard Married Their Eyes"). Filip's strength lies in his Whitmanesque exuberance; the danger lies in poems becoming rant, mere message:

*Nations no longer rise,
Only magnetic fields.
Continents book up:
Electronic corpora callosa
Doing mindless business.
Greed eats up the ecosphere
With Pac-man turtle persistence.
("Piano Nobile of Earth")*

Jay Ruzesky, in his second book, *Painting the Yellow House Blue* (Anansi, 88 pages, \$12.95 paper), casts a transforming eye on everyday moments. Ruzesky's skill is apparent in the section "Come Out Wherever You Are," in which overheard bits of speech are plumbed for their implications. There's nothing flashy about Ruzesky's technique; a scrupulousness and an attentiveness to human mystery give his writing its depth. In "Ink Lake" bats fly about as a woman watches two men doff their shirts for a swim at dusk:

*They face each other, naked
and too similar. Each man
lowers himself gently through the glass
as if avoiding a jagged edge.
Then they are two heads
skating across a pond of ink.*

The closing lines:
*What
radar would tell them apart
if you were a bat. say,
or a woman, tired of watching,
coming toward them down the lawn?*

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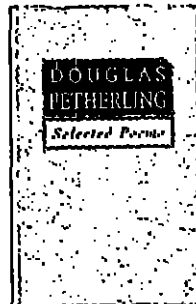
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Susan McMaster in *Learning to Ride* (Quarry, 64 pages, \$12.95 paper) is less preoccupied with nuance than Ruzesky. This book delights in energy, verbs, the tension and speed of riding. The poems enact various aspects of horse riding and caring for horses. In the process the equestrian is often linked with the erotic, or with other human relations. McMaster's lines are pulsing, muscular:

*Me, I've already pummelled
the car into life, thrummed
across townships to meet you
here, I'm rich with the buzz
of the morning flies,
filled with the pleasure
of rasping mud from your coat ...*
("Warming Up")

This book works because the energy and discipline that McMaster praises in the act of riding she also displays in her lines. She exults in "a whole new language, / of heat and sweat / power and flow," in "the uncoded strophes / of pulse and breath" ("Learning to Ride").

One of the most powerful — and disturbing — books of the group discussed here is Linda Rogers's *Hard Candy* (Sono Nis, 80 pages, \$9.95 paper). A stark contrast to McMaster's exultant sensuality, the persona in many of the poems of *Hard Candy* is a woman paralysed, tortured, attendant upon her own mutilation. *Hard Candy* is full of elegant, glittering poems, carrying terrible ironies. Violence and pain shimmer with a frozen glamour in these lines; the woman of these poems is split, cut off from the saving aspects of self. A woman visits her in her sleep; her husband calls her the rain:

*Dear one,
you thought she was rain.
You offered to cut off your ears
and sew them into my hair.*

*That woman is me.
She is old.
She is deaf and dumb
and needs glasses to see.*
("Holding a Suitcase")

Elsewhere, the husband figures as the one who "gives / his wife a red pedicure / every Saint Valentine's Day" ("Red Pedicure") and as "the one / who never forgets / to write her name in the medium of his choice" ("Mysterious Ink"). Violence haunts the world of these poems: in the marriage poems; the poem of an Inuit boy, son of a carver, abused by the priest; the poem about the two-year-old murdered in Liverpool; the collage of New York violence, "The Word for Bread in New York Time."

The dark humour of Rogers's finely wrought poems is truly harrowing. *Hard Candy* includes even that recognition of itself:

*The Chicken Woman, a psychic
with cards and a teacup,
took the poet's hand in her own
and told her she was approaching
heaven like a predator fish,
eating her way inside The Beloved,
excreting the sound in exquisite ink,
transposing the colour of snow.*

("What the Chicken Woman
Told Her") O

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FIRST NOVELS

BY MAUREEN McCALLUM GARVIE

Covert Sources

IN AN AFTERWORD TO THE FILE ON ARTHUR Moss (Lester, 216 pages, \$22.95 cloth). Douglas Fetherling observes that while the jungle in Aphra Behn's 1688 novel *Oronooko* was dense with Behn's actual experience, the tropical wilderness of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was no less compelling for being imaginary. "This," says Fetherling, "is a long-winded way of saying that the first part of *The File on Arthur Moss* is set as it were in Defoe's Vietnam." Fetherling's imaginary Saigon, a place of bars, drunken GIs, and massage parlours, is humidly substantial. It is 1970 and Arthur Moss, a rich man's son who loathes reporting but loves the romance of the press, is on his second tour of Southeast Asia as a correspondent. His anti-Americanism has caught the attention of US intelligence, and the book's 56 sections are supposedly taken from a US consulate file: agent reports, dispatches home to Toronto, and transcriptions of nocturnal tape recordings in which Moss beseeches God "humbly to protect us from Americans, to deliver us from the decay they call vitality, from the show business they call culture and from the disorder they call freedom but is only freedom from order" There are also letters from an actress-filmmaker named Jemmie Ramboulin, whom Arthur meets while she is in Vietnam making a documentary on a Canadian priest.

Though Fetherling has written a great many books (his memoir, *Travels by Night*, appeared in the spring), this is his first work of fiction. As he himself points out, it's less a novel than a novella ("the simple black cocktail dress of literature"). The tone is "mock-serious," the characters, except perhaps for Arthur's dying father, only real as in "he was a *real* character." Jemmie in particular fails to jell, despite all her space-cadet letters; though she is apparently a beautiful woman who bares her breasts in *Playboy*, we see little more of her than her "isoceles-triangle" face and "V-shaped smile." She and Arthur carry on a stilted association that they finally consummate back in Toronto, before her Cheshire-cat treachery spurs the melancholy Moss further into a private hell as a TV entertainment columnist. The likelihood of such a narrative being compiled from covert sources is beside the point; *The File on Arthur Moss* is a diverting, idiosyncratic foray into paranoid fantasy.

The Sri Lankan setting of *Funny Boy* (McClelland & Stewart, 316 pages, \$17.99 paper), Shyam Selvadurai's novel in six stories, is of the Aphra Behn sort, drawn vividly from memory. Readers of Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* know Sri Lanka as a stunningly beautiful country of flamboyant eccentrics, complex racial mixing, and tragic tensions. *Funny Boy* further rounds out our understanding with a portrait of a prominent Tamil family, observed by a bright, sensitive son.

Unwilling to play with the rough boys, forbidden to play with the girls, Arjie spends much of his time in adult company, providing Selvadurai with a point of view through which to piece together a world of politics, love, and death. Arjie's great-grandfather was killed in a racial clash decades before; now Arjie's businessman father tries to blind himself to the inevitable explosion. His mother has a devastating liaison with a Burgher (a Sri Lankan of Dutch descent) journalist.

Meanwhile Arjie grows up, a boy with "tendencies," exploring power and sex in a love affair with a schoolmate. Some passages seem unnecessarily attenuated — such as Arjie's struggles with a tyrannical though politically allied headmaster, or the story of Jegan, a Tamil Tiger sympathizer and the son of a boyhood friend of Arjie's father. But the writing is rich, fluent, and exciting; this is a remarkably mature and accomplished book.

Flight from Sri Lanka takes Arjie to Canada, as it took Selvadurai to Toronto, the setting of Cary Fagan's *The Animals' Waltz* (Lester, 288 pages, \$22.95 cloth). Fagan has already published non-fiction and short fiction; this is his first novel. It's told in the first person by Sheila Hersh, daughter of the mattress king "Honest Abe" Hersh. After her proposal to write her thesis on an obscure Viennese poet whose slender volume she found on her mother's shelves was turned down, Sheila quit university and moved downtown, commuting to the family business up on Finch. But Hersh's House of Mattresses is in a slide, Sheila's widower dad is starved for love, and Sheila isn't exactly blooming. The key to all these problems lies in that mysterious book of poems.

The Animals' Waltz is full of cleverness and good ideas, but has problems in tone and balance. The Toronto half, with

Aunt Ettie and Uncle Lou at Mattress Mart, occasionally verges on Milton Berle-style slapstick. The dance of intimacy between father and daughter, that old Oedipal rag, is sometimes played straight, sometimes for yuks. In part two things look up; Sheila searches in Vienna for her poet and makes peace with her late mother as well as with her father, and comes to terms with being Jewish. She also finds a man. Fagan's choice of a female narrator is risky; I tend to believe men have more difficulty seeing life through women's eyes than the reverse, and Sheila doesn't quite ring true. Father and daughter inviting new partners for a sleep-over at their Viennese hotel seems psychologically off-base, and Fagan also fails to generate any real erotic tension between Sheila and her young man from Bathurst Manor.

As in Carol Shields's *Swann*, or A. S. Byatt's *Possession*, the work of a dead woman poet lies at the heart of *The Animals' Waltz*. Unfortunately the examples here made me side with Sheila's thesis advisers. So too in *Endless Bay* (Mercury, 176 pages, \$14.50 paper), Laura Fairburn's pastiche of the great romantic Maritime writer Charles D'Arnell is crucial to our suspension of disbelief. In the tradition of Jane Urquhart, it's a story of literary ghosts and ecstatic passions set against a thoroughly late-20th-century backdrop of a disintegrating marriage, sodomizing priests, and academics accused of sexual assault by lesbian students. Its protagonist, Rhea Northway, has come late to academe and is now researching D'Arnell (né Darnell), a Cape Breton version of L. M. Montgomery or Mazo de la Roche. His one novel, *Leonora*, caught the popular imagination, yet nothing much is known about him. Rhea leaves her horrible husband for the summer (perhaps permanently), and goes to Cape Breton, where she locates the house in which D'Arnell lived and wrote. Meanwhile a much younger classmate, Abelard Hearn (whose

Mi'Kmaq mother happens to live in the same village), follows to help her in her research, which so far has amounted to little more than trying to pump D'Arnell's tight-lipped relatives for information. Despite warnings from Abelard's mother and clear evidence that Abelard is dangerously unstable, Rhea exploits him for her own academic and sexual ends.

Fairburn's style is curiously Edwardian, and despite intermittent flurries of description, the imagery is often out of focus — with the exception of a wonderful sketch of the second-hand bookshop where Rhea, Abelard, and Darnell first intersect. The final passage has considerable punch, but the victimization of the young Mi'Kmaq by the white woman is distasteful, and though the narrator sporadically recognizes the extent of her culpability, I'm not sure that the book does.

It's stretching it to view James Fontana's *No Cause of Death* (Mercury, 288 pages, \$15.95 paper) as a first novel; it is actually true crime, but at some point in the publishing process a decision was made to present it as fiction, a police procedural "based on a true story." George Broderick, the murder victim's husband, quickly identifies himself as the chief suspect, and over the rest of the book the chaos of his life is relentlessly unravelled.

Fontana, an Ontario Criminal Courts judge, is no stylist, and much of this reads like court transcripts and newspaper clippings. I finished it, but hated myself after. The reader slogs along with Detective Sergeant Bob Mancuso and his team through tedious police work such as trips to Eastman Kodak in Rochester to analyse colour values in slides of the bath-oil-filled tub in which Anne Broderick's body was found. Fontana might have put George Broderick's ruin in context — how could a man who after his retirement from the navy quickly established himself as manager of the Ottawa branch of a large life-insurance company spiral downward so

precipitously into lying, swindling clients, browbeating his daughter, and sexually exploiting his son's fiancée? We're left with shards of facts, a verdict of guilty, and a frustrating sense of inconclusiveness. Life's like that: fiction owes us closure.

Division of Surgery (Women's Press, 222 pages, \$13.95 paper), by Donna McFarlane, also draws directly upon life, but the writer's skill in fictionalizing it is much greater. McFarlane, a Toronto writer, has had 12 abdominal surgeries in 10 years for inflammatory bowel disease: the central character of her novel, Robin Carr, has undergone 11. Ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease are hardly the stuff of glamour, and McFarlane and her publishers don't prettify it. But an otherwise healthy young woman attacked from within by inherited disease is as good a metaphor for the human condition (in fact, it is a human condition) as struggles with war, international terrorism, AIDS, or a broken heart.

Division of Surgery has the requisite elements of an absorbing novel: love, sex, suspense, humour. The writing is candid and gritty. It takes risks. McFarlane's central character is attractive and utterly familiar. Other characters tend to be somewhat shadowy, yet appropriately so; they come briefly into sharp focus and then fade again as fear and pain drive Robin back within herself. Every movement away from the hospital and the operating theatre toward life (in the form of lovers, a new apartment, neighbours, an ecstatic swim at the family cottage) is matched by a heart-chilling yank back to death's door. The last section, in which Henry Morgentaler makes a cameo appearance, at first seems at odds with the preceding narrative, but the urgent considerations it gives rise to, of changed expectations and quality of life, make it work. Though hardly a stocking stuffer, *Division of Surgery* is one of those rare books from which you learn something not merely of a factual nature. ○

Old Wine, New Bottles

THE RETELLING OF LEGENDS AND folk-tales continues to be a popular pursuit in children's books. Ideally these modern renderings of old stories bring new layers of meaning and a fresh sense of wonder to timeless themes. Of course the success of such books depends largely upon both the durability of the old story as well as the skill of the individual writer. In other words, sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.

In *La Diabliesse and the Baby* (Annick, 32 pages, \$15.95 cloth, \$5.95 paper), Richardo Keens-Douglas retells a Caribbean folk-tale, abetted by delightful, richly coloured illustrations by Marie Lafrance. The book begins with something of a disclaimer, assuring us that "Today's children are, of course, aware that there are no hoofed creatures such as La Diabliesse, or Pied Pipers who steal children and disappear into the mountains." La Diabliesse is a tall, beautiful, "immaculately groomed" woman with one human foot and one cow foot. Because she has no children of her own, she tries to steal other people's babies. One stormy night La Diabliesse manages

to weasel her way into a country house where a grandmother is singing a lullaby to a crying baby. This grandmother is no fool and manages to outwit La Diabliesse and keep the baby out of her clutches. As it turns out, the narrator of the story was that very same baby. Although this book is intended for the five-to-seven age group, even my nine-year-old was confused by this ending and he wasn't sure what "immaculately groomed" meant.

In *Chinook* (Pemmican, 32 pages, \$9.95 paper), Sharyn Marston retells the Native legend of how the chinook wind came to be. According to the legend, Chinook's beloved young husband, Red Eagle, goes off to lead a war party against an

enemy band. Many days pass and then Chinook has a dream in which she sees Red Eagle gravely wounded on the battlefield. She goes out into the Prairie to search for him. She never returns — but that winter, an arch of cloud appears in the sky and suddenly a warm wind blows down from the mountains: it is Chinook still sighing and search-



From *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police*

ing for Red Eagle. This rather expensive little book is illustrated by Anne Hanley, whose watercolour renditions of landscape and sky are quite attractive (although her version of the chinook arch is not particularly accurate). Her human figures, however, are poorly done, with uniformly muddy brown features, squinty eyes, big lips, and bigger cheekbones. The story might have been more effective had it first been explained that the chinook wind is an actual phenomenon in the West — not all readers will know this.

Sonja Dunn, in *Beauty and the Beast Rap* (Moonstone, 32 pages, \$7.95 paper), has rewritten the old fairy tale in a modern rap version for six-

to nine-year-olds. Call me old-fashioned, but I found this less than satisfying. The magical qualities of the original tale are lost for me in the monotonous repetitions and awkward phrasings Dunn has used to keep within the rap rhythm. Susan Darrach's illustrations of Beauty in tennis clothes and big hair are equally dismaying. My son just rolled his eyes and said he liked the "real story" better.

Beyond (or beside) legends and folktales, many children's books attempt to present history in a manner suitable for young readers. The history of the RCMP, for instance, is told in Marc Tétro's first picture-book, *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police* (Marc Tétro, 28 pages, \$22 cloth). It is an interesting story — who knew that the first recruits for the RCMP were actually teachers, farmers, students, and lumberjacks? Positively disposed towards the RCMP, the book skims over any difficulties they have had along the way. Louis Riel is covered in two sentences, summed up by the statement: "The Métis wanted their own country, but their dream was not to come true." If the historical backbone of the book is rather weak, the illustrations are quite enchanting. Tétro is a Franco-Manitoban design artist best known for his work on T-shirts, postcards, tableware, wallets, magnets, and backpacks. His illustrations are bold and bright, in a uniquely simple style. But both my son and I wished the human figures had been given facial features — their blank white (for the white men, who all have moustaches or beards) and brown (for the Natives, who all have feathers or braids) faces may work well on T-shirts, but they seemed odd in a book.

Josepha: A Prairie Boy's Story (Red Deer College Press, 32 pages, \$14.95 cloth) offers a more complex look at part of Canadian history: the hardships endured by immigrants at the turn of the century. Jim McGugan tells the sad story of Josepha, a 15-year-old boy from an

unspecified European country. Unable to master English, Josepha is frustrated and humiliated at school. Eventually he leaves to work for a dollar a day bagging grain. The story is actually about the friendship between Josepha and the narrator, a younger classmate. When Josepha leaves school, they exchange their most prized possessions. The book begins with the boys' parting, then flashes back through time to Josepha's problems — this may be confusing for younger children. Murray Kimber's illustrations are dramatic and brooding, dominated by the intensely coloured Prairie sky. Stylistically McGugan uses far too many sentence fragments and unnatural, stilted rhythms, perhaps meaning to convey a sense of an earlier time. Ultimately the story sinks under the weight of its wooden language and melancholy message.

Perhaps I'm comparing apples to oranges but no book could be more unlike *Josepha* than Marcia and Richard Vaughan's *Bon Voyage!* (HarperCollins, 32 pages, \$13 cloth). This lighthearted book is set in the present day and it's very funny. Dan Hobbs's illustrations are a perfectly hilarious match: bright, clear, and quirky, featuring funny-looking kids with skinny arms, bulgy knees, pinpoint eyes, and big noses. A young girl and her brother, Baxter, must earn \$6.75 to buy Benjamin Brown's old red wagon. Their mother tells them to earn the money themselves so they open their own backyard travel agency. For 50 cents a trip, they take their friends around the world — sort of. The Turner twins go on a camel ride in Egypt (they are pulled through the sandbox on a rocking horse). P.J. skis the Swiss Alps (she skis down the teeter-totter, which has been covered with soap flakes). Anastasia Andrews gets to visit the leaning tower of pizza boxes (though she wants her money back when it falls on her head). Finally they send the

neighbourhood bully, Bruno Kombobski, on a one-way trip to Mars. Although this book is intended for the three-to-seven age group, its exuberant good humour delighted my son as well. Perhaps the best thing about being nine is that sometimes you're a big kid and sometimes you're a little kid.

He was equally delighted by Linda Rogers's *Frankie Zapper and the Disappearing Teacher* (Ronsdale, 125 pages, \$7.95 paper), a novel for 8- to 12-year-olds. It begins: "Frankie Zapper can change the channels without touching nothing." That's not all he can do. Frankie Zapper is a First Nations boy with shamanistic powers. Much to the delight of his friends Jen and Odie, he can also turn their mean teacher, Mr. Smith, into a parrot. This leads to a series of hilarious adventures. Despite its fantastical elements, the book is firmly grounded in contemporary reality. These kids are real and so are their problems: divorce, dyslexia, bad teachers. Rogers is also a critically acclaimed poet and her brilliant use of language sets this book far above most written for this age group. It is rich with humour and surprising imagery. For instance, when Odie and Jen get into a fight, Rogers writes:

Jen was really crying now. She was making awful moo sounds. Her face, pushed into his, because she landed on top, was plum coloured and her nose was dribbling. Odie thought she looked like a grape that had sprung a leak.

The passages about Frankie Zapper's dream visions in the Big House are remarkable. Rogers is acutely sensitive to the child's point of view, especially when writing about Frankie's difficulties in dealing with his own powers. Engagingly illustrated by Rogers's husband, Rick Van Krugel, this book is a must-buy! O



Winds of Change

SOME MONTHS AGO I WROTE a column attacking the recent wave of revisionist biographies that are committed to nothing other than making as much money as possible for their authors and publishers. I condemned the recording of irresponsible and unfounded rumour as if it were fact, and I said that such books did biography and literature a bad service. But that was only one half of the equation. The other is more positive. At its centre is the idea that intelligent, open-minded, and objective biography is not only a very good thing but is also quite inevitable.

The practitioners of the genre, these locksmiths, these spies who peep through the paper curtains of a literary life, have always been around, but it was Lytton Strachey at the turn of the century who transformed the art. If there was a pivotal moment, it was when Strachey revealed that an English nobleman had passed gas while bowing to Queen Elizabeth I. Humiliated, the man retreated all the way to France. On his return, many years later, the poor wretch went to see the queen and the monarch's first statement was that she had "quite forgot the fart." Nothing would be the same again; or to put it another way, the winds of change began to blow.

Since then literary biography has dealt for the most part with revealing previously unrevealed truths. Whether it be the details of Hemingway's suicide, the fact of D. H. Lawrence's homosexuality, the way in which F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote his fiction or, most recently, some of the details of Graham Greene's personal and professional life, we have been told a great deal more about literature and as a consequence have a greater appreciation of its content

and of its creators. The two, of course, are intertwined. A biography sets a work in context, places its author in time and space. A novel such as *To the Lighthouse*, for example, cannot be properly understood by a reader who is not familiar with Virginia Woolf's definition of feminism, with Edwardian attitudes toward women, and indeed with Bloomsbury's ambivalence toward Virginia Woolf.

The vitality and the importance of biography also concern the fundamental direction of modern literature. If fine writing and fine reading are to survive we must oppose and defeat those critics barking out like little *Obergruppenführers* that the written word is all that matters and that we should not, must not, study the life of the author.

Of course, it comes as no surprise that it has become fashionable to criticize literary biography. In Toronto last year I heard a rather sad, under-achieving young man ask Andrew Motion, the biographer of Philip Larkin, why he wrote biographies, adding "after all, you've got a life." The question may have been ill-informed and pompous but it did reflect the views of those who know no better: biographers live vicariously, they are unable to write fiction or poetry themselves, etc. In essence the usual and tired complaint levelled against critics, that they are eunuchs who envy the lusty. Not true. Many biographers also write novels and some, Peter Ackroyd being a consummate example, have reached the highest levels as both biographers and novelists.

The issue is even more germane in Canada, where there is no strong tradition of literary biography. Most of the authors who write biography do not attempt another and only dip their toes in the tidal waters of this swelling sea — the *Toronto*

Star books columnist Philip Marchand's life of Marshall McLuhan and our very own Paul Stuewe's book on Hugh Garner are two appropriate examples. There are reasons for this. I well remember a widely known Toronto literary figure proclaiming that it was wonderful "that at the Harbourfront Reading Festival the writers got on so well with the biographers." By "writers" he meant, of course, novelists.

Yet it is vital that Canadian writers are chronicled. Why, for example, haven't we heard about two or three rival biographies of Morley Callaghan being written, with publishers trying to outbid each other for the rights? The reason is that it just ain't happening. The same is true of most other Canadian writers. There is a biography of Lucy Maud Montgomery and another is currently being written, but you can be sure that an American or English author of similar success would have been the subject of at least half a dozen biographies.

Yet Canada requires and desires more rediscovery of its cultural heritage than larger, more secure countries. Even now there are writers from the past who are slipping into that twilight zone of distant memory and will soon be forgotten. Pearls of Canadian culture will be lost, and the necklace simply isn't sufficiently long or ornate for us to let this happen.

Ultimately it is not a question of whether we ought to have biographies but whether we could survive as a culture without them. I cannot imagine a governor general explaining that he had quite forgot the fart, but I can well imagine future Canadians regretting the day that the original incident was not recorded. O

Michael Coren's latest book is The Man Who Created Narnia (Lester).

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

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 title of the book (solution next month).

- A. Hindu God
6 67 131 40 142 118
- B. Soon afterwards (arch.)
3 19 178 36 128 105 21 54
- C. New Brunswick town
48 121 31 100 184 86 130 56
- D. Hyphenated urban area
92 102 114 141 179 139 190 135
82 155
- E. Humorist Richard _____
181 107 191 117 24 132 152
- F. Walt Whitman's "Solitary,
singing _____"
(3 wds.)
166 77 91 192 176 111 116 146
75
- G. Hugh Garner novel
188 76 144 28 55 93 173 99
134 12 180
- H. Be present
85 161 46 149 136 78
- I. Impulsive
165 193 185 150
- J. Flower
90 129 158 2 74 22
- K. _____ lip (2 wds.)
108 60 50 18 122 86 104 69
180 94
- L. *Titanic* passenger's sensation
(2 wds.)
98 157 52 27 62 30 168 43
7 112 33 171 125 64

- M. Classic Styne-Cornden-Green
tune (3 wds.)
34 20 119 11 127 68 153 145
- N. Kind of newspaper (2 wds.)
17 172 126 4 96 45 167 49
- O. Organized, in the U.K. (2 wds.)
187 13 38 51 9 140
- P. Vegetable
42 70 182 16 80 189 101
- Q. Jay Silverheels film (2 wds.)
154 5 148 25 57 177 44 95
151 71 1
- R. Conversed
26 61 169 87 37 29 143
- S. *Love and Salt Water* author
(2 wds.)
175 53 89 120 8 162 124 81
14 110 106
- T. David Fennario's _____ to
Lose
63 103 23 115 183 39 137
- U. Atwood opus (2 wds.)
174 123 35 97 159 164 113 47
84 10 85 72 136 15

SOLUTION TO ACROSTIC #66: "She wore a dark green frock and green pachedi that was full of wonderful affects: needlework, sparkles, and sequins. Her hands and feet were covered with henna in detailed bridal patterns. She shimmered and jangled as she gracefully moved."
M.G. Vassanji, *The Book of Secrets* (McClelland & Stewart)



Klondike Hero

THROUGHOUT THE 1970s AND 1980s there was renewed interest in writing about George Dawson, the geologist, geographer, and naturalist who did more than almost anyone else to create the map of the modern Canadian West. In 1989, for example, UBC Press brought out a two-volume edition of his *Journals*. But the attention always seemed less than he deserved. Dawson, who's probably still best known by the cities in British Columbia and the Yukon that bear his name, made the official survey of the 49th parallel. Later, as head of the Geological Survey of Canada, he settled the dispute about the Alaska/Canada boundary. He also explored the Yukon with a geologist's eye, paving the way for the Gold Rush of 1898. Authors often focus on this last accomplishment because of its highly dramatic consequences. The most recent example is probably Michael Gates, whose study *Gold at Fortymile Creek: Early Days in the Yukon* is also published by UBC.

But in true Victorian fashion, Dawson was also a botanist, a pioneer of what today we would call environmentalism, a talented painter, a competent poet, a prolific correspondent, and, in general, a proud all-rounder whose personality left a deep imprint on those who knew him. When Dawson died in 1901, one colleague remembered that "Klondike Dawson was a personage in his own right at the Rideau Club in Ottawa — he was a gay companion, physical weakness never depressed his bright spirits — his constant cheerfulness was a surprise to all who knew him, more specially those who reflected upon the fortitude required to bear his bodily infirmities with patience." The phrase "bodily infirmities" refers to

the fact that Dawson suffered from Pott's disease, or angular curvature of the spine brought on by tuberculosis, which left him underdeveloped and humpbacked. The disease, which ended his life when he was only 50, makes his fieldwork and rugged adventures all the more amazing. As late as 1870, he was supplied with an "invalid's chair" when visiting London, England.

Dawson's father, Sir John Dawson (1820–1899), was the first scientist born in Canada to achieve international renown. He did so for his accomplishment in building McGill University into a top-rank institution and also by nipping Darwin. (Sir John was Christian but not an evangelical nay-sayer: as a geologist, he could see how very old the Earth was, but he simply didn't believe fossil evidence showed that one species had led inexorably to the next.) Another son, William Bell Dawson (1854–1944), was an important engineer. The Dawsons, in short, were a remarkable scientific family.

In 1962, Louise Winslow-Spragge published, in an edition of 100 copies to be distributed in the family, a selection of her great-uncle's letters and diaries. Even today, such keepsakes are often undertaken by the old elite families. The custom is charming, though the results tend to have more to do with genealogy than with historiography.

In this case, another generation has passed now, and the family has made an intelligent decision to entrust the use of its manuscripts to Bradley Lockner, a professional historian and editor. Lockner has restored to their original length passages shortened in the memorial volume, and otherwise gone back and

re-edited and contextualized the material, producing *No Ordinary Man: George Dawson, 1849–1901* (Natural Heritage). It's a spotty, miscellaneous sort of a book — a scrapbook in a way — but a high-quality example of the type, with appropriate emendation and other apparatus that heighten integrity without distracting the reader.

Lockner rightly devotes much of the book to Dawson's correspondence with his sister Anna, with whom the scientist maintained a special lifelong bond — less unusual perhaps among the Victorians than it would be now — but given a distorted feeling here by the exclusion of Anna's side of the exchange (presuming it still exists).

Dawson was educated first at McGill (where his father was already principal), and then in England at the London School of Mines (where T. H. Huxley was one of his teachers). The Dawsons, the sons as well as the father, helped make McGill famous as a training ground for geologists and engineers, which resulted in more Canadians entering these professions. This contributed in turn to more mineral rushes, which led finally to the Haileybury School of Mines (now called the Northern College of Applied Arts and Technology). Mining education was thus Canadianized, and several generations of young Canadians in laced boots staked out the future of Canada's extraction industries. A few, like Dawson, should be popular heroes. Most are remembered intramurally, if at all, as part of the folklore of prospecting and related activities. ○

Douglas Fetherling's The File on Arthur Moss (Lester) is reviewed on page 55.



Don'ts at Dos

THE CANLIT COMMUNITY IS not nearly as rife with careerism, backbiting, and hypocrisy as is generally believed; some of the behaviour so labelled, I'm convinced, is simple, uninformed gaucheness. Writing is a solitary pursuit, after all, so it's to be expected that practitioners of the trade might be somewhat lacking in social graces. In short, a lot of us just don't know how to handle those awkward situations that arise while schmoozing with our rivals, er, colleagues. What the literary crowd really needs, then, is a *Miss Manners*. So in the interests of fulfilling a public service, I'm willing to step into the breach and offer some suggested dos and don'ts that I hope will be helpful. A couple of typical scenarios are discussed below.

1. Someone who has sent you a copy of their latest book, and who has always admired your work, approaches you at a wine-and-cheese.

If you haven't read the book yet, a simple "I'm looking forward to reading it" is perfectly acceptable. Try to keep your tone of voice pleasant and free of any inflection that a paranoid writer might interpret as sarcastic, hostile, or otherwise less than enthusiastic. Avoid attempts at humour: however well intentioned, they will inevitably be seen as an indication that you're not taking the book (and its author) seriously. If a number of months have passed since you received the book, the sincerity of your interest may seem somewhat suspect to your colleague; in that case, you may want to elaborate slightly, saying that it's in your "must-read pile," and listing some suitably eminent titles in its company. Increase the number and eminence of these books in

direct proportion to the amount of time that's elapsed. And please note: it's a definite no-no to pretend you've read the book, when all you've done is scan the blurbs (how did he get *her*?), skim the first paragraph, and check the acknowledgments page for your name.

If you actually *have* read the book and liked it, you don't need any advice from *Miss Literary Manners* — think up your own flattering adjectives. If your reaction was mixed, try to accentuate the positive: mention aspects of the book you truly liked. If these were limited to the creative use of punctuation and the author's dedication, it's best to take a slightly different and more general tack. Remember that the best response is one that is honest and yet ambiguous enough to be construed as unconditionally favourable. No one wants to lose a friend (let alone a potential recommender for future grants) through unnecessary bluntness. "You've outdone yourself!" is pretty safe, for example. Alternatively, if you really disliked the book and can't think of any redeeming qualities whatsoever, be creative. Use it to prop open a window or shore up the short leg of the coffee table; you can then remark, with perfect truthfulness, that you feel it's one of those *essential* books. (You don't have to say for what.)

2. You're in the line-up for the bar at a literary event when you notice X, the reviewer who trashed your first poetry chapbook, published in 1974, standing nearby.

The standard procedure in this situation is to ignore X, retreat to the corner of the room in which fellow members of the Wounded Poets Society (a fixture at every literary gathering) have congregated, and

complain in an undertone about the unfairness of the review to anyone within earshot. Unfortunately, as fascinating as this kind of CanLit history can be to interested parties (usually those directly involved), it's not that scintillating as a topic of general conversation, particularly if repeated on numerous occasions and at unrestrained length. And it may give the erroneous impression that you're the type to hold a grudge. (There *are* some situations in which it is admissible to bear a grudge and/or administer a snub of varying degrees, but this is not one of them; *Miss Literary Manners* will discuss them in detail at another time.)

I suggest that you approach X, providing you are under the legal limit of intoxication. Engage in the two-and-a-half-minute distracted conversation typical of book launches, and move on, without ever mentioning the offending review. In other words, give X the benefit of the doubt: he/she may have smartened up in the intervening 20 years. (And don't forget — editors have notoriously short memories, so there's always the possibility your next book will be sent to X, too.)

Confidential to "A Long-Time Faithful Subscriber and Prolific Author": Thank you for drawing our attention to your latest book. There's no need to supply us with the accompanying list of "intelligent reviewers," as you put it, since we have quite a few of our own. And although I'm sure, as you say, that your mother has never shown you any favouritism, we don't feel she would be suitable for the assignment. ○

Barbara Carey's most recent book is The Ground of Events (Mercury).

I set sail

I debated heartily with the writers of **Clayoquot & Dissent**.

for phantom

Plotted escape with **Yeshim Ternar**. Encountered anarchy with **George Woodcock**.

islands with

And journeyed to Africa with **Joan Baxter**. Books by Canada's authors are some of the best books available.

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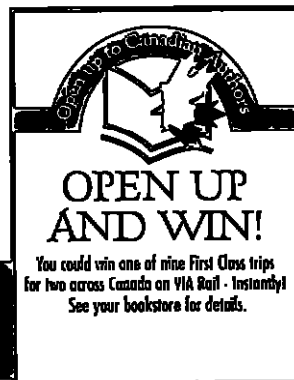


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