

BOOKS *in* CANADA

CANADIAN
HIGH REALISM

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LOW BLOW TO HIGH REALISM

High Realism in Canada, by Paul Duval, Clarke Irwin, 169 pages, \$24.95.

By **TERRENCE HEATH**

PAUL DUVAL and Clarke Irwin are striking while the iron is hot. Following hard on *Four Decades*, their 1973 success, they have collected in *High Realism in Canada* thirteen painters working in the genre of super-detailed, realistic studies that has come into international vogue in the past decade. Six of the artists are from the Maritimes: Alex Colville, D.P. Brown, Tom Forrestall, Christopher Pratt, all associated with Mount Allison University, and Fred Ross, a New Brunswicker. Six others — Jack Chambers, Ken Danby, Eric Freifeld, Hugh Mackenzie (formerly Mount Allison), Christiane Pflug and Jeremy Smith — are from Ontario. One from the Prairies (Ernest Linder, Saskatoon) and another from the West Coast (E.J. Hughes) complete the roll. Each artist is represented with from three to eight full-colour reproductions, and them an also details from some of the paintings, a few drawings and a number of black-and-white studies.

While the production of the book is of high quality, the conception, organization and writing leave much to be desired. Duval has chosen to ignore the relative historical role of realism. The term has been central to a number of controversies and movements in the visual arts in the past century — the realism of Courbet was a revolt against the idealized paintings of the Romantics; the realism of *neue Sachlichkeit* of the 1920s was a revolt against the emotional work of German Expressionists and the earlier, spontaneous colour painting of the Impressionists; the realism or neo-realism of contemporary American painters is a revolt against the abstract, colorist paintings of post-war art. Duval seems to assume that realism has a definite rather than relative meaning, so he has not deemed it necessary to place Canadian realism in any context. In a highly misleading and incomplete historical survey, he plucks works from here and there in the past hundred years of Canadian painting with only oblique references to their context and a few phrases seemingly intended as suf-

ficient proof of realism: their attention to detail, their close observation, their "clear delineation of form." He seems to want to show that there is a central and continuing stream of realist painting in Canada. But all he has really shown is that Canadian painters before 1910 were trained in the academies, where the first step in learning how to paint was extensive drawing exercises. After 1910, he is hard pressed for examples, as Canadian painters by then were being swept into the techniques, ideas and styles of modern European and American art.

When Duval comes to defining High Realism, he describes it in terms that might apply as easily to the calendar pictures in local garages as to the paintings he has included in this book. High Realism, he says, is "a special kind of pictorial art which is characterized by an intense concern and involvement with subject matter as such." The few added riders describing how long it takes the egg-tempera painters of his liking to produce a completed work and the discipline their craft demands (a sort of Calvinist aesthetic) hardly constitute a method for choosing a representative group of Canadian realists. Having neither located his subject historically nor defined it with any precision, Duval presents an arbitrary selection of artists.

Ultimately, the art writer must either take what is given him or decide why he thinks certain works are worth putting into a high-priced art book. If he wants to show the quality of Canadian realist work, and Duval does seem concerned to do this, then he must make some sort of formalist (abstract!) judgments on the paintings. What I am saying is, he cannot avoid the question raised by Roger Fry in the early 1920s in regard to the high realism of early Flemish work: Is Van Eyck, in spite of his craftsmanship, an inferior artist to Vermeer? (Not to mention all the other Flemish painters whose work has been pre-selected by art historians.) The reproduction of the visual illusion of reality is, after all, a trick. A very highly skilled trick, but nevertheless a trick. When is a collection of reproductions of these tricks worth \$25? When the tricks are formally excellent. Some of the paintings

Cover: D.P. Brown's "At the Piano", 1972, egg tempera on panel.

in this collection, I think, would meet standards of excellence; others, I feel, would not.

Duval also fails to show any intellectual excitement in the range of questions that the subject of realism opens up: the technical problems of drawing and painting and their relationship, the question of photographic realism (he only touches on the use of the camera), the similarity to comic book framing which often sets contemporary realist works apart from earlier ones, the relation of realism to primitivism (especially interesting in the work of E.J. Hughes) or even the obvious conundrum of the role of connotation in art and the dangers of sentimentality.

Lastly, the editors have done Duval a disservice by accepting what seems to be a hastily written, first draft text. Duval's prose is flaccid at best. It only shows life in the passages describing the china saucers or whiskey shot glasses, which the painters use for mixing colours, or the size and appearance of their studios. Surely his editor should have cleaned up much of the obvious stylistic awkwardness and many grammatical errors.

Four Decades won the Leipzig Award as "the most beautiful book in the world," and *High Realism in Canada* may very well win a similar award on the basis of its visual format. But in order to have made a contribution to our knowledge of Canadian art, the research and text would have had to be much better than they are. □

TIT BITS

How To Bat Well and Stay Single, by Nigel Napier-Andrews, Kakabeka, 204 pages, \$1.95 wrappers.

I MEAN little ad *hominem* injury here; believe me, but judging from the snap on the back of How To Eat Well and Stay Single, "Nigel Napier-Andrews" may well be Jean Shrimpton, elegant and lovely, in mustachioed disguise. Stranger things, including the publication of How To Eat Well and Stay Single, have happened.

Considering that the book is a basic cookbook for bachelors, the photo on the front cover is deceptive and perplexing as well. But inside, where the action is, there is no smacking of lips or hips, just a clatter of pots and pans.

Sum, the author intimates **half-heartedly** that the way to a woman's vagina is through her stomach, but it's the joy of cooking, not the joy of sex, he celebrates. **Pity him, terrorized** by the cries and whispers of swooping feminist demons, **caponed** by the gnashing of merciless teeth, reduced to such puerile rubbish as this:

Just before serving, place a maraschino cherry in the centre of each grapefruit, which, with any luck, will enable your lady guest to ask the magical question "Anybody want my cherry?"

Back in the kitchen, **comfie and** secure, the recipes and handy hints, though uninspired, are reliable enough.

ISAAC BICKERSTAFF

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OLD SONG, NEW MYTHS

Now in Paperback: **Canadian Playwrights of the 1970s**, edited by **Connie Brissenden**, Fineglow Press, 120 pages, \$3 wrappers.

Striker Schneiderman, by Jack Gray, Canadian Play Series, University of Toronto Press, 85 pages, \$1.75 wrappers.

By NIGEL SPENCER

CONNIE BRISSENDEN'S independent publication, *Now in Paperback: Canadian Playwrights of the 1970's*, and *Striker Schneiderman in the Canadian Play Series* provide a number of revealing contrasts. The first is clearly a labour of love. It's cover, type and format are unassuming but solidly self-confident. Brissenden's short introduction is precise and to the point. She does not gush or rely on hollow nationalism to sell her book: she and her playwrights are professionals in the very best sense and they know it. Her message is "forget the '60s". Her authors, **Hrant Alianak**, **George P. Walker**, **Louis Del Grande**, **Larry Fineberg** and **Steve Petch**, show the firm grasp and economy of stage technique that make for the exciting new maturity in Canadian theatre.

Jack Gray, conversely, has resurrected in *Striker Schneiderman* a weak, vague and pretentious piece of work. It struck me that way when I acted in it four years ago and it has gathered a lot of dust since then. This may sound harsh, but one is tempted to believe that Gray overlooked many better plays and published his own out of sheer opportunism. True, *Striker Schneiderman* is a full-length play, but there are plenty of others, and surely the U of T's criteria are not so narrow as to exclude short ones.

Striker Schneiderman stands out as a lame victim of the paralysis that strikes most Canadian playwrights when they turn to politics. Three years ago, amid great furor, **George Ryga** gave us "Captives of the Faceless Drummer," a largely dishonest play about political kidnappings, which doled out an even mixture of pap and romanticism. The same sense of flirtation comes from **Carol Bolt's** new "Red Emma". It is a cold, superficial brush past the subject of anarchism, as well as some very real people. **Ryga**

put together a" artificial blend of politics and soap-opera, **Bolt** walks the tightrope between politics and no politics, and the publication of an uncut *Striker Schneiderman* splits both contradictions wide open.

This fictional story of a non-committal Jewish taylor caught between opposing forces in the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike has tremendous possibilities, but unfortunately Gray fumbles them all down the line. The contrast between **Moishe's** modest home life and the sweep of history around him serves only to drain them both of interest. Gray has not really gone into either of them because he is unwilling to commit himself to his subject. Furthermore, this mixture of light comedy and heavy drama leaves one feeling awkward and unsatisfied as though *Striker Schneiderman*, like "Red Emma," would rather have been a Broadway musical. But if *Striker Schneiderman* shows a lack of confidence as great as its pretensions, this is definitely not true of **Connie Brissenden's** five playwrights. Their plays are all short (**George F. Walker's** "Prince of Naples" is 40 pages long and **Hrant Alianak's** "Mathematics" lasts 190 seconds); and despite differences in style, each one achieves a spareness that manages to extract the power of ritual and myth from everyday life.

Alianak's is the most refined and cerebral approach. "Mathematics" is a systematic ban-age of household objects thrown from one void into another. The end product is a witty satire of an average day in suburbia - without the people. "Western" involves a gunfighter and two women playing out a ritual of sex and violence to the sound of cowboys and Indians and endless name-dropping from western movies. Both plays are so precisely controlled and lightly witty that one might be tempted to call them exercises. But they are too full of everyday menace for that.

Louis Del Grande's "So Who's Goldberg" is the most deceptively naturalistic of the six. Two young homosexuals dally in the "twilight zone" of a casual pickup, and their moment-to-moment fibs turn out to be the emblem of an entire existence built on nothing but pretense. As in *Pinter*, the more a person talks, the more he reveals the terror that stalks him. **Del Grande** has as sure a grip on timing and repartee as **Alianak**, and all

the writers in this volume has a definite knack for **ironic endings** that are as light as they are surprising.

Larry Fineberg's "Death" presents a series of **serene tableaux** depicting the decline towards death of an old man. As Max loses his physical powers, he **reflects** a corresponding weakness in the world around him. His adolescent grandson and equally **lacklustre** daughter are the symbols of what he has **outgrown**. He is a man whose "perfection" has limited him to, "eating himself." The quiet marking out of Max's steps toward death meshes with Johnny's search for the old man's wisdom to turn a straightforward journey into a cyclical blood ritual.

Perhaps the riskiest of all in dramatic terms is Steve Petch's "The General." In this, a soldier is abandoned by his comrades in a kind of no-man's land. . . only to reveal that the army itself has always been lost. It is a searching for a "enemy" that may not

exist, or which may be the army itself. Here again, the ending is perfectly logical and astonishing. Petch takes a **calculated chance** on the character of **one-armed** Mrs. Macdonald, who is part listening-post, part reflector of offstage action and part antagonist. It **seems** a "awkward handful for a" actress to pull off.

The last and longest play also runs deliberate risks — and barely gets away with it. George F. Walker's "Prince of Naples" handles a good deal of intellectual talk with **deft** skill and from it develops a **pupil-teacher** relationship that becomes a **nightmare** parody of the Pygmalion story. This truer, **merciless** version reflects **modern** society's need to keep outsmarting itself at a "ever-increasing speed. Walker, like the other writers, begins with what often seems a" esoteric theme and manages to expand it by stripping it down to its barest essentials. Essentials that form part of our current mythology. □

more than a tantalizingly fleeting impression of the township. The trouble is — all the inhabitants of Brulé with their rough language and disgusting smells, their boozing and their brawling, keep rearing up' and spoiling the scenery, which is really rather pretty, if one could just get a good look at it between the piles of manure and heaps of human wrecks that litter the countryside. Nevertheless, one feels that the land is what Sears really cares about.

When the narrator first arrives in Brulé township from the West he settles into the countryside in a member of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists out on a Sunday morning hike.

The flat, fertile fields sporting rich, dark loam were waved away, and limestone ridges cluttered with maple and birch and ash and beech rose in undulating combs . . . I was happy spotting the different trees and trying to figure them out from the old books dad had shown me.

His arboreal observations continue when he arrives at the ranch where he is to live with his great-uncle:

Several hundred acres were returning to woods: second growth maple, ash, hickory, hornbeam and beech grew well spaced out and were so cropped underneath by the cattle that it looked like park land. on top of some of the hills aspen and balm-of-gilead made a crown; down by the Culm, white birch and spruce clustered, and along the Perch there were thickets of alder and pussy willow.

Even at the height of sexual passion it is the naturalist's rather than natural instinct that takes hold of Danny-Boy:

I put my mouth hard against her while a killdeer outside the window cried all the way across the pasture just streaking with the first light of dawn.

Next time, Sears might do well to set his story in Brulé Township before the settlers arrive. □

wind in the moon sky
he and you and i
drowning by a sea not a sea
"loo" shadow only
on leaves
rippling
we swim
hand in two hands
you are he and he is me
together still together and now sinking
through moon whiteness alone

Janis Rapoport

PEOPLE OR PLANTS?

The Lark in the Clear Air, by Dennis T. Patrick Sears, McClelland & Stewart, 190 pages, \$695 cloth.

By SUSAN RICE

DENNIS T. PATRICK SEARS has been skillfully reviewing books for the Kingston Whig-Standard for several years. Now, he has written his own book. *The Lark in the Clear Air* is the story of a year in the life of a young man from Alberta who is orphaned and comes to stay with a great-uncle in Ontario.

There's not really too much to be said about the characters or the story. You've met them all before, and you've heard it all before too. The fact that it happens in the early 1930s in a fictitious Ontario township out behind Lindsay doesn't much matter. The folk who inhabit this (It must be said) dreary little township of Brulé do their best to liven up the place in what is apparently wild Irish fashion. There is quite a bit of drinking out behind the barn. This is probably because there aren't enough women in the place to hold a decent barn dance. The only eligible girl in Horncastle is also the

town slut; the fact that she wears such thick glasses that her eyes appear as "patches of brown fog" makes one wonder if the men of Horncastle aren't taking unfair advantage of this myopic miss.

Characterization, especially of women, while often overdrawn, is more often under-achieved. Part of the problem lies in the inconsistent viewpoint of Danny-Boy, the narrator. At times he seems to be remembering his sexual encounters from the distance of middle age and with more than a touch of braggadocio. At other times he is still a teenaged romantic, awkwardly caught somewhere between boyhood and manhood. All the ladies — his mother, Doris the town slut, Holly the virgin, Elaine the educator — appear and re-appear without really coming to life, and, in fact, quite a few of them die untimely deaths just when we might have got to know them. (Come to think of it, Danny-Boy enjoys a rather staggering success with women considering he is just a fifteen-year-old kid with a bad background, dim prospects, and little evident personality!)

Sears is at his best when he writes of the land. There is an attempt to make the book a regional thing in the style of Faulkner, or perhaps Twain, but the feeling of place doesn't become much

UMBRAGE & UNCTION

Would it not be more dignified
To run up debts on every side
And then to pay your debts refuse,
Than write for rascally Reviews
And lectures give to great and small
In pot-house, theatre, and town hall —
Wearing your brains by night and day
To win the means to pay your way?
I vow by him who reigns in — — —
It would be more respectable!

Borrow

MORE ON LIBRARIES

Sir:

While I agree with Jean Wright's views on the invidious nature of the suggested royalty system for public libraries (January-February) I am somewhat puzzled by her statement that "the public library concept simply doesn't have the ascendancy [in Britain] that it does here (just as in education)." As a practising librarian who has lived and worked in England, I cannot recall any major differences between the two systems, and I should, therefore, be pleased to hear more about the writer's views regarding the ascendancy of libraries and education in this country.

John A. Wiseman
Peterborough

St:

I take great umbrage to your recent suggestion that libraries are the great enemy of the working Canadian author. While your desire to defend the Canadian author is very commendable, the contribution of public libraries to Canadian literature also merits some attention. The simple fact is that there are so many titles published in Canada every year that a moderately heavy reader would go broke if he had to buy all the books he reads. Considering that most new books are driven to begin with, an economic restriction on reading would probably stifle the buyer's reading habit and cripple his critical faculties for want of scope. Consider also that most Canadian books are over-priced thin volumes which would find very little market at all if it were not for the bloc buying power of municipal, corporate and educational lending libraries. May I go so far as to say that without free libraries and generous book-lending friends, the Canadian reading public, hence Canadian literature, would disappear pretty quickly.

There is always a problem in identifying the book-buying public. But in general, the person who buys books, even occasionally, is the inveterate reader. Conversely, the woman to whom you allude who puts her name on a library list for a bestseller is a person who doesn't read much anyway and who wouldn't buy a book even as a gift.

It is ironic that you should cite Robertson Davies as the author who complains about libraries. I have bought and distributed as gifts at least a dozen copies,

hard-cover and paperback of his *Fifth Business*. I don't think he has suffered much from library lending.

Writers can best support their cause by writing better books and having them printed in editions which the public can afford. What this country really needs is not a system of library royalties but more and more libraries to support our reading obsession and our mediocre authors.

R.J. Belliveau
Hong Kong

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Sir:

I enjoyed Doug Fetherling's review on Lloyd Abbey's *Flies* and Gail Fox's *Flight of the Pterodactyl* in the last issue of *Books in Canada*, but I wish to point out in public that — Fetherling is mistaken in thinking that we have violated the provisions of the Copyright Act in placing the copyright notice at the back of the book. The Copyright Act places no restrictions on the location of the copyright notice, though it does specify the form that notice shall take and provides that it shall be in plain view. Our advice is that placing of the copyright notice after the last page of text is in no sense prejudicial to our rights or those of the authors.

Michael Macklem
Oborn Press
Ottawa

RIGID MIDGET

Vertical Man/Horizontal World, by Laurence Ricou; University of British Columbia Press, 151 pages, \$8 cloth, \$4.50 wrappers.

By FRASER SUTHERLAND

ANYONE WHO has been, caught out in a Prairie thunderstorm knows that it counts as one of man's most frightening experiences. To realize that one is the tallest object for miles around is enough to make one believe in a Jove or Jehovah with thunderbolt poised in hand; in the might and majesty of the Lord. It's natural then that someone should write about Prairie man, that "challenging upright thing" in Wallace Stegner's words, as he stands out against the sky in Prairie fiction.

Laurence Ricou has done this in a thorough study that traces man's silhouette in the "benign Prairie" of Robert Stead's sentimental novels through the implacable one of Frederick Philip Grove to the sternity-conscious landscape of W. O. Mitchell. Ricou, a professor at the University of Lethbridge, has obviously done his research and writes in an easy unpedan-

tic style that, while somewhat humoured, does the job effectively.

He seems, however, to unnecessarily limit himself. Since Edward McCourt has already written *The Canadian West in Fiction*, a book the author draws on, one wishes Ricou had written a thorough study of the Prairie sensibility in fiction and poetry, especially since here and there he drops tantalizing quotations from poets, yet fails to follow them up.

But on his chosen plane or plain Ricou is at his best when he breaks free from the mortar of other men's quotations, as in the intelligent discussion of Sinclair Ross' *As for Me and My House*, perhaps the one Prairie novel with legitimate claims to greatness.

"Locale permeates the fabric of the novel as it is internalized," Ricou says, "and thus Ross represents both an escape from self-conscious local colour and a much more profound, if unconscious, feeling for place." The sense of "exposure, and an awareness of the surrounding emptiness" that Ricou points out in his preface is put at the core of the character's psyche. Philip Bentley and his wife are only a stumble away from the abyss.

In the same preface Ricou observes that sensitivity to landscape tends to be more strongly pronounced in Canadian Prairie fiction than in its U.S. counterpart since Canada lacks both the tradition of the Wild West and the mythic idea of the Garden. Ricou's book, coming after Margaret Atwood's *Survival* and John G. Moss' more recent *Patterns of Isolation*, is another assertion that the Canadian Muse is geographical. □

BREATHERS

Double Feature, by Leslie Mundwiler, illustrations by Linda Mundwiler, Coach House. unpaginated, \$4.50 wrappers.

By P. MELNICK

THE PROBLEM FOR poets is how to write interesting lines. The problem for critics is how to be accurate. In the case of poetry, especially complex, intellectual modern poetry, the job of criticism is almost impossible. An injustice must almost always be done. One's first conclusion is not one's final conclusion. One's final conclusion is

not necessarily final. A stifling ambiguity hovers over the whole project, which seems shipwrecked from the start. A labour of love subjected to a coarse, impersonal glance, a matter of some delicacy and complexity weighed on a rusty balance — it's almost enough to make the heart sink. Yet the presses don't stop and the game must be played.

Leslie Mundwiler hasn't made it any easier for the critic. He writes in his preface to *Double Feature*:

In an irrelevant critical metaphysics, it's possible to take each poem "for itself"; but this is mainly a series of arguments about history and politics — examined from a concrete, necessarily egocentric standpoint.

I wonder. Why is a criticism that takes each poem "for itself" irrelevant? How are these poems "mainly a series of arguments about history and politics"? By not understanding what the poet means by these prefatory statements am I missing something essential to the comprehension of these poems?

What I look for in a poem is interesting lines. I like some of the lines in this book, and others I don't like. Perhaps it's a matter of taste. Here is a

passage I do like, taken from the first poem in the book:

*Why do I keep moving around
to forget what doesn't mow with me
even though I could take it
like a piece of paper, if I lived
hem every day,
like a broken pencil in a dusty corner,
like a paperclip no sweeping's got
to yet when the room where I lived
was like myself with ayes
and ears in each thing;
but I said goodbye to paper in a fence . . .*

Here are some lines I don't like, from the poem "Running to the Midnight Snow":

*Between one year and the next
Charlie danced his music
wide of the walk,
snow in his boots, talk and laugh
in his mouth;
then an arm for us each,
right arm for Ade
telling old Charlie
"You're crazy. You are crazy, man!"
giggling, then smiling his wide
open smile . . .*

I like some of these poems when the imagery is unexpected and takes on a life of its own. I don't like these poems when the imagery falls flat and holds no surprises. I respect the effort of feeling behind poems like "Take Cariboo," "To L.S.M." and "Gavel," and the shifts and turns in "Czechoslo-

vakia" and "French-Portuguese & Vice Versa Dictionary." I don't like the two long poems "The Time Machine" and "The Count of Monte Cristo," the language of which I find too strained and the arguments of which I find obscure. (Pity the poor critic!)

Leslie Mundwiler I know is struggling with his language, as a poet should. But sometimes his approach seems too heavy to me, too prosaic, and sometimes too light, too playful — it's a delicate balance that's hard to achieve. His playfulness sometimes suffers from a lack of weight and significance so that his words seem gratuitous and thin. His seriousness sometimes lacks colour and energy so that the words never seem to get off the page.

Linda Mundwiler's drawings seem to echo the technique and feeling of the poems and enhance the volume. The quality of the printing in my copy is a little inconsistent and not quite up to Coach House standards. Leslie Mundwiler is good poet and his work deserves the kind of attention that's sometimes lavished on inferior but more popularly accessible darlings of the literary establishment. □

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CHORUS OF FOLK SONG REPRINTS'

By GLYNIS E.C. BARNES

THE REVIVAL of British folksong is presently passing through its third stage of development, and each has been paralleled by a revival of interest in North America. The British Antiquarian movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries produced such important collections of songs and ballads as **Bishop Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry** (3 vols. 1765; reprinted Dover 1966, \$8.25 the set) and **Sir Walter Scott's Minstrelsy of The Scottish Border** (3 vols. 1802; reprinted Singing Tree Press 1967, \$64.60 the set) which are still regarded as major source works. Percy's *Reliques* were saved from destruction by chance, and the Harvard scholar **Francis James Child** resolved to preserve whatever still existed of this form of "ancient English poetry": which resulted in his monumental five-volume work ***The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*** (Boston, 1882-1898; reprinted Dover 1965, \$21 the set). Three hundred and five ballads were included, the texts and all possible variant forms were transcribed with meticulous accuracy (a large number were rejected as not being genuine or having been tampered with by earlier collectors), and versions of the same story were sought in the folk poetry of a multitude of languages for comparison. Roof of his antiquarian spirit is that **Child** collected only from manuscript and printed sources, did no field collecting and seemed unaware that many of these ballads were still being sung throughout the English-speaking world. The living folksong tradition interested him not at all; he was concerned exclusively with preserving ballad texts, and it was not until **Bertrand Bronson** researched and published his ***Traditional Tunes of The Child Ballads*** (Princeton, 1959-72, 4 vols. at \$40 each) that **Child's** work could be regarded as satisfactorily completed.

The first Canadian folksong enthusiast fits into this era, but he was concerned with collecting both music and texts of the songs directly from the people. **Ernest Gagnon** was much aware of the living folksong tradition amongst the French-Canadians of Quebec, and his ***Chansons populaires du Canada*** (1865; reprinted Montreal, **Librairie Beauchemin**, 1952) was the first major collection of French-Canadian songs.

In Britain the Folk Song Society was founded in 1899; Cecil Sharp, the figure-head of the Society, paid several crusading visits to the United States where an enthusiastic response was generated. More important, he encouraged field work in North America and fitted in his own collecting trips there. Pure British songs were found among many immigrant communities in the United States, an exciting discovery resulting in the publication of Sharp's ***English Folk Songs from The Southern Appalachians*** (Oxford 1914; reprinted in two volumes in 1932 and still available at \$15).

This second revival was ended in Britain by the advent of World War One. However, the enthusiasm for collecting in North America continued, and Canada was also found to be a fruitful source of British (as well as French and native) song traditions. **W. Roy Mackenzie**, professor of English at Washington University, had formed an interest in ballads when studying under **George Kittredge**, and was an ardent admirer of Child's collection. From 1908 he had been searching for variants of "Child ballads" when on vacation in his native Nova Scotia, and widened his interest to include all types of folksongs. The story of his collecting experiences was told in ***The Quest of The Ballad*** (Princeton, 1919; reprinted **Haskell**, 1969, \$11.95). where he also developed his theories on oral transmission and classification of material, "illustrated" with ballad texts. This was followed by ***Ballads and Sea Songs From Nova Scotia*** (Harvard, 1928; reprinted **Hatboro**, Folk Lore Associates, 1963) where the full texts (sometimes with several variants) of 162 songs, arranged according to his own tentative classification system, and 42 tunes are published. There are 16 "Child-ballads," 50 love songs, over 30 concerning the sea (including sailors' chanties) and 20 dealing with pirates and other outlaws. Mackenzie had an interesting collecting experience for he found that his prime informants were Protestant French immigrants who learned the ballads and songs from earlier Scots settlers and kept alive the British traditional songs after the "power of the kirk" had persuaded the Scots to

abandon their sinful secular songs. These French settlers fiercely embraced the British-Canadian traditions of Nova Scotia in opposition to the Gallic Catholicism which had driven them from France.

It was during this period that women really came into their own as collectors in North America and were responsible for the next three major collection of Canadian Maritime songs. **Elizabeth Bristol Greenleaf** first visited Newfoundland in 1920, was impressed with the wealth of folklore she found there, and returned with **Grace Yarrow Mansfield** in 1929 as the **Vassar College Folk Lore Expedition**. The two young American girls apparently won the hearts of their Newfie informants, for in a remarkably short time they made a fine collection of traditional songs, published as ***Ballads and Sea-songs of Newfoundland*** (Harvard, 1933; reprinted **Gale**, \$10).

At the same time as the Vassar girls, **Maud Karpeles** was also collecting in Newfoundland. **Cecil Sharp** had wished to make a field trip there and after his death, his amanuensis, faithful to his wishes, paid her visits to Newfoundland in 1929 and 1930. **Dr. Karpeles** successfully completed this project, collecting some 200 songs and publishing ***Folk Songs From Newfoundland*** (2 vols, Oxford, 1934; reprinted **Shoestring Press**, 1970, \$20).

The fourth major Maritime collection of this period was **Helen Creighton's *Songs and Ballads From Nova Scotia*** (Dent, 1932; reprinted Dover, 1966, \$3.50). **Creighton** first started collecting in 1928, and over the years has become Canada's grande-dame of folklore. In this first collection she concentrated on her native Halifax County, and one of her prime source areas was the tiny **Devil's Island**, where she once took down 100 songs in one week. Prime informant was **Ben Henneberry**, who supplied her with over 90 songs, some 60 of which are published in this collection. In this publication are the texts and music to 150 songs, including 11 "Child ballads" and the usual mixture of love, sea, battle and drinking songs. A large number she identifies as being Irish in origin (or at least well known and collected in Ireland — an important distinction as original sources will almost always remain totally obscure), and over 50 as being North American.

many specifically Nova Scotian. Creighton stresses the value of the music, that the text alone is but half the song, and notes that the tune given is correct for the first verse, but that the traditional singer will often amend the tune during the performance to make it fit the other verses. It must be remembered that all these collectors were taking down both words and music by manual dictation. Creighton later added a melodeon to her equipment of pencil and paper to help her work out the tunes more easily, and it

was only much later that she acquired a dictaphone. All the tunes included in this collection were transcribed by hand, but for the new Dover edition she was given the opportunity to revise some tunes in accordance with her later recorded versions where necessary.

The Maritime provinces, however, were not the most exhaustively collected area of Canada. During this period Marius Barbeau started his collecting activities in French Canada, and in his career collected over 7,000

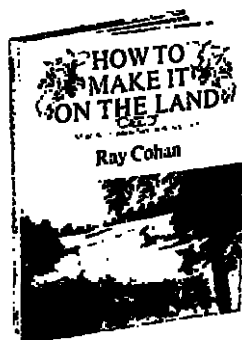
French-Canadian songs (as well as his work on the folklore of the French, English and native populations). His first major collection was in collaboration with Edward Sapir, *Folk Songs of French Canada* (Yale, 1925), followed by his own *Chansons populaires du vieux Québec* (National Museum of Canada, 1935) and many other publications.

Helen Creighton was to become the second most prolific collector, with a total of 4,000 songs, almost all from the Maritime provinces. From 1928 to 1947 she worked privately (although she did collect on behalf of the Library of Congress and was also assisted by Canada Council grants), but in 1947 she joined Barbeau and other notable folklorists on the staff of the National Museum. Some of her more recent publications are *Maritime Folk Songs* (Michigan State, 1962, \$10) and *Gaelic Songs in Nova Scotia* (National Museum, 1964).

The National Museum of Canada has shown great enthusiasm in collecting traditional music from all parts of Canada, through the agency of such notable scholars as FJ. Alcock and Kenneth Peacock, and has a comprehensive archive, including over 3,000 songs recorded from over 30 Indian tribes, and numerous publications to their credit. There is an important series of monographs on the songs, lore and customs of ethnic groups within Canada, such as the Doukhobors, which helps to redress the balance against the French and British monopoly.

This imbalance is clearly shown in attempts to anthologize Canadian folk-songs and provide coast-to-coast coverage of traditional music. The Maritimes and Quebec will be well represented, but what about Ontario, the Prairies and the West? A collection edited by Edith Fulton Fowke and Richard Johnston, *Folk Songs of Canada* (Waterloo Music [Saannes], 1954; library edition \$7.50; choral edition \$2.50) highlights this problem. This selection of songs aims to "represent a vivid cross-section of the Canadian way of life" by presenting songs in sections such as "Men of The Sea," "In The Woods" and "Out West," and Fowke has a great problem trying to maintain an equal representation for all areas. Unable to solve her problem in any other way, she tries to justify the inclusion of songs with a known author, and in fact 20 out of her total of 77 supposed folksongs are

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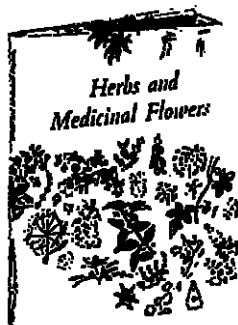
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credited with an author or a known non-traditional source. The section "Out West" does not contain a single Canadian folksong and as substitutes offers lachrymose cowboy ditties such as "Bury Me Not on The Lone Prairie". Other non-folk gems include Thomas Moore's poem "A Canadian Boat Song" ("Faintly as tolls the evening chime...") and the old Wilf Carter hit "When The Ice Worm Nests Again." Token Eskimo and Indian songs are included in this tribute to our national cultural heritage: the Eskimo lullaby is a three-line "free interpretation" of the text end introduces a quite gratuitous Christian reference not present in the original while the Indian contribution is the "Huron Carol," attributed to the seventeenth century Jesuit missionary Jean de Brébeuf. Token French does rather better with a total of 16 songs.

Admittedly the editors have other problems beside the scarcity of choice for certain parts of the country. The first criterion for inclusion is suitability for group-singing, and the choral edition is designed specifically for use in schools. Texts of songs are collated and bowdlerised where necessary, tunes are adapted and piano and guitar accompaniments are given. The term "folksong" is continually being abused by the media, and it is a pity that the editors should see fit to deceive Canadian school children with plastic imitation "folk."

The same team has fared rather better with the second book in this series, *Folk Songs of Quebec* (Waterloo Music [Saannes], 1957; library edition \$4.50, melody edition \$2.50). There are 44 French songs, each with an English translation; and again the idea of unity through cultural interchange is stressed. Unfortunately, the English translations rob the songs of most of their Gallic flavour, although differences between the French and British folksong traditions, in both style and subject, can still be observed, and occasional "cross-influence" noted. The stylistic device of repetition so important in many French songs is rejected as being "less natural to the English singers" — of course it is, that's what makes it French! — and the *ronde* is artificially compressed into an English ballad metre. Deliberate poeticisms and archaisms of some of the translations often compare badly with the delicate simplicity of the original text.

These two anthologies date back to the 1950s and have been reprinted fre-

quently. Many of their short-coming surely could be corrected in new editions. Both central and western Canada have been investigated for folksong material in the past 20 years, so truly regional songs could be used to replace the makeshifts included in the first volume. That the bibliographies and discographies need to be brought up to date will be evident when they are compared with those in the very recent *Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs* (Penguin, 1974, \$2.95), which is also edited by Fowke. This follows the format of Penguin's earlier *English Folk Songs* (1969) and *American Folk Songs* (1965), edited by Ralph Vaughan Williams and A.L. Lloyd, and Alan Lomax respectively. The three volumes together give a comprehensive selection of traditional songs in English, accompanied by helpful notes and up-to-date bibliographies.

This last crop of anthologies and selections from earlier collections follows the post-war return of interest in folksong, generated in the United States and then taken up in Great Britain. Not only is collecting being carried out on an even larger scale than ever before, but folklore has attained a true academic respectability. The subject is being studied at a number of major universities in North America and Britain, and the large numbers of reprints of important texts stems from this demand. □

Glynis E.D. Barnes, now a Toronto bookseller, is a graduate of the Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies at the University of Leeds, where she wrote her thesis on British transvestite ballads.

OIL SLICK

Rage Under the Arctic, by Basil Jackson, George J. McLeod, 220 pages, \$6.95 cloth.

ONE OF THE FEW positive repercussions of the energy crisis has been the emergence of a new literary genre — the ecology thriller. Its structure, like the DNA molecule, is a complex double helix in which ideas from *The Scientific American* and *Nature* are interlaced with strands of John Buchan. The strength of this type of thriller is that it combines escapism with garbage-pail reality. It's not the machinations of some shadowy Moriarty that threaten to bring on doomsday. The

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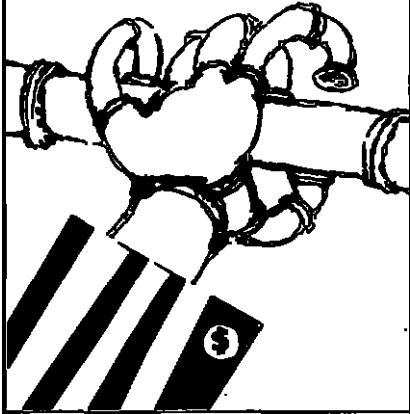
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enemy, as Pogo so nicely put it, is us. The weakness of the genre is a natural tendency on the part of the author to preach at his readers because he knows his cause is just.

Basil Jackson, science editor of Toronto's *Financial Post*, does a fair bit of preaching in this his second ecology thriller. (The first, *Epicenter*, explored what would happen if the Pickering nuclear power station near Toronto developed a radioactive leak.) But he's admit enough to wrap his sermon up in a sound — and entirely believable — plot. There's no danger of falling asleep.

As in all good thrillers, the dirty deed that triggers the action is unfolded with a minimum of ceremony. The North Star, a 1,000-foot nuclear submarine tanker making its maiden voyage out through the Northwest Passage with 60 million gallons of crude oil on board, is punctured by an iceberg. The viscid black gum that spews forth corrupts the fragile Arctic ecology within a matter of hours and, carried south by the Labrador Current, ultimately threatens the whole North Atlantic basin — from the Shetland Islands to the Florida Keys.

Jackson's point is that an oil spill of such magnitude is not just a probability in the near future but a virtual certainty. And despite our experiences with the Arrow in Chedabucto Bay and similar disasters, we are ill-equipped to deal with it. In this instance, an international task force is mobilized to meet the emergency and the best answer it can come up with is a 70-mile-long boom made out of wire fencing and fir boughs. But against the pressure of the advancing oil slick, it might as well have been a daisy chain.

Burning doesn't work. Nor do oil-eating bacteria, an imaginative solution that is still in the experimental stage. The trouble is the bacteria, which will gobble up refined petroleum like ice cream, have so far shown no real taste for the crude stuff. Jackson's own answer is to freeze the oil with canisters of liquid nitrogen and then lift out the solidified chunks by helicopter. As he himself admits, the cost of such an operation would be enormous. But when the alternative is creeping devastation, any idea that's remotely feasible is worth trying.

The story is told mainly through the eyes of Frank Millwood, the skipper of the *North Star* and a subsequent observer of the clean-up attempts. Although the cause of the accident is traced back to technical rather than human

error, his feelings of guilt rue as heavy as the polar ice cap. He is not a totally successful character — too helpless to be an effective protagonist. As this tidy horror story makes abundantly clear, however, in the face of the forces we are about to unleash we will all be underlings. □

DOUGLAS MARSHALL

MONTREAL LETTER

By FRASER SUTHERLAND

TO BE AN English-speaking writer in Montréal is to nurse an inferiority complex. The drums are constantly being beaten for some Québécois writer — to hear the local critics one would think the city is the literary capital of the universe. Locked in his anglophone ghetto, this writer cowers before such continual *oui-saying*, wondering whether he should not just move to Toronto and leave the city to the French. Of course there's no danger of my doing that, but for reasons unconnected with what exists of an English literary community in Montréal.

There is an English literary community in Montréal? Well, yes, sort of. Mind you, it doesn't get much exposure in the local press — the *Gazette* and the *Star* cover the literary scene like a sieve, and their book reviews combine the lowest quality conceivable with the minimum quantity feasible. The English-speaking writer has a few friends, though. John George of Argo Book Shop on St. Catherine Street, not far from the Forum — one of these, and his cosy little place is a dumping ground for productions of the local literati. The Argo is a rarity, a place where one can browse and chat with the proprietor, who is perhaps the most courteous man on earth — a great change from Classic's canned pea factory just up the street.

Another friend is The Word, a living-mom bookshop on Milton Street near McGill University, where Lucy Estwick and Andrian King-Edwards arrange poetry readings and purvey quality paperbacks.

The "community" which patronizes both places is made up mainly of poets, but with a few novelists and some playwrights, the last attached to the Playwrights' workshop Theatre

Company **which**, partly subsidized by a **Local Initiatives grant**, has set up shop in a building in Old Montreal formerly occupied by the **Catholic Sailors' Club**. The company has six plays in its current **season**; the one right now is — **ironically** — a translation of **Québécois** playwright Serge **Sirois' Dodo l'enfant do**. **Still**, the company will be putting on at least two plays by **English-speaking Montréalers** — another sign that **theatre**, French and English, is thriving here.

Novelists? The **Montréal** Story Tellers group is hibernating, since some members are out of town. Bay Fraser is **in Saint John and Clark Blaise** in India, where he and his wife **Bharati** are busy with works in progress. The **Blaises'** recently published works — **Bharati's** *The Tiger's Daughter* and Clark's *A North American Education* — have had a **virtually** unanimous critical success. In **Montréal** are John Metcalf, Bay Smith and **Hugh Hood**, who **all** combine **teaching** with writing. Smith's **story-sequence** *The Lord Nelson Tavern* is just out with McClelland & Stewart, while Hood has completed the first **instalment** of a projected **12-volume roman fleuve**.

The **Story Tellers**, who had done well with group **readings**, do not in any case form a cohesive **"school"** of writers. Each **pursues** his own style and **influences** the others.

Certainly one prose-writer **unlike** any other in **Montreal** is **Valerie Kent**, who **will** soon have a collection of stories out with **Toronto's** Coach House Press. Kent's style — **surrealist/ electric** — is **best displayed in** a novel, *A Thousand Days in the Attic*, **which she's** just **finished**. A **novelist** to watch.

There is no **"school"** evident among **Montreal** poets either, although they do **seem** to fall into two groups. **One** group is the contributors to *Four Montreal Poets*, edited by David Solway and published by **Fred Cogswell's Fiddlehead** press in **New Brunswick**: Peter van **Toom**, **Marc Flourde**, **Arty Gold** and **Richard Sommer**. To these can be added **Paddy Webb** (*Between Two Fires*, DC Books); **Carol Leckner** (*Daisies on a Whale's Back*, forthcoming from Fiddlehead); and **Avi Boxer** (*No Exit*, DC Books). Most of them are active **in** readings around the city.

DC Books, by the way, stands for **Dudek (Louis)** and **Collins (Doug)**, active **publishers** of **new poetry**. **Dudek's** former partner, **Glen Siebrasse**, is also busy with his **own** imprint, **Delta Can.**

Delta publishes' **Sommer** and **van Toom**.

The other **"group"** centres around the **Vehicule** Art Gallery on St. Catherine near St. Laurent. Included are **Allan Bealy**, who **this** winter edited *Da Vinci*, a **visually-arresting, attractive** start to what will be a **continuing literary** magazine; and **Claudia Lapp**, who co-ordinates poetry readings for **Vehicule** and has brought out *Honey*, a collection of **erotic hymns**, or, as she spells it, **"Himhymnhimhymn."**

But when you add it **all** up it **still doesn't amount** to a hell of a lot, certainly nothing like the **Montréal** movement of the late 1940s which brought Canada into the **mainstream** of modern poetry.

But even if **Montréal** had no English **literary** life to **speak** of, it would **still** be worthwhile **to live** here: being a minority-member is not so bad; it's like expatriate life without the inconveniences. Then there's the physical setting itself — the **Mountain** in whose shadow we **all** play out **our** lives; and the **taverns**, bars and restaurants. **Montreal** is **Eros** to **Toronto's Logos**.

Last Friday night I was on **my** way, this letter **in** mind, to **hear** a **reading** put on by some local poets and prose-writers. But I **got** waylaid — a poster did it — **into** attending a party given by the Hungarian Students Association of **Sir George Williams** University. Then, I discussed cosmic questions with some Hungarian Canadians and **drank vast** quantities of **Egri Bikaver**. I can think of few better ways for a writer to spend his spare **time in Montréal**. □

NO SPICE

Goodbye to **Elsa**, by **Saros Cowasjee**, New Press, 152 pages, \$5.95 cloth.

By **JUAN BUTLER**

IN HIS **SPLENDID** study of suicide, *The Savage* God, A. Alvarez **lists** what he considers the three components of suicide: the wish to **kill**, the wish to be killed, the **wish** to die. **To which** he adds: **"No ma"** kills himself unless there is **something** wrong with **his** life. This fact is so obvious that it is often ignored. So one vital meaning of the act is missing: the suicide wishes to show **those** who survive **him** how bad **things** are. In the case of **Tristan Elliot**, Anglo-Indian university professor, potential suicide and principal

character of **Saros Cowasjee's** first novel *Goodbye to Elsa*, things are very bad indeed.

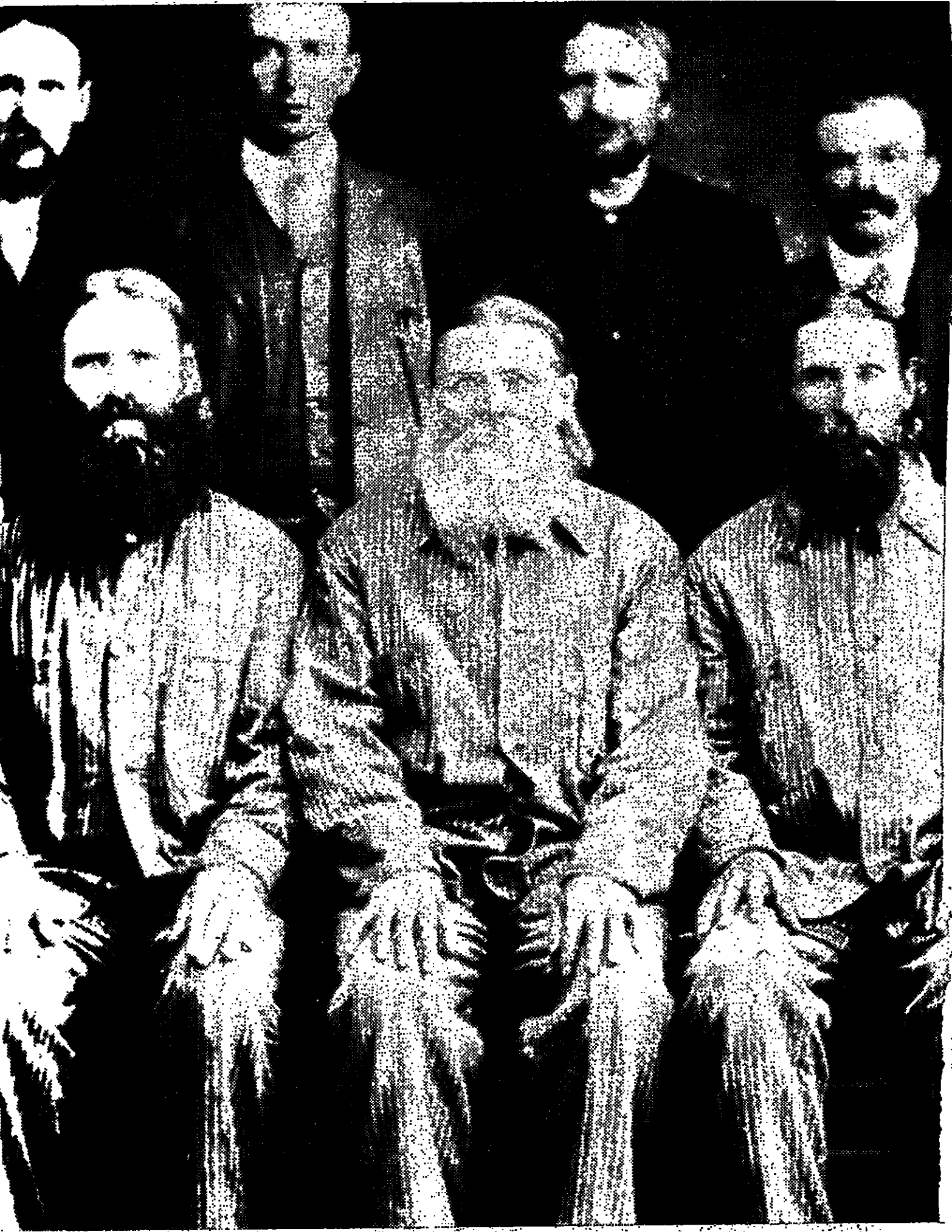
Blinded **in** one eye, his wife and child despised and **abandoned**, his career a **hollow** parody of a meaningful existence, he sits alone disgusted and disillusioned in a wilderness cabin in the Canadian West. With **rifle** in hand, he **slams** back and forth from past to present to past again with **all** the **misdirected** energy of a demented **ping-pong** ball.

In his **mind** he rebounds off **Leeds**, where it is kindly suggested he **return** to **his own** country and marry **his own kind**, then off a **breastless** prostitute who refuses to put out her cigarette while they make love, which only reinforces his low **opinion** of himself and the world around him. In **London**, where he falls in love with **Heather** who **runs** off with **Syria**, he meets **Elsa**, a stout German girl who once had a lover who lost his **sex** in a **hunting** accident, which in turn reminds him of his old Bombay girlfriend **Nellie** who **lost** both legs in a **train** wreck.

They were **partners in** tragedy, **Tristan** and **Nellie**, when they set **off** for a **college** in the Canadian **Prairies**, but **they soon** became embittered with the **intrigues, back-stabs**, hypocrisy and **sexual politicking** which **form**, it appears, a major part of academic life. Finally, it **all** comes to a head. **Cowasjee's** savage god **turns** to religion and a rifle. **Wishing to kill**, be **killed** and **die** **all in** one **glorious** blaze of fury and **redemption**, he falls **in** love once more, this time with a **fresh-faced** storekeeper's daughter. **Mumbling** and moaning his **pains** and **sorrows**, the Messianic marksman chooses this lass as his sacrificial **offering** for a life **not** worth living. He shoots her dead.

But the story does not end here. Just as **war** is the ultimate absurdity, **suicide** is the ultimate futility, for **Cowasjee's** victim not only fails to **kill** the right person (it is his **girlfriend's** twin sister into whom he **pumps** three bullets) but it turns out **he** is not **certain** if he actually has killed anyone at all. **That's** it, the **latest** entry on the literary **scene**, with its **hem** left howling miserably into the cold **northem** wind. Great **reading** for **those** who **like** their sorrow **without** seasoning. All others, beware. The author is presently **working on** a sequel. □

Juan Butler, author of *Cabbagetown* Diary and *The Garbage Man*, is **currently working on** a third novel.



THE DOUKHOBORS: A SAD EPIC

THE STORY OF the Doukhobors is as much a Canadian epic as the story of the building of the railways, with which at times it interlocks; but like the story of Gabriel Dumont and his Métis, it is a sad epic, for it ends in the defeat of unwilling acceptance.

The outlines of the story are well known. The Doukhobors arise in Russia as a pacifist, radical sect, anarchistic in appearance but in fact ruled by a succession of "divine" leaders. They suffer persecution from the Tsars for their refusal to accept military service, and their extermination seems certain when Tolstoy end the Quakers intervene. Tolstoy sells the copyright of *Resurrection* to assist them, and those who refuse to submit are allowed to emigrate, first to Cyprus, then to Canada, where the great marcher Kropotkin suggests they should settle and where James Mavor (Mavor Moore's grandfather) is one of their active sponsors.

They begin to reproduce on the Prairies their Christian communist system, living in villages in what later became Saskatchewan, the men earning money in the summers by helping to build railways and the women drawing ploughs through the Prairie sod for lack of horses. Soon other men are jealous of their good lands, and by a despicable technicality — because as men who do not believe in earthly government the Doukhobors will not swear allegiance to King Edward to get their land — the federal government dispossesses those who will not submit to the letter of its regulations. They migrate, under their leader, Peter Verigin (the Lordly), to the valleys of southern British Columbia.

There they again build a great commune of 6,000 people, with its orchards and jam factories and brickworks. But now dissension strikes. A zealot fringe, the Sons of Freedom, has already developed in the Prairies. It spearheads the resistance to absorption by North American uniformity. Its members parade nude in protest, and Wasp sensibilities are abraded. They refuse to send their children to school or to pay taxes. Some of them burn houses — their own and those of less extreme Doukhobors — to show their renunciation of material goods. They also burn schools and a few re-

A Pictorial History of the Doukhobors, by Koozma J. Tarasoff, Saanes (Prairie Books), 280 pages, 59.95 cloth.

By GEORGE WOODCOCK

sort to dynamite. They are lost peasants — splendidly hospitable and good natured as I know from having moved among them and stayed in their houses — fighting desperately for their dying world. Hundreds are interned in prison camps, and the Doukhobors are disfranchised.

In 1924 the leader, Peter the Lordly, is blown up in a train, no one yet knows by whom. Under his son, drunken Peter the Purger, the community disintegrates; when the Depression comes, it is bankrupt, and the Doukhobor lands are seized a second time. The heritage of bitterness continues for decades; the Sons of Freedom carry on their resistance in extreme forms right into the early 1960s. Since then the Doukhobor lands have been returned, almost all the Doukhobors have accepted state education, the burnings and the nude parades have dwindled to an occasional incident. The Doukhobors have become good citizens, building ticky-tacky houses on the former community lands. We have overcome! We have assimilated the Doukhobors, and most of us fail to realize that in forcing a minority culture to abandon almost all that declares its identity except for the Russian language and the pacifist credo, we have admitted that no more than totalitarian states can our kind of democracy find room within it for the radically dissident group.

This story, as I say, is known; it has often been told. But the telling has been curiously distant because of the lack of a good pictorial record. For a long time now, students of Doukhobor affairs have been aware of the archive of photographs which Koozma Tarasoff has been gathering from among his Doukhobor acquaintances and relatives. The archive was kept so carefully that a few years ago when I was working on a book on the Doukhobors I was unable to make any use of it. But now at last, in his own good time, Koozma Tarasoff has released a great

number of his photographs in a unique record of the Doukhobors. At last we have a good idea of their history as it was actually seen by men's eyes over the past century.

There is nothing especially noteworthy about the text to *Pictorial History of the Doukhobors*. The facts it recites in concise manner have appeared in earlier histories, and its sociological speculations do not add a great deal to what has already been said by other students of the Doukhobors; perhaps its main importance is that it gives the honest views of a critical intelligence speaking from within the sect, for Koozma Tarasoff is a birthright Doukhobor.

But the pictures, which are after all the main reason for the book's existence, form an invaluable addition to the literature of the Doukhobors. A generous selection of photographs from the Russian period — much under-represented in earlier books — begins the record, which continues with an evocative series on early Doukhobor settlements in the Prairies. The later sections rather sadden one, as the Doukhobors slowly come to resemble the rest of Canadians, losing their special character in appearance as well as in way of life.

Yet this is, of course, the sad and perhaps inevitable ending of the epic. A pictorial History of the Doukhobors is a true record of what it means to belong in Canada to a minority that works across the grain. It is the fate of being smoothed down until the eccentric pattern at last becomes invisible. The old militant psalm of the Doukhobor, "Sleep on, ye brave fighting eagles," has at last become an elegy.

The story of the Doukhobors in Canada, coming from persecution under the illusion of finding freedom to develop their own pattern of life, should fill the Greater Canadians (if one can adapt a Russian phrase) not with a sense of guilt, which is a useless emotion, but with an awareness that we have made our nation up to now in such a form that radical deviations must be sacrifices, and that in the end it is we who lose by the process. □

George Woodcock is co-author, with Ivan Avakumovic, of the 1968 definitive work, *The Doukhobors*.

NAVEL TACTICS

Achilles' Navel: Throbs, Laments and Vagaries, by. Doug **Fetherling**, Press Porcépic, 54 pages, \$3.95 boards.

Jeremy's Dream, by **Janis Rapoport**, Press Porcépic, 59 pages, \$3.95 boards.

By **CHRIS SCOTT**

OF THE TWO books under review, the laurels undoubtedly go to **Fetherling** for his title. *Achilles' Navel* is **very clever**. It suggests a certain cosmogonic irony, and this is borne out by a random sampling of the contents: 'Elijah Speaking,' 'Excavating Graves,' 'Art Era (1956),' 'Experimental Death Wish:' and 'Café Terminus.' Equally clever, equally sententious, these a* **threnodies** plucked out on the lute of our electronic boredom. Alas, **Fetherling** has spoiled his title with an egregi-

ous afterthought. **Throbs**, laments and vagaries these may also be, but the subtitle **reeks** of diffidence and enthusiasm — the two conflicting elements of **Fetherling's** poetic self.

The first poem (untitled) sets the tone. We are required to contemplate the spectacle of an:

*Ignorant child
playing
with a skull in its crib*

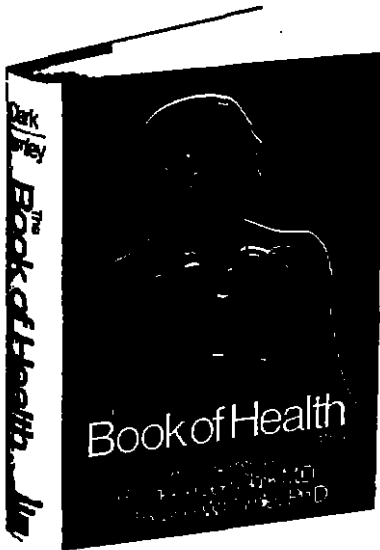
In case we, like the, child, should be unaware of the significance of this conceit, the poet is mindful to observe that it is a "symbol." Nevertheless, "... neither do we/ know the source of every dent/ and trepanation." There is the faintest trace of *Hamlet* here. However, the poem moves through a **Prufrockian** moment into viscid oblivion, "past/ old age and unto death."

Fetherling does not quite appear in the jesting role of **Aubrey Beardsley**, though sterility and **thanatos** are writ large in these poems. He mourns, among others, A. M. Klein and Leslie Howard -but not Rudolph **Valentino**. In the character of **Elijah** he laments

the fact that he is engaged in "deficit living." In the second section of "**Tera-tology**," played **Streptoso** (boisterously) by his muse, he remarks wittily on the physical and mental peculiarities of: **Blake**, **Hearn**, **De Quincey**, **Machen**, **de Gourmont**, **Cendrars**, **Bodenheim**, **Corvo**, **Huneker**, **Bierce**, **Apollinaire** and **Desnos** — all of whom, at some future time, may become his predecessors. Hart Crane (I am thinking of the "Voyages" sequence) is omitted.

Finally, in "Vespers" the poet proclaims that, "My decline is unsteady but' certain/ for yesterday I was / twenty-three years old/ and today I am eighty-one." A long time ago, Edmund Wilson thought it was silly of T. S. Eliot to refer to himself as an "aged eagle." Doug **Fetherling**, young at the age of **eighty-one**, almost pulls it off. He affects a romantic insouciance toward the **shocks** of this life; he is modishly nostalgic for the celluloid heroes of **this cinematic** age. -He is mordant, irreverent and, above all, he is immensely clever.

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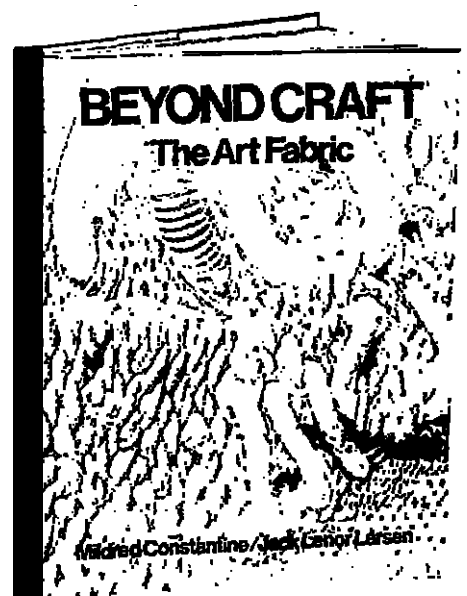
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If Fetherling is an enthusiast, Rapoport is an ecstatic. Ems is her god. In a poem titled 'Paul,' she remembers the "rough smoothness" of a lover's tongue, and where she is not trite she is tautological: "curved sneer" and "penumbral darkness." She is at her best when evoking the obstetrical consequences of her devotions.

Rapoport memorializes something called Sicon 4, which, a note reveals, was the 1971 Science Fiction Conference held in Toronto. She was also present at a reception for Yevgheny Yevtushenko and lampoons the "sychophants" there, assembled. That she does not name them left me with the impression that she would like to have her cake and eat it. In case her high seriousness is in doubt, however, the poem (titled "6121973618" — a tattoo number?) ends with a reference to Babi Yar. Rapoport has also been to Lod, Israel, where, it will be remembered, something messy happened.

Many of these poems are marred by syntactical quirks. The title poem, "Jeremy's Dream," is reminiscent of the Beatles' more surreal moments and blends snatches of nursery rhymes with Rapoport's penchant for the visceral. Sooner or later, we all go back to the cradle endlessly rocking. □

MENTAL HOME MOVIES

The Disinherited, by Matt Cohen, McClelland & Stewart, 240 pages, \$8.95 cloth.

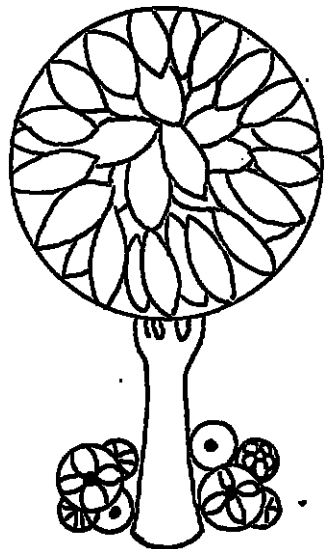
By NANCY NAGLIN

IN THE PAST few years it's become unfashionable to write books straight out about life, death and sex — in the style of the 1930s realists who seemed to get away with it because they were so good at it — but Matt Cohen attempts it in *The Disinherited*. He sets out to reconstruct a private world, a time capsule of turn-of-the-century farm life frozen in a tri-generational conflict in the Ottawa River Valley. He doesn't fake it, either. When things falter, he can't hide behind his prose and expect pages of psychological probing to speak for his characters and say, "We weren't being serious anyway."

The Disinherited is a serious novel, a "real" novel in the sense that it reaches out for the meaning beyond cups and saucers and petty conversation. Cohen begins and never folly develops a skeleton story he fleshes out by going into the characters' heads. The narration is a series of episodes strung along by intense mental activity. Occasionally, the story falters because the mechanism is over-worked.

The Thomas family is a latter-day, literate Snopse clan. Like the tensions of the Faulkner family, the struggles of the *Disinherited* revolve around land. Faulkner wrote about the grand emotions of fairly grubby people. Cohen is working on ordinary lives of pretty average people. The Thomases are FOOF's — members of fine old Ontario families who have gone slightly to seed. So instead of a morally reprehensible Mink Snopse, there is old man Simon, Crafty progenitor who sneaks around the countryside waiting to seduce girls in their rocking chair.

The characters in *The Disinherited* are wrapped up tightly in the confines of their own lives. Cohen, I think, intended them to be flesh-and-blood people — simple, hard-working, common folk, the kind nobody wants to



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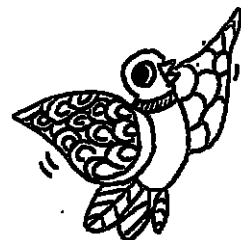
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be **anymore**; and for the most part they **fulfill** that part of his expectations. **Brian**, the adopted son, has a hula **girl** with a snake **around** her middle tied to **his** steering wheel. Cohen isn't a voyeur. The hula lady doesn't stand for Brian, as seen by someone outside the environment **carefully jotting** down details so that we **may recognize** the **inhabitants** of this **strange** land. The hula lady is Brian.

Cohen's attempt to reach directly into the **minds** of **his** people weakens when he tries to reconstruct their **conversations**. It's not that he has a poor ear so much **as** that dialogue **originates** in **his** head instead of **coming from** his people. **His nineteenth-century characters** are like stilted contemporaries who talk slowly and **thoughtfully** because **they** are in a void with no chance **of being** understood. They are slowed **and** deliberate and **unconvincing**.

In Cohen's closed, **rural** community crime is **personal**. Whether a character casually goes to bed with someone else's wife or hates brothers, **fathers** or wives for a lifetime, the **anger** is real, not **an** existential white-wash. **Adul-**

tery, sterility **and** **jealousy** cause **anguish** that wounds for life, **and** emotions **smoulder** beneath the **surface** in half-remembered **insults**.

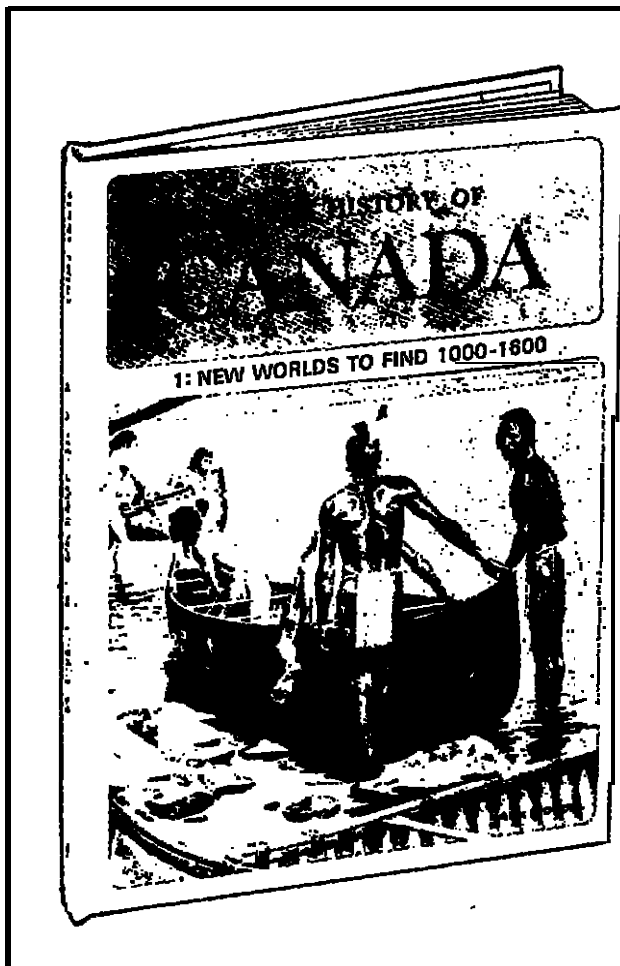
The land is at **the** heart of everything. The dying Thomas worries about the future of his **farm** to **somnolent** monologues that bring him **home** to his roots **and** forward to his death. **The** birthright gets **tossed** back **and** forth between waning **brothers** while Cohen hints at a larger possibility: people don't know what **they're** doing. The land **isn't** an **anchor**. We're too complex for **that**.

There **are** no hard and fast resolutions in *The Disinherited*. **For** me, **that** is a small triumph. The people about whom Cohen writes **are** **average** in their lives, unconscious of their doubts **and**, incompletions, and 'no **more** **deserving** or expectant of solutions than anybody else. At the end of the book there is a **new** alignment of allies, **that's** all. A **wife** and a mistress leave **the** **funeral** together, a son **discovers** his past, absorbs it and turns away. **Everything** continues altered but unchanged.

The Disinherited is a **curious** book. The characters are exteriors; the activity is subterranean **and** hidden. There **are** repeated **chance** encounters **with** women, misunderstood meetings **and** a **very-important** but totally mysterious person who wanders **in** a **film** of **his own thoughts**. **Some** passages are extremely well-written, nearly eloquent, but the story as a whole **has** a sense of detachment. It is as though Cohen couldn't handle his story on all **fronts**, so he **did** the next best, wisest thing, he treated it **from** the **inside-out**.

It's hard to know exactly what Cohen intended. At times his story **proceeds** with the momentum of **his** words because his characters are **strangely** eviscerated. But he has turned himself to the **task** of the novelist and in **this** **strangely** drifting, less than **satisfying**, **book** about **farm** folk outside of Toronto, he has **written something moving** about **human** emotion. □

Nancy Naglin, a regular contributor, interviewed Matt Cohen in the March Books in Canada.



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By **RICHARD LANDON**

ONE OF THE little known but well documented sagas of Canadian history is the journey made from Fort Carry to the interior of British Columbia by some 200 gold-seeking adventurers known as the Overlanders of '62. They were lured westward by the prospect of the fabulous wealth of the Cariboo gold fields but arrived just in time to witness the rapid decline in gold production which followed the boom of 1858-1862. Many, however, adapted to the changed circumstances and became the much-revered pioneers of the new province.

This book, first published in 1896 by William Biggs of Toronto, is here re-issued in facsimile as volume three of the Northwest Library, a venture

which the publishers hope will again make available 'the best of the early written history of the Pacific Northwest. It contains a substantial new introduction by Victor G. Hopwood of the University of British Columbia.

Margaret McNaughton was the wife of one of the Overlanders and her story is supposedly told through the experiences of her husband: no doubt she listened many times to his stories of the trek. She appears, however, to have relied principally on the account of Thomas McMicking, one of the leaders of the party, published in the *British Columbian* in fourteen parts during late 1862 and early 1863. Hopwood says that by modern standards she was guilty of plagiarism, although that hardly matters now. It does, however, suggest that the gathering together and republication of McMicking's articles would be a valuable publishing project.

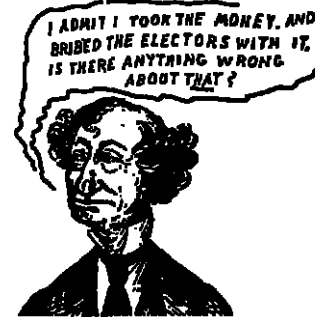
The Overlanders travelled from Fort Garry to Fort Edmonton by Bed River carts. They then packed through the mountains with horses to the Fraser River where the various contingents split up, some to proceed down the Fraser by raft and canoe and some to try the Thompson River further inland. It was during this portion of the journey that several fatalities occurred, and anyone who has gazed upon either river will wonder how any of them survived.

Two of the Overlanders are particularly interesting. Catharine Schubert was the only woman of the party, her presence being a surprising occurrence as normally Ontario Protestant men would not have allowed women to participate in such an expedition. A.L. Fortune, however, thought it a "wise providence" that she accompanied them as "her presence in the company helped to cultivate a kindly and manly treatment of man to man". The day following her arrival in Kamloops, Mm. Schubert gave birth to a daughter, the first white child born in the interior of British Columbia. The Schuberts eventually pre-empted land near Armstrong, B.C., and their descendants are there today. Fortune, after finding out that the promised gold had disappeared, settled in Spallumcheen and became the first white settler in the North Okanagan. He died in 1916 and is well remembered by people alive today, an instance of the direct links with pioneer history which still exist in some parts of Canada.

In Chapter 10, Mrs. McNaughton gives extracts from *Sawney's Letters*

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SPECIOUS & CHOPPY

A **String of Amber: The Heritage of the Mennonites**, by **Blodwen Davies**, Mitchell Press, Vancouver; 288 Pages, 87.50 cloth.

By MAGDALBNB RBDEKOP

HISTORIANS HAVE frequently considered (but inevitably discarded as without basis in fact) the tempting possibility that the **Anabaptist** movement could be traced back through the pre-Reformation **Waldensians** to its supposed origin in the early apostolic "invisible" church. The charm of this theory derives not only from its positing of a simple continuity with the historical Jesus but also from the seemingly anarchist hue of the Old Evangelical Brotherhoods — medieval non-conformists who took refuge in the remote mountain regions of Europe. For these early pacifists the church was the community, all members were priests, ritual was considered sinfully decorative and survival was assured only by mutual aid.

Since these elements bear an obvious resemblance to Mennonite beliefs, the reader ought perhaps to be more wistful than surprised to see that **Blodwen Davies** succumbs to the charm of this Well worn thesis. Like earlier exponents of the theory, Davies uses (or rather misuses) **van Braht's Martyrs' Mirror** and the writings of **Sebastian Franck** to set up a shaky pseudo-historical skeleton which she fleshes out from her observations of a variety of folk customs among Ontario Mennonites. In order to evoke a specious confidence in the vague generalizations she sweeps casually under the rubric of "Defenceless Christians," she scatters a wealth of tantalizing detail about these customs: the string of amber beads, herbal remedies for cancer, funeral and marriage customs, water diviners, fire letters and even a

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solitary witch. Tantalizing but not, finally, persuasive.

The discontinuous structure of the book, the exaggerated simplicity of the style and the repeated breathtaking leaps backward and forwards from the apostolic pacifists to contemporary Mennonites, all combine to make for frustrating reading. Her design is all too transparent: to portray Ontario's "Plain People" 55 quaint primitives exaggerated to the point of caricature — this by ignoring the complexities of their theological and political stance. It is a simple fact that all the early Anabaptist leaders were urban intellectuals and there is no concrete evidence that a single Waldensian ever converted to Anabaptism.

Through the force of her synthetic impulse, Davies unwittingly creates (besides numerous distortions) an accurate impression of the paradoxical combination of an expansive, frontier spirit with a contractive, tenacious clinging to traditions. The book needs a stronger analytical thrust, however, to separate those aspects of social customs that were determined by the pressures of frontier life from those attributable to ancient traditions.

The most enticing chapter turns out to be the most disappointing example of sloppy research. Davies considers the *Ausbund*, a hymnbook still in use among Amish Mennonites, and asserts categorically that the texts were written by pre-Reformation primitive Christians. "The people who treasured these songs," she claims, "would have been distrustful of the intellectuals who created the Anabaptist movement." Her statement that it is "the oldest Christian hymnbook known" is just another example of the kind of hyperbole with which the book is generously larded. The *Mennonite Encyclopedia* more carefully labels it "the oldest hymnbook in continuous use in any Christian church." Meticulous research by Wolkan and Jackson on the origins of these hymns unambiguously contradicts Davies' conclusions.

A *String of Amber* provides a mildly amusing survey of the remnants of folk customs and superstitions among Mennonites. Davies rightly emphasizes the need for an "unbiased, scholarly program of research" into the origins of these customs. It is unfortunate that this book merely accentuates that need. □

Magdalene Redekop, a Mennonite from Manitoba, is joining the English department of Victoria College, University of Toronto.

ANOTHER KRAVITZ SPIN 'OFF

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, by Mordecai Richler, McClelland & Stewart, 378 pages, \$2.95 wrappers.

AND now from (*fanfare: lamphorn, kazoo and cowbell*) M & S, The Canadian Publishers, a special large-format edition of this "Canadian classic" (says so right on cover), including 69 stills, cast list and production details from the new feature film of the same name. The cost is just 60 cents more than the New Canadian Library edition (though \$1.45 more than the non-Canadian Penguin), a reasonable sum for such a meticulously handsome and hefty plea of merchandise. So far as can be determined, the novel itself has not been in any way mutilated,

nor have any additions been made. Only the packaging is different. It's gonna sell like crazy to the high schools.

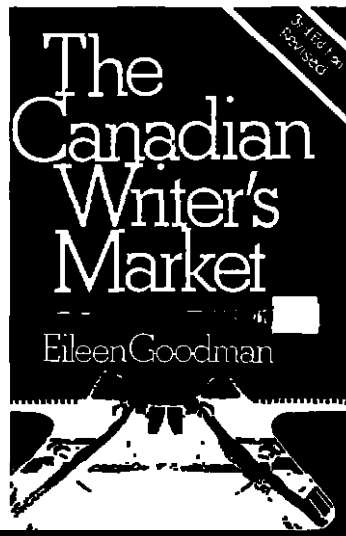
See, before, you had to pretty well imagine what Duddy Kravitz looked like: "a small, narrow-chested boy of fifteen with a thin face. His black eyes were ringed with dark circles and his pale, bony cheeks were crisscrossed with scratches, as he shaved twice daily in his attempt to encourage a beard." Now, you just have to check the stills to see that Duddy looks like Richard Dreyfuss, the kid in *American Graffiti* who couldn't decide if he wanted to go away to college and eventually wound up a writer (we all cheered with the posting of this intelligence) Canada.

For a high school kid who hasn't previously read the book, and who's certain to go see the movie so he won't have to finish reading it, and who can just peruse the 69 stills to be reminded, prior to exams, of the plot, this is the pluperfect edition. At last, indisputably, Duddy has become a somebody. □

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Val Clery freelance broadcaster and writer. Formerly with BBC Overseas Service and CBC's London Bureau, Clery was radio producer for CBC *Current Affairs*, producing *Speaking of Books* and originating *As it Happens*. Val Clery co-founded *Books in Canada* and was its initial editor for 2 years. He contributes to several Canadian newspapers and periodicals and broadcasts regularly on CBC.



Gerald Lampert Founder and Director of York University's Summer Writers' Workshop for three years, he has conducted writing seminars at York University and Ryerson Polytechnical Institute. His writing has appeared in *Panorama*, *Dialog*, a blewointment anthology, etc. He is Co-Ordinating Director, Poetry Readings, League of Canadian Poets. His first novel *Tangle Me No More* was published by Simon & Schuster and a second novel *Eye of Venus*, will be published early in 1975.



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Lotta Dempsey One of Canada's most prominent columnists and feature writers, she travels widely for the *Toronto Star* throughout Canada, the US, London, Paris, Rome, etc. She has covered assignments at the White House, Princess Anne's Wedding, interviewed four western Premiers at their homes, etc. She is twice winner of the Canadian Women's Press Club Memorial Award for best column and feature by a woman in Canada.



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Martin Myers Professor, advertising man, editor, broadcaster and contributor to numerous magazines. His first novel, *The Assignment*, received international acclaim. Northrop Frye called it "authoritative, witty, and absorbing." "Excellent reading," said the *New Statesman*. *Time* praised it as "a remarkable first novel, inventive and full of controlled madness." Myers has just completed a second novel, *Frigate*.



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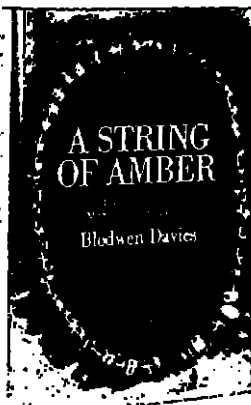
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