

A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

AS IN CANADA

THE LIFE AND LOVE OF ELIZABETH SMART



Naim Kattan on the passion of Northrop Frye
George Woodcock on Gabrielle Roy's memoirs
Biographies of A.M. Klein, W.A. Deacon, and
Evelyn Waugh, and an interview with Alden Nowlan

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BOOKS IN CANADA



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Two epiphanies: a people's bold defiance and baseball's timeless allure

A terrible strength

THE FIRST THING we saw when we docked at Gdynia in Poland last August was a Canadian flag. It was strung across the front of the customs shed, and beneath it was one word in English, *Welcome*. We'd chosen to come by ship as a way of easing into our Polish experience, and the trip on the *Stefan Batory* had been leisurely, even a bit luxurious, as life on a liner always is. The maple leaf flag, not quite clean, and the wrinkled bunting with *Welcome* on it, were the last vibrations of the final echo of those old gala moments of arrival at, say, Southampton, where bands played, streamers streamed, and people laughed and shouted. But it was an awkward gesture here where the real welcome was Solidarity, which at that moment was near the apex of its power and influence. Poland was Solidarity and Solidarity was patriotically Poland. And the men of Solidarity were there on the dock in dispute with the port authorities, tools down and the ship helpless for a couple of hours until the beef was settled. Aboard, there was none of the usual North American rant about the destructive power of unions. The defiance here was the stuff of legends. A few kilometres out in the Baltic Sea 80 Russian warships cruised and waited. In Warsaw, the Party was howling with pain and frustration. We had heard about these tensions hourly since we'd left Rotterdam. These were not sweetheart negotiations; they were very real and damned impressive. The kind of history that was being made then in Poland belonged to everyone, even visitors.

Our friends, Oakley and Maureen Duff, who were Canadian Embassy people, met the ship and were our hosts for the two and a half weeks we stayed in Poland. I, at least, am not intrepid, and living there with all the privileges of an Embassy person suited me fine. To have Maureen and Oakley as guides was another privilege. Most tourists don't go shopping at a Sam store and the Polna market (among other places) for food — in Warsaw a business serious enough to

put on the same list with life and death. On the lighter side, few visitors would normally go to Warsaw's racetrack which, besides having good honest racing (I cashed a couple of bets), has one of the two or three most beautiful turf race courses in the world. And perhaps even fewer — lacking the good offices of our young and hip Embassy receptionist — would have found the obscure club

where Henryk Miskiewicz was playing his saxophone, together with four other world-class jazz musicians.

The Communists are late-comers to Poland; a millennium of oppression has created a climate for jazz, and it has rooted itself there, not as a yearning for things Western, but as a contemporary expression of the thousand years of resistance Poles have put up against every kind of invasion, internal and external. Miskiewicz — as technically graceful as Johnny Griffin and as musicianly as our own Fraser MacPherson — was a connection I hadn't expected, and the heart of an evening I won't forget.

But, in fact, in Poland it's easy to be a tourist in the classic sense of the word. The Poles live with their history, and it's all around for everyone to see. Wilanow on the outskirts of Warsaw and castle Wawel in Krakov are filled with their particular and often very individual works of art — works, incidentally, that Canada received and guarded during the Second World War. As a result, our Embassy sits in the centre of a small park in downtown Warsaw, a gift of the Polish people. Krakov itself is worth the trip. It is old, dirty, beautiful, and the young at its universities are not letting it, or Poland, die. The spirit of the country is as much there near the source of the Vistula as it is in Gdansk at the mouth of that great artery, which has enabled Poland to remain a cultural entity for all of its history. Auschwitz, not far west of Krakov, now is a museum. The horror of it persists in its grey emptiness. Prissy almost, and, at its periphery, commercial, but stand in front of the Wall of Death and walk through the dungeons of Block 11: *there* is the heart of a very human darkness.

We tend to begin to shape experiences as soon as we've had them. Memory does it for us, as well as the exigencies of trying to communicate them. Our arrival, our first impressions, Solidarity's slow-motion revolution provided an emotional underpinning. Sensitivities were sharpened, sensibilities directed until I think we were able to use the fact that we were strangers in a strange land as a point of view to shape our experiences as we had them. This process was quickened by the importance of this place and this moment in its, and our, history.

The Poles are a terrifyingly complex people. They are, for instance, unbelievably anti-Semitic; corruptible at any level of bureaucracy. Their peasantry live lives so degraded and cruel that a Kosinski only has to report them to make fiction. Their security force has a reputation for blunt terror not matched elsewhere. Opposite such horrors there is the serious austere Pole who has produced a culture and an identity of his own, and has resisted assimilation as fiercely as any Jew. And in the middle ground between these two extremes there is the romantic Pole who has made "The Polish Question" into a saga that has lasted from the Congress of Vienna to the present day. The Pole is exclusive, special; this is a stance, and a powerful engine for his country's survival. One reacts to all of these things, even as a stranger, and your experiences begin to be shaped accordingly.

Old Town, for instance. Warsaw was destroyed utterly by the Germans. (Why do we always use the euphemism Nazis?) The city was rebuilt, largely in the beginning by hand labour, and afterward the Old Town was rebuilt. Since the dawn of Polish consciousness, Princes and Kings have reigned there, sometimes free, sometimes puppets. The Poles rebuilt it stone for stone. Each building was researched through civic, company, and personal records, through pictures, paintings, and living memory. Now it is there, a town within the city, an enormous monument to Poland's refusal to die. Still, it is in a sense only one monument among the 361 memorials visible in Warsaw alone, which commemorate atrocities done to Poles by their oppres-

sors. Poland lives close to its memories, as if they were reminders of a karma that they somehow can't pay off. You stand in the middle of Old Town and understand that it is a work of art, and it is possible then to think that this is true of the whole country — that it is a gigantic canvas on which there is a painting of terrible strength and complexity that centuries of invaders have tried to obliterate by painting over it their own pictures. They've never been able to make the pigments stick.

Suddenly at that point I wanted to be a Pole — which, of course, is sentimental, but I make no apologies for it. As a Canadian (the one I am, at any rate) who has lived for a long time conscious of my country's economic and cultural oppression, going to Poland was at once exhilarating and a depressing experience. Oppressed, you are half a person, and the other half is held by the oppressor, not always as hostage or for ransom, but simply because he feels it his right. Oppression, in order to work and be profitable, is always institutionalized — like Jewish perfidy or Canadian inferiority — and Poland's Russia with its thousand years of cruelty and tyranny, and our U.S. with its racist history and

its still fanatical belief in Manifest Destiny, are expert oppressionists. I was not at all prepared for the emotional release there was in being suddenly close to 9.5 million people's defiance of the quislings and branch plant managers in Warsaw. In the end there was the word, and the word was No. Our friends in Poland say that despite military rule the word is still No.

On the other hand, I wasn't prepared either for so suddenly understanding how very far away I was from being able to join a few million other Canadians to ask for the other half of me and my country back. It's probable that as in Poland our time won't come until we have no oil, gas, metals, water, fish, land, and no harvests; until we have a government even more arbitrary and sycophantic than our present one, and a people desperate to the point of having no language left but No. Poland, for me, was both cathartic and a walk through a possible future. Eventually, the shaping of experience on the spot became so fierce that I began in September, and finished in March, a novel, not about Poland, but fuelled by the experience of it. I will never be the Pole I wanted to be there in Old Town,

but the wanting at least partially opened my eyes and, for what it's worth, some of what I saw and felt now is on paper.

— ROBERT HARLOW

Diamonds are forever

WHEN I WAS going to the University of British Columbia I used to put in a lot of time at the Arty Farty table in the old Caf. The Arty Farty table was reserved by consent and threatening glances for campus poets, actors, newspaper columnists, and various ingenues with big eyes or British accents. At the beginning of the school year and near its end, I would read the newspaper baseball scores at the Arty Farty table, and more stereotyped artistes would ask with scorn how I could possibly be interested in both poeise and batting averages.

I think that I was supposed instead to be walking along the beach, coughing in the rain. But I struck an attitude and brazened it out, though I did feel defen-

BOOKS IN CANADA

congratulates Sandra Martin, winner of the Fiona Mee Award for literary journalism, for her profile of Mordecai Richler, which appeared in our March, 1981, issue

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We continue our winning ways in the August-September issue, with articles and reviews by Susan Crean, Howard Engel, W.P. Kinsella, W.D. Valgardson, and George Woodcock. Available in better bookstores, or by subscription, September 1

sive, and I did doubt myself. I did wonder whether I really had the right serious and tragic cast of mind to be a Canadian Rimbaud, like those young tousle-heads in Montreal.

So you cannot imagine how happy and smug I felt to discover that most of the North American male writers I like, and even some I have little regard for, are baseball fans. Some are go-to-the-park: baseball fans, and some are follow-the-stats baseball fans. All the best ones are the latter kind, and the lucky ones are the former kind as well. At Black Mountain they had a ball team, and Charles Olson was the third-base coach. In Vancouver the writers hang out in Section 9, the bleachers behind the Canadians' dugout. Raymond Souster uses baseball phrases to title most of his books, and in the U.S. the baseball novel has become a genre, so much so that it has provoked college English courses on both sides of the world's longest undefended chalk-line.

Being a baseball fan is one thing, and writing about baseball is another. But as Ezra Pound the famous tennis player said, what thou lovest best remains — the rest is dross. As a result of some research I did a few years ago, I can safely say that a majority of our significant male writers has used baseball as subject or metaphor. Not all sports are equally interesting to them. Basketball and boxing are next in line. Maybe literary love of sport has to do with the letter B. There are some eastern Canadian writers who mention hockey from time to time, but I take that as ethnographic nostalgia, not metaphor. Football, a game decided by steroids and a giant clock, seems all but disclaimed by the imagination. The only two poets whom I know to be interested in football are John Newlove and Eli Mandel. They are both from Saskatchewan, the site for novels and stories of grinding naturalism. Need one say more?

One wonders, of course, why baseball and literary imagination meet so often, so unerringly. The five nicest things in the world (women not being things) are baseball, writing, beer, Mexican food, and jazz. Often, all five occur to the lucky life-pilgrim in one day. But the two that resonate most beautifully are baseball and writing. One wonders why, and one has read many attempts at an answer made by writers who have been asked to explain.

I have tried many explanations, often to women and/or professors who think that I should be spending my ration of creativity on something else, like the Roman epic, or *le cinéma noir*. But this also *le texte* and the game share: you love them most, you *desire* them, as Bar-

thes would say, at the point at which they become ineffable. Here the inquirers cannot cry "cop-out," because they do not want to deny the beauty of the ineffable, say in one of Joyce's epiphanies, or the end of Shelley's "Mont Blanc."

In the face of the ineffable one does not explain; one attests. One attests that one has been moved, carried away, metaphorized, in other words. One has exclaimed, "Aha!" I always remember not the quality but the fact of the quality in that moment when one plucks the lob from the shortstop, twists off the bag, and whips the ball to first, oh lovely hand-sized sphere with raised herringbones, to complete the double play. Not the needed double play, but the beautiful double play. "Aha!" says somebody in the stands. I feel the fact of the quality when I overhear the muse as she murmurs the phrase my poem has been waiting for without any irritable reaching after fact or reason.

Waiting on the balls of your feet. That is the stance of any writer who is not a hack. Baseball differs from the other sports in that the ball is not put into play by the offensive side. Neither are the people who put it into play defending a territory; rather they are covering a

ground, the vast majority of which the other side has no interest in occupying.

The writer does not identify with the baseball player. He tends to idolize him. He desires the sight of him. He sees in him what the poet sees, a being who can daily step over the limits of time and space. In the brutally regimented games such as soccer, football, and hockey, the combatant has to worry about three things that can ruin his hope: the line over which he must not step, the clock that will tell him it is too late, and the ambition of the cursing opponent he is alone responsible for. In baseball these similes of the existential *angst* give way to the metaphor-making of the right-fielder who cheerfully crosses the line to snag a fly ball, the base-runner who rounds third and runs home in foul territory, the extra-inning pinch-hitter who knows that his skill and luck, not some inhuman siren, will end the game.

So if a baseball game unfolds the way literary composition does, what is a hockey game like? Why don't you ask those parents at a pee-wee hockey game? It is early in the morning on a weekend, and they are shouting phrases at the coach and their children, the most printable of which is "Work, work, work!"

— GEORGE BOWERING

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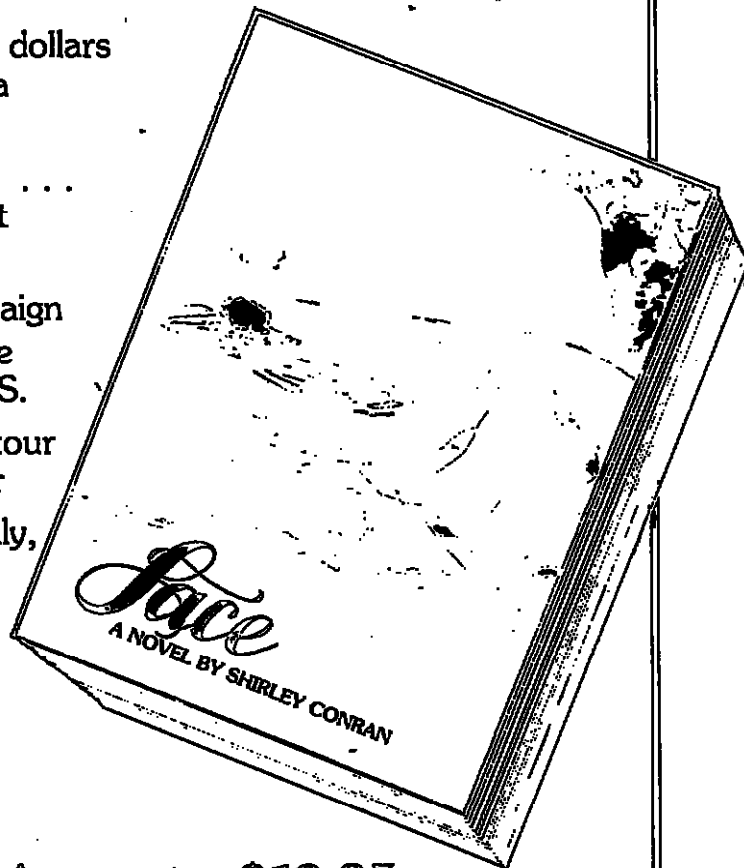
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AN APPETITE FOR LIFE

'The price of pain is love,' says Elizabeth Smart after 40 years of exile and a tempestuous love affair.

'A consenting adult cries in private and blames nobody'

By JOHN GODDARD

A PAIR OF black doors with frosted windows block the mid-day drizzle and workaday world from the French House pub, cramped hang-out of the offbeat literati in the heart of London's Soho. Inside, the air is blue, and rife with raucous babble — a witty put-down of a new play, a smutty anecdote from a late-night party. The patrons share a vaguely artistic air, but each is distinctive: an arch-looking man with deep-set eyes and pointed shoes; a loquacious woman with shredded hair, dyed pink at the ends; a thin man of shy demeanour wearing a pale-green bow tie.

At one end of the bar is Elizabeth Smart, nursing a Bloody Mary and waving a cigarette in a loose-wristed way as she talks. Her hair, slightly flattened by the rain, is still honey-blonde and thick, belying the years that show on her face. Her accent is compromised by 40 years abroad — the r's and h's still distinct but the o's elongated, the a's softer. "Why don't we go somewhere else?" she says after breaking off the conversation with the others. "It's far too noisy in here."

She was born in Ottawa in 1913, lived among the Establishment and next door to William Lyon Mackenzie King. Then she rebelled. She made love to a woman to defy her mother, lived on a commune in Big Sur long before the beatniks, had four children by British poet George Barker (who was married to someone else), and, when the going got rough, wrote her slim classic, *By Grand Central Station I Sat*

Down and Wept, the story of a self-defeating passion that is still smouldering. She has spent the past 15 years in a remote cottage in Suffolk, a wild spot 100 kilometres east of London, accessible only through a gravel pit and a cow pasture. Now, belatedly free of maternal responsibilities, she is back in circulation, reading at poetry festivals, going to parties, and "looking in" at the French House when in London. Next month she is to end the long estrangement from her native country by becoming writer-in-residence at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.

"I feel terribly excited about going back to Canada," she

says, settling down on the sofa in her son's flat, away from the French House din. "It has always been on my mind to return." She had lost touch for a while, to the point of not knowing that modern Canadian literature existed. But when *Grand Central* was republished by Popular Library in 1975 and made available in Canada for the first time, Canadian writers began seeking her out, sending her books in thanks for her hospitality. "I was much amazed when I read these, mostly women actually: the Margarets, Alice Munro, and even earlier

books like *The Double Hook*. I felt a total kinship with them. Even the rhythms of the sentences and so on. It's something I don't understand, why Canadians are Canadians and Americans are Americans. Is it something about the wind blowing over the prairies or something?"

She still considers herself very much a Canadian and has set her new novel in the Canada of her childhood, a novel she plans to complete in Edmonton, adding to a collection of three slim books: *Grand Central* in 1945; a book of poems, *A Bonus*, in 1977; and another novel, *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals*, in 1978.

"And we *did* have a wonderful childhood," one paragraph of the new work reads, as it appeared recently in *Harper's & Queen*, a London magazine, "thrilling to the frothing surf on the bland sea of Brackley Beach, Prince Edward Island; or making leaf houses in the woods by the lake

at Kingsmere; going for walks with Daddy, begging to be thrown into flat round juniper bushes, just prickly enough for ecstasy; finding enchanted flowers in Flower Ben on early cold picnics; taking the adventurous first trip up to the cottage, wondering if we could get there, because of the congealed snow on the road, packed down in old drifts, and patches of ice. Then we roared with joy and spring. How we must have driven our patient father frantic, bellowing out of tune, loud, excited, 'A Hundred Blue Bottles,' from one hundred relentlessly down to one."

Her father was Russell Smart, a pioneering patent-and-trade



Elizabeth Smart

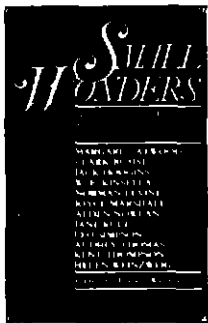
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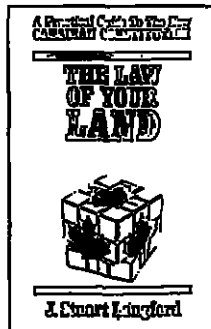
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lawyer who was "retained by Coca-Cola and Kellogg's to fight Pepsi-Cola and Shredded Wheat, things like that." He was a kind, patient, generous man who continued to send Elizabeth a monthly allowance long after she left home, and who sponsored 22 boat trips to Europe during her adolescence. "One would think up a project and if it were reasonable he would finance you. I would say that I wanted to study music, and my sister would say she wanted to study sculpture." And off they would go, with a governess in the early days, later on on their own.

Her mother was an engaging hostess who kept perpetual open house, or so it seemed. In winter the parties were at home in Ottawa, where Elizabeth met young Mike Pearson and diplomats who later helped her when she fled to London, pregnant with her second child and rejected by the man she loved. In summer the activities moved to the cottage at Kingsmere, next to Mackenzie King's estate, where as a child she played in the leaves with Eugene Forsey and as a young woman, provocatively beautiful in old photographs, she drew the attention of young men: "I was one of three sisters, lively girls and, you know, men were always sort of nosing around the way they do."

But casting a shadow on the frivolity was the other side of her mother's character. "I loved her very much, but . . ." she was bossy, domineering and reproachful. She tolerated the trips abroad but stopped the girls from going to university, keeping them dependent while the son studied law. Elizabeth wanted to be free.

On one trip to England, while browsing in the little magazine and book shops on Charing Cross Road, she got an idea. "There was a wonderful shop called Better Books; I think that is where I found George Barker's and I thought they were marvellous. By that time I knew a few people, and I'd say, do you know George Barker, because I'd like to meet him and marry him. I didn't know he was married, you see."

By that time Barker was on his way to becoming known. He'd been singled out by W.B. Yeats as promising, and was a close friend of Dylan Thomas and David Gascoyne — the three of them generally considered to be the best British poets of their generation. But Elizabeth and George didn't meet for another two years. She returned to Ottawa in 1938, to a job on the Ottawa Journal against her mother's wishes: "Every morning my mother would say, 'Stay in bed today, don't go in,' and she'd bring me breakfast in bed."

After six months Elizabeth did quit, fed up because the Journal wouldn't pay her a living wage — only \$2.50 a week because she lived at home. She went to New York, slept on her sister's sofa, worked in art galleries, and tried to sell the manuscripts she had been writing since age 10. "I had written a novel by then and lots and lots of poems. I sent them to an agent and he thought they were very shocking. He sent them back with a reproachful note. The novel was about male impotence and, you see, those things were not discussed in those days. It wasn't explicit like *Fear of Flying* or anything, it was just a little too frank." It was never published.

She also sent poems to London and Paris and struck up a correspondence with Lawrence Durrell. From Durrell she learned George Barker was broke and willing to sell his manuscripts to collectors. She wrote to Barker and he sold her one, but the correspondence ended there. She went to Mexico City, then to California, had a Lesbian affair, and wrote a novel about it called *Dig a Grave and Let Us Bury Our Mother*. It, too, was never published.

In 1940, while she was still in California, Barker sent her an urgent message. He was teaching at Imperial Tohoku University in Japan and sensed war coming. Could she send him money for passage to California — for two passages, one for him and one for his wife — and get immigration papers? She sent him savings she had earned as a maid and some borrowed

money, but the documents were more difficult to come by, requiring sponsorship from a millionaire. She engaged the help of Christopher Isherwood, who was working for MGM in Hollywood at the time and knew Barker's work. Finally all was set. Barker and his wife sailed to California and took a bus to Monterey. Elizabeth was waiting for them, as she describes in the opening line of *Grand Central*:

I am standing on a corner in Monterey, waiting for the bus to come in, and all the muscles of my will are holding my terror to face the moment I most desire.

The book is not straight autobiography, she says. She has trouble remembering now which were the true events and which the fiction. But she found a wooden hut for them at Big Sur, a virtual wilderness in 1940. She thought the three of them could all just be friends but, as the book describes, the inevitable happened: "Under the waterfall he surprised me bathing and gave me what I could no more refuse than the earth can refuse the rain."

The triangle broke up after a few months. Barker and his wife left for New York; Elizabeth retreated to an abandoned school house in Pender Harbour, B.C. — pregnant — where she wrote sequences of *Grand Central* in longhand, out of order, building the edifice brick by brick: "I wrote the border incident last," she says of the passage she most often reads to an audience. It is a fictionalized account of how she and George are detained at the California-Arizona border and charged under the Mann Act — a law ostensibly prohibiting couples from crossing state lines to fornicate but also a ruse for police in those days to detain suspected gangsters and spies. The passage has a rude American cop interrogating the heroine, who replies with verses from the *Song of Songs*: "Did intercourse take place? (I sat down under his shadow with great delight and his fruit was sweet to my taste)."

"At the time I wrote it, I was terribly pregnant," she says, "and I remember, oh, the boredom of it and looking up the Bible to get the bits I wanted. I didn't feel like doing research but I wanted to get the book done in case I died in childbirth. Well, people used to you know."

She didn't tell her parents she was having a baby — they were already against her for not helping in the war effort — but George knew. He visited her briefly. When he tried to visit a second time, he was stopped at the border. Elizabeth's mother "had harangued the ambassador or something" to keep him out of Canada. To be near him, Elizabeth used her former Ottawa ties to get a job at the British Army Office in Washington.

"I was still in love. I was pretty much in love for about 19 years, really, but I saw early on, I mean I really started trying to leave him early on, because I saw it wasn't a working proposition. I never expected him to be of any help because I wouldn't have been so silly. I saw there wasn't anything he could do and I didn't expect him to. I just thought I could do it. I was working as a filing clerk and had the lowest salary

you're allowed to have in America, and George would say that his wife had gone away and we were going to go to Reno and then, I don't know, there were all sorts of excuses, all very, very, very believable stories. Then I'd get suspicious and look in his pockets and I'd find a laundry list with her writing on it. So then I'd say, Go, I'm not seeing you again, and he could always make jokes and get around my resolution and then I'd let him in again. This went on for ages. But then it was too horrible and awful so I decided to get myself to England."

In 1943, in wartime, pregnant with her second child, she waited three weeks in New York for a ship and crossed the Atlantic in a convoy. Three of the ships went down. She didn't leave a forwarding address, "but of course he got himself over and found me and there we were." They had a third and fourth

child, but he had no money. He lived with his mother and went on to have more children by other women. *Grand Central* was published but in a printing of only 2,000 copies. An Ottawa book store imported six of them; Elizabeth's mother bought them all and burned them, using her influence again to prevent more copies from coming into the country.

The book circulated in New York, however, and was praised by the beat poets. Jay Landesman, now head of Polyantric Press in London (Smart's publisher), was editor in the late 1950s of the underground magazine, *Neurotica*. "Grand Central is an historic book," he says, "way ahead of anything written at the time. It was a forerunner of Kerouac's *On the Road*, and Elizabeth and George were the forerunners of that kind of living. They broke down traditions completely, broke down the standards of morality. Kerouac and those guys broke it down

in the 1950s when it was easier. Elizabeth and George did it in wartime, that's the exciting thing. They were in pajamas when the rest of the world was in uniforms."

Landesman first met Barker in New York in the late '50s at a gathering of beat poets. "Allen Ginsberg was at George's feet. They were in awe of him. They were aware of what Elizabeth and George had done." Inspired by such meetings, Landesman wrote a musical that played on Broadway in 1959 called *The Nervous Set* about Kerouac, Ginsberg, Barker, and a few others. Kerouac was played by Larry Hagman — the J.R. of *Dallas*.

Grand Central influenced a new generation after Panther Books published it in paperback in Britain in 1966. "It was one of the cult books," says Helen Dennis, professor of American literature at the University of Warwick. "The late '60s was a time of great optimism among young people, a time to break social and political conventions, and this book seemed to be an expression of that spirit."

British novelist Brigid Brophy called the book "a masterpiece of poetic prose" in her introduction to the 1966 edition: "By *Grand Central Station* is one of the most shelled, skinned, nerve-exposed books ever written . . . a cry of complete vul-



Elizabeth Smart and George Barker

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nerability . . . transformed into a source of eternal pleasure, a work of art."

For all its anguish and torment, however, the book is ultimately hopeful and forgiving. "Inspiring, truthful and very feminine," says Ann Barr, features editor at *Harper's & Queen*, and a close friend of Elizabeth's. "It's one of the books everyone has read, more so than *Ulysses*, which everyone only says they've read." Everyone in her circle might have read *Grand Central* but the book did not attract a mass readership, possibly because, like poetry, its dense, lyrical style demands concentration.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth had to make a living — for herself, her two boys and two girls. She got jobs on various women's magazines, as a music editor and fashion writer, and later worked in advertising. Bob Johnson, now production manager at *Harper's & Queen*, shared a cubicle with her in the mid-1960s when the magazine was called simply *Queen*. "She always seemed to me to be at least half on the way to being smashed," he says. "She needed something to keep her going all the time, what with four kids, getting older, the whole George Barker thing, and just the business of getting through life. In the absence of anything else she would grab a can of Cow Gum [layout paste]. She's the first person I ever heard of sniffing glue."

At *Queen* she wrote book reviews, but her main job was laying out 14 pages of fashion, writing the intros, and making the captions fit. "She was tremendous at it," says Ann Barr. "Her pages were like concrete poetry. When she went into advertising she was the highest-paid copywriter in London."

But her literary career was in limbo. She regrets her skimpy output as a writer, but babies, she says, are part of being in love. "It's a natural feeling to want to have a baby when you're really in love. Every woman feels it and I think men do too when they're really involved. A woman is a man with a womb, that's what the word means. It's not a man without something, it's a man with something and that something is a womb. I wanted these female experiences."

At age 50, with her children grown, she was ready to start writing again seriously. But problems she doesn't like talking about obliged her to raise two infant grandchildren. She retreated to a cottage in Suffolk, channelling her creative energies into a one-acre garden, cultivating a wilderness that must have resembled in some ways her childhood playground at Kingsmere. There was some literary activity. She continued to write the occasional newspaper and magazine piece and in 1977 published *A Bonus* — 44 pages of poetry collected over the years. The book isn't available in Canada, although Deneau is interested in it. Deneau also plans to publish a hard-cover edition of *Grand Central* this fall. *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals* was published in 1978, a slim book of 120 pages. The reviews in Britain were favourable, but the book never attracted the following of her first. Eleanor Wachtel, reviewing *Rogues and Rascals* for *Books in Canada*, called it "an elliptical novel, a gathering of reflections, stories, bits of memoir, journal entries and so on that . . . lacks the first's drive, just as survival seems somehow less forceful than love."

After the grandchildren in her care had more or less reached adulthood, Elizabeth was in danger of great-grandmother problems and decided enough was enough. At a poetry festival in Cambridge she met poet Patrick Lane, writer-in-residence at Edmonton for 1981-82. He suggested she succeed him, and the university later sent her a formal invitation.

BY THE TIME I heard Elizabeth Smart's life-story, I had spent time with her at her son's flat, in restaurants, in cafés, at parties, at her cottage, and at poetry readings, including one she gave at the opening of the cultural centre at Canada House in London. She revealed herself as a warm, kind, giving per-

son. But what was George Barker like? What made him worth pursuing so? Elizabeth alternately describes him as fascinating, selfish, interesting, badly behaved, and a marvellous poet who took her for a lot of money. The nicest thing most of her friends had to say was that he was cruel. "He'll charm you," said Ann Barr.

I phoned him and was invited for Saturday night to his home in Norfolk, near the sea. Elizabeth phoned Saturday morning to say she would be there — they were still in touch, meeting occasionally at poetry readings. I was first to arrive — after dark by train, bus, and taxi — at an Elizabethan stone building said to be haunted by a little girl in the study and by an old sea captain upstairs. Saturday night, it turned out, is drinking night, and George was in the drinking room.

"Come in young man," he said, beckoning with one hand. At 69 he retains luminous blue eyes, is lean and tall despite a slight stoop of the shoulders, and, yes, sexy-looking in a turtle-neck sweater, blue jeans, and dirty white running shoes — cliché garb for a poet except that he probably invented the look. We talked about the weather for 15 minutes, a conversation his wife, Elspeth, thought silly. She is a soft-spoken, 40-year-old Scot anyone would at once call beautiful, even in high green Wellington boots and country woollens. She has been with George for 19 years, has five children by him, the youngest aged seven, and is considered George's fifth wife, counting Elizabeth. George has 14 "conspicuous" children, as Elizabeth puts it, though he has boasted as many as 35, she says.

Elizabeth arrived with a friend via three pubs. More drinks were poured, then the fireworks began.

"You cow," George said to Elizabeth in his gravelly voice. "Your face looks like the back of Auden's hand. I love you."

"I love you too but that's irrelevant."

"You loathsome Canadian. You're like something out of Ibsen, horrible. You have no versification."

"I know."

"It was I who taught you the word *eye* is spelled with one letter."

"I know."

And so it went.

Elspeth took me aside to balance the effect, speaking softly. "He's shy. He's a wonderful person and I love him. We sit up in bed sometimes in the early morning, propped up on our pillows, in our own particular darkness, drinking tea, with the light from the windows and the electric fire flashing off the posts and the knobs of the brass bed. He becomes so articulate and poetic. I cherish these moments."

To quiet people down, Elspeth read Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" to the group, hauntingly, until George complained she read like a waitress. Someone phoned to invite us all to a party and we were off, shouting at each other, singing Presbyterian hymns and getting lost along the way. We finally arrived at an old stone country house that seemed to be full of well-dressed women in their late 20s, and George soon had a clutch of them around him.

"What's his magic?"

"He's 69 and still very sexy," said one.

"He's just very special," said another.

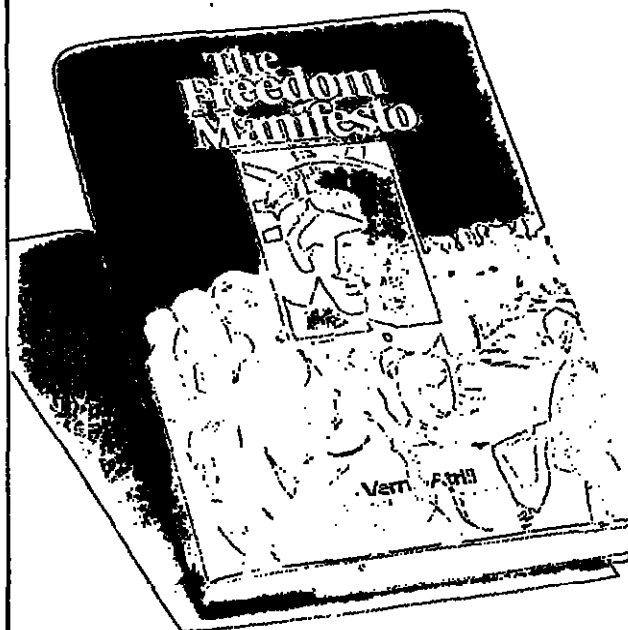
"He's so overt in his rudeness, he challenges you," said a third. "You keep coming back for more."

"What's your opinion of *Grand Central*?" I asked Barker at one point.

"The best thing since *Wuthering Heights*," he said. "And I hate *Wuthering Heights*. Women don't have souls."

IT WAS CLEAR that Barker and Elizabeth still have strong feelings for each other. It was also clear the encounter was painful for them — certainly for Elizabeth, who showed pain

The Book Every Thinking Person Will Read... and Read... and Read.



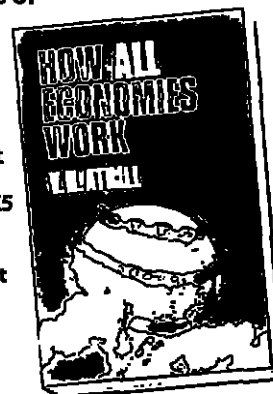
"(Atrill's) erudition and the radical nature of his thesis are together so impressive that there can be few exposed to them who do not wonder uneasily if they are in the presence of genius." Peter Brimelow, Assoc. Editor, Barron's

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on her face, in her voice, and in her submissive responses. "So much pain," she said late one night in Soho, in a slightly different context. She had been eating with friends in an Oriental restaurant on Frith Street, talking, joking, by all appearances having a good time, when she abruptly got up, said goodnight, and walked out. Intercepted on the street, she said something ambiguous about pain being hard to bear.

But pain is a prime motivator, a key tool, for Elizabeth Smart the writer. Brigid Brophy touches on the point when she says *Grand Central* is a cry transformed into a work of art. Elizabeth, in fact, has developed a theory about the relationship between love, pain, and art. She wrote about it in the February issue of *Woman's Journal*, in a piece called "How to Mend a Broken Heart," in which she gives advice to spurned lovers. "Pain is, can be, useful," she writes. "But only if you

use it. You have to be willing to suffer. You have to accept it . . . because if you fight against pain you augment it. . . . So say: Come dear pain. Come, be welcome. Please overwhelm me. . . .

"Examine yourself," she advises. "Perhaps it was the bastard in him that triggered your susceptibilities. It looked like glamour, then, and you only saw the shiny side. You responded joyfully. . . . And now you have the beginning of wisdom: the price of pain is love."

She warns against bitterness: "It was a rich experience. Don't deny it. Don't denigrate it. Don't say If Only. Suffer. . . . If bitterness comes creeping in, nip it in the bud. A bitter person has failed as a human being A consenting adult cries in private, takes the pain, acknowledges it, praises the experience, blames nobody.

"A consenting adult moves on." □

FEATURE REVIEW

A grand passion

Though scholarly in its approach,
Northrop Frye's study of the Bible is the
work of a very personal imagination

By NAIM KATTAN

The Great Code: The Bible and Literature, by Northrop Frye, Academic Press, 261 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 7747 0134 75).

WITHOUT DOUBT *The Great Code* is Northrop Frye's most important work; it is also his most personal. It is no coincidence that Frye became interested in Blake and Milton, both of whom carried on an interrogation very similar to his own. Personal faith can never be the result of an individual psychological or emotional need when it is also the product of that which forms a civilization. This civilization possesses linguistic, poetic, and mythological structures. From Shakespeare to Goethe, from Dante to Rimbaud, Frye sought out its lines of force. He identified and at times reduced literature to the condition of a corpse, so that he could study its anatomy. And his masterwork, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, although it has no intention of discussing theology, is nonetheless a religious interrogation; it uses literature only as a pretext.

Works of the imagination cannot by themselves explain to a passionate man the foundations of his faith, nor can

they calm his doubts, let alone silence them. Frye explores the contemporary world; technology, communication (he was an adviser to the CRIC). He is a teacher because, as he himself has said,



Northrop Frye

teaching allows him to ask questions, and teaches him how to ask them.

Here is a man who has decided to attack his consuming passion head-on. Nothing, neither the world of objects

nor that of the imagination, can explain to him the foundations of the religious mind. There remains only the Bible, which has inspired the art and literature of the West, and in so doing has furnished the great code that will elucidate all obscurities and enigmas. It is no longer a question here simply of literature. Frye also addresses himself to the study of psychology, philosophy, and history, as well as theology and mythology. But he launches his attack by a repeated and at times exhaustive reading of the Bible.

Two problems arise from this approach. Which Bible? That of the Jews or that of the Christians? Frye replies from his own method. The Old Testament of the Hebrews, he says, is the stylistic model for the New Testament of the Christians, whose rhythms are as close to their model as the Greek language will allow. He admits, on the other hand, that although he knows that "Jewish and Islamic conceptions of the Bible are very different [from those of the Christians], that is practically all that I do know about them." The second problem is related to the first. If Frye possesses a certain knowledge of Hebrew and Greek — and it shows in his

book: that he does — the Bible he uses is the English Authorized Version of 1611. Is it necessary to point out not only that the original Hebrew has its own autonomy, but also that a whole different civilization is at issue?

Judiciously, Frye doesn't go into it. The English Bible, however, is emphatically not that of the entire Western world. And though Frye writes about Dante and Goethe he passes in silence over a whole pleiade of other names, from Vondel to Chateaubriand, to whom the Bible was at least as important as it was to Blake and Milton. *The Great Code*, therefore, is a work that arises from a close scrutiny of the English Protestant Bible. This is not merely a choice of limits — although otherwise the project, which is already ambitious enough, would have been untenable — but it is an act of passion.

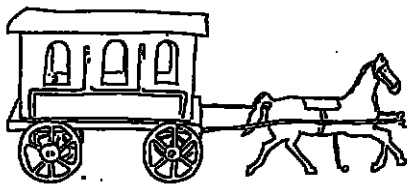
The Great Code is thus a personal work: that comes from an individual imagination, not from a detached scholarship. Frye admits as much in his introduction: "The present book is not a work of Biblical scholarship, much less of theology: it expresses only my own personal encounter with the Bible." And he applies to this encounter the same methods he had earlier applied to his encounters with Milton, Blake, and Shakespeare.

The Bible is an anthology of poetry, narrative prose, and colossal myth. It possesses a force and energy that give it a life and persistence that defy the centuries. And its life is structural, by which is meant that one must search for its life within its own language. What unifies the immense diversity of the Bible cannot be logical or doctrinal evidence, which could be called into question at any time by a culture. What gives the Bible its persistence is its metaphorical base.

The Bible's simplicity is not one of uniformity, still less of naiveté. It is the simplicity of majesty, the voice of authority. In its first expression the voice of authority is that of command: the more it becomes supreme the less it relates to particular circumstances. God says "Let there be Light," and one does not ask whether it might not have been wiser to begin with a source for that light — a Sun, for example.

Biblical language, even when it is being narrative, is metaphorical. The no-man's-land between legend and history is never clearly defined, and Frye could have added or concluded that the Bible is an attempt to escape from history. He certainly says as much in other ways. Biblical metaphor is associated with poetry. It encompasses poetry and surpasses it. Its verbal magic

is everywhere apparent. Frye finds it in the arrangement of its words, its images, and its tone. Such an approach, one realizes, is not that of a theologian: Frye rejects logical rigidity and its capricious desire to transform the Bible's poetry



into doctrine. A doctrinal reading of the Bible turns everyone who is not doctrinal into "heretics," and throughout the history of Christianity, Frye argues, the fear of heresy has constituted what can only be termed a "mortal psychosis."

To the extent that poetry is the manifestation of the universal in the particular, biblical myth itself is poetical. Myth is not the description of a historical event; it comprises all particulars, all events. Any reading of the Bible that tries to place its myth in relation to history is reductive. Myth presents itself in two aspects: internal narrative structure, which relies on literature; and social function, which relies on learning, on things that are necessary to a society based on knowledge. Thus the Bible avoids opposition from the literary as well as the non-literary: it is as literary as it is possible to be without being literature.

The colossal myth of the Bible extends from Creation to Revelation. It is expressed in metaphors that can be identified with the body of the Messiah. This biblical reality passes through many stages, and Frye examines them textually one by one. In the beginning is the Creation, which consists of the perception of an ordained order that exists above the chaotic alienation of nature. The second phase is what Frye calls the Revolution: man's rejection of tyranny and exploitation. Based on an energy drawn from nature, man's relationship with God can hardly be called passive. In the Old Testament God can do what Israel cannot accomplish even with a strict adherence to the Law. In the New Testament God performs miracles. The third phase is the Law, the moral and judicial code that binds society together.

After that it is Wisdom that gives the life of events its sense of continuity. The fifth stage is Prophecy, which proposes a vision of man as he advances from a primary to an ultimate identity. The two final stages, the Evangelical and the Apocalyptic, speak of a present that no

longer seeks for its meaning in the future, as is the case when the New Testament assesses itself in terms of its rapport with the Old Testament. The past and the future revolve around the present moment.

This metaphor does not rely on external elements. There is no historical Christ for Frye — he even goes so far as to give one name to both the Bible and to Christ, a metaphorical identification that is central to Frye's procedure. As he relies solely on the text, he is not hindered by its Western transformation of text into image. Western art is properly born of this distance taken with respect to text, with respect to language.

Although the Bible is also a narration, a history, for Frye its narrative exists only to give a form to history, in which Revelation permits us to understand the march of events. Is this the price of consolation for the Jewish people, who have witnessed the rise and fall of empires without ever having had the strength to build one themselves? Certainly not. Because for Frye the superiority of the verbal over the monumental can never be in doubt: it is the supremacy of life over death.

Frye has subtitled his book *The Bible and Literature*. Is the Bible like literature? This is where all the powers of criticism are futile. The Bible is a unified whole, like the work of Dante; it is also epiphanic and discontinuous, like the work of Rimbaud. We are so used to believing that the qualities we admire in a work arise from its originality, from the uniqueness of its author, that we have blinded ourselves to the possibility that an even greater originality can spring from a complete snuffing out of individuality. The transformation of consciousness is inseparable from a transformation of language. If man searches for unity, it is a measure of the limitations of his spirit. By means of the royal, universal metaphor, language triumphs over those limitations.

Only a language that will lend itself neither to refutation nor to debate can divide the world of death from the world of life. According to Frye, "the language used in the Bible is, in short, the language of love, which, as Paul reminds us . . . is likely to outlast most forms of communication."

One day André Malraux was asked what he was. "A writer," he replied. I believe that Frye, out of modesty, would answer the question differently. Certainly he is that as well — a writer. He probes man and man's place in the world. But there the resemblance ends. Malraux the revolutionary, the agnostic, rifled the whole world in search of its secret, and when he found his answer in

Art he never ceased his examination of it. Frye had no need to leave his armchair: faith, given some initiative, was for him only a point of departure. And throughout all the long years he has searched only in his books. The Word is both the puzzle and the solution. To gather words and to write them down is both man's work and his means of transcending work. The gift of God or the triumph of mankind, the Bible is a code — a code for life. Never before has Frye revealed his passion with such astonishing force. □

REVIEW

Sweet nothings

By BARBARA NOVAK

The Black Queen Stories, by Barry Callaghan, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 165 pages, \$15.95 cloth (ISBN 0 919630 24 3).

IN THIS FIRST collection of short stories, Barry Callaghan writes about the type of people most of us try to avoid: small-time hustlers, bookies, hookers, pimps, transvestites: rootless, loveless, jaded characters who lead empty, lonely lives. The stories are set in Toronto, but it's not the city we see reflected in the pages of *Toronto Life*. Instead, we are drawn into the Toronto of the Dundas Street strip joints and the Silver Dollar on Spadina. Even the Art Gallery of Ontario, which provides a setting for two stories, is simply a place for a pick-up, where people who have just met make desperate attempts to ease their loneliness by pretending they are old friends.

What distinguishes these stories stylistically is their attention to detail. Appearances, surfaces, the telling details, are as important to the narrators as they are to the other characters. A woman distrusts "men with shiny heads." A priest who judges men by what they wear and buildings by how they look observes the Eaton Centre, "with walls of outside pipes and ducts, all exposed, and poured rough-cast concrete," and comments, "Funny . . . the way we've made a virtue out of turning everything inside out." Collette, in "A

Terrible Discontent," slips bobby pins into "the little blue porcelain bowl she had won at school for elocution" and examines her "good legs" in the mirror. We focus for a moment in another story on a doctor's "perfectly pressed three-point white handkerchief in his breast pocket"; another character worries about breaking her long nail. Poodles John, a clothing store merchant and pimp, lives with Luella with the "race-horse legs" who is worried about getting old. Poodles is wild about the way she looks; he can't stand the way she is. The woman in "All the Lonely People" wants a photograph of her new lover, but she keeps her emotional distance and is good to him only because she knows that "Everything good comes to an end."

These characters live on the surface because they dread the emptiness within. A recurring motif in all the stories is the sense of nothingness. Crow Jane, a worn-out club singer, discovers that even the surfaces are illusions. She takes a newspaper photograph of herself to a photography shop to have it blown up:

an' I say, man, I want this big for framing, hang myself over my head in my bed, two feet by three I said an' he shrugs and when I come back there I am, mounted on cardboard, an' I can't find myself for the looking, my whole face just gone to great big grey and dark dots an' I say, where'd I go, man, I don't see myself at all, an' he says that's what happens when you blow yourself up outa some newspaper, you disappear into dots, man, 'cause if you look close that's all you was in the first place.

Callaghan's characters define themselves in negative terms, like Cowan in "The Cohen in Cowan" who discovers, "Now I know I'm not nothing." This allows Callaghan some opportunity for word play, which at times is reminiscent of Samuel Beckett. A retired cop in "Dark Laughter" tells a young companion that he realized one day he had nothing to say, so he "just sat down and said nothing . . . for two years." Earlier, the younger man had remarked, "Nothing? How can you think nothing when someone zeroes in on you?"

The 14 stories in this collection are told with voices utterly distinct from one another, sharing only their terror of silence and their obsession with surface reality. With one exception these voices seem authentic, compelling the reader to enter fully into their world. The voice of Cowan, however, in "The Cohen in Cowan," seems riddled with clichés, and the story is slight.

The narrator of "Anybody Home" has a quiet voice, a listening voice, that provides a ground-base for the counterpointing of the two voices he hears — that of his doctor and that of a woman

who is grateful for his silence. "I suddenly saw myself in the window, calm but hunched and my heart pounding, staring into my reflection, with her saying thanks for saying nothing and for making love to her, which was nothing but to her it was a lot, and wondering what was there to say to Cholet, except nothing."

The movement flows back and forth between the first and third person in "Silent Music," as a character seeks to define himself in terms of the fiction he has read, and fails: "He didn't know if it was his voice. He had never heard his voice."

The irony of this collection, and its power, lies in Callaghan's ability to capture these voices and let them speak for themselves. While the characters that people these stories are shallow, the stories themselves have depth, and they speak with eloquence about the pain of having nothing to say. □

REVIEW

The darker side

By L. KING-EDWARDS

I might not tell everybody this, by Alden Nowlan, Clarke Irwin, 95 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 7720 1343 8).

AS MIGHT BE surmised from its title, *I might not tell everybody this*, Alden Nowlan's most recent collection of poetry verges on the confessional, which is not to say that all of the poems are concerned with the narrator's personal life and loves, but rather that they concern his coming to terms with such personal dilemmas as man's stupidity, cruelty, guilt, and isolation in the face of his own mortality. Many of the poems are apologies, either to himself or others, for his previous lack of insight. It is a setting straight of the record, such as in the poem "He runs into an old acquaintance":

*But it still matters that she'd not have laughed,
that she would have smiled and said,
"Yes,"*

if I had asked; and I didn't know.

The poems are also exclamations of discovery by Nowlan about himself, his

repertoire of acquaintances, and his social encounters in general. One of the more rewarding aspects of this journey to self-acceptance is the sureness with which Nowlan faces the mirror and unflinchingly puts his own fears into perspective.

The tone is most fitting for a confessional — soft, even at times mellow. One senses that Nowlan has already forgiven himself and others for all their catalogued human weaknesses, and has come to terms with small fears as well as with death. The latter takes on a mundane irony in one of the finer poems, "Working late," in which the narrator awaits a serious operation while the nurse phones to ask her husband to pick up some groceries on the way home:

*It is not hard for me to believe
that great matters are being discussed
today;*

*I know the world will go on,
whatever happens to me.*

...

*But tinned tomatoes!
I'm reminded of how infinitesimal a part
I play in the universe,
of how minute is my share of reality.*

One of the more tender poems, "The secretive fishermen," makes a gentle case for aging homosexuals who cruise the highways looking for young men.

Nowlan finds as little to condemn in these lost men as he does in the young panty thief of another poem: perversion is ranked as yet another human foible misinterpreted. The closest he comes to condemnation is aimed at the narrator's Jansenist self and his own tendency toward pessimism.

Another recurrent theme in the poems is the relationship of son to father and father to son, and the necessity for the son to become the father. This is introduced in the mythological piece "The King of the Woods," is found more subtly in "Subway Psalm," and is charmingly presented in "Just now I heard my father singing," which concludes: "Just now I heard my father's laughter. / That, too, came from my mouth."

These poems have great strength of emotion and sincerity of tone. The darker side of the human psyche is deftly portrayed with an irony that can only come from the experience of betrayal. Ultimately Nowlan is on the side of our better nature; he is truly sympathetic and has put his priorities in order:

*It's what we all want, in the end,
to be held, merely to be held,
to be kissed (not necessarily with the lips,
for every touching is a kind of kiss).*

Yes, it's what we all want, in the end,

*not to be worshipped, not to be admired,
not to be famous, not to be feared,
not even to be loved, but simply to be
held*

*("He sits down on the floor of a school
for the retarded")*

In terms of Nowlan's mastery of subject matter, this collection is potentially strong. Despite the sincerity of the poems, however, there is a quality of construction in many of them that makes them read too pat. Far too many close with a punch line; far too many are explicit and prosaic to the point of including parenthetical explanations, leaving little or nothing to the reader's imagination or intellect. It becomes difficult to participate in these poems of discovery. Nowlan renders each poem with its reading given, thus there is no room for doubt or second sight. The poems appear as anecdotes; some, in fact, make excellent short short stories.

The discussion of "what is poetry / what is prose" is endless and often boring, but post-modernism aside there has to be something in the poem's language and structure to give a clue that it is more than rolling prose broken into lines. These clues come from a combination of rhythm and sound, and a subtlety of sense that prickles the back of the neck, plays with the tongue, and

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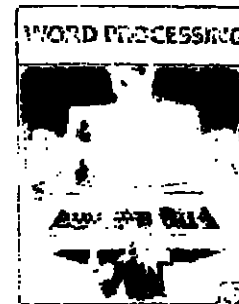
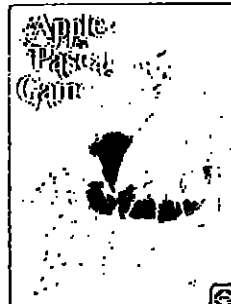
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adds zest to the subject matter. Poetry does have the onus to "make it new" for the reader; it must revitalize people, places, and things as well as emotions and ideas. Poetry has always been a question of language titillating insight. This rarely happens in *I might not tell everybody this*. In his earlier books, particularly in *Under the Ice*, Nowlan gives

us a promise of such poetry, but he has reneged on the promise. A good, heartfelt, humorous story does not conjure up a poem. As much as Mallarmé stands outside the context of most Canadian poetry, his advice to an aspiring poet is still worth noting: "A poem is made with words not ideas." And, one could add, with words as well as emotions.

In the past, as witnessed by the blurb on the back cover of this collection, Nowlan's publishers have been concerned that his poetry suffers from a regional tag. There is no doubt that these poems travel beyond any regional interpretation. Yet with all their universality, and with all their pithiness, the ultimate accolade escapes them. □

FEATURE REVIEW

The polished lens

This first biography of A.M. Klein gives us the body; the poetry provides a glimpse of the soul. Together they make up the record of a great heart plundered

By HENRY MAKOW

Like One That Dreamed: A Portrait of A.M. Klein, by Usher Caplan, photographs edited by David Kaufman, introduction by Leon Edel, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 224 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 07 548451 X).

EXCEPT FOR THE WORD "portrait" in the title there is nothing to prepare the reader for the special character of this first biography of A.M. Klein. Usher Caplan has striven to an unusual degree for objectivity. He spins facts and quotations, skilfully withholding his own ideas and unifying vision. In addition he has inserted in the text 80 photographs and numerous examples of Klein's poetry and unpublished prose. "The book is intended as a self-revelation of Klein through documents, the bare facts and a minimum of interpretation," Caplan said recently. "I couldn't write about Klein and compete with him in a literary way. He has a powerful voice; I couldn't put mine in the way."

A writer-editor with National Museums in Ottawa, Caplan first researched Klein's biography for a 1973 Ph.D. dissertation. The thesis provided background for David Kaufman's film *A.M. Klein: The Poet as Landscape* (1980), and the book, designed by Kaufman, was originally conceived as a "collage" based on the film. The result is a handsome and tasteful companion to Klein's poetry. Such a study is long overdue, and Caplan's account is thorough, intelligent, and succinct. The pictures, readings, and general appearance of the

book contribute to a feeling of enjoyment and discovery.

However, as biography the book is incomplete, as it deals mostly with the external events of Klein's life. Klein's real life was his poetry: "everything else in my life," he wrote, "is mere adjunct." Caplan gives pertinent examples of the poetry, but he does not make it the



A.M. Klein

touchstone of his account. Rather we see the poet as he appeared to others, from the outside. And there is not enough poetry to convey his inner being.

In order to deal seriously with the poetry, Caplan would have had to become more subjectively involved. A biography is a story, after all, and the teller is intrinsic to the tale. In my favourite biographies it is the author's personality and intelligence that shape and give immediacy to the account. Stefan Zweig's *Balzac* and Lovat Dick-

son's *H.G. Wells* are examples. Obviously a subjective biography was the farthest thing from Caplan's mind. But while we may begrudge him his dry detachment, his approach is innovative. In the narrative he gives us Klein's body, in the excerpts from the poetry an introduction to the soul. Read Klein's books and put them together yourself, Caplan seems to say. Such an approach has definite validity.

The problem of Klein's breakdown and retirement at the age of 45 obscures the fact that until the early 1950s his life was a happy and productive one. Caplan's account of Klein's varied activities — family man, lawyer, professor, politician, editor, novelist, scholar, publicist, and one of the foremost Canadian poets of the century — helps to restore perspective. P.K. Page remembers a warm, bubbly, punning Abe Klein: "Klein had that sense of the child in him, to delight in language and play with it. His joyfulness, his delight in things — he was so alive to the world."

Nonetheless, given Klein's faith, born of his temperament, that the world is a manifestation of a loving deity, his breakdown was foreseeable. In his rhetorical, witty, and passionate poetry, Klein demanded to know how a loving God could permit injustice and misery. Klein's suits took on a personal dimension, since his lifelong devotion to the Jewish people and their culture was for him neither an accident of birth nor product of faith, but a point of honour. "Ignoble and base is he who forsakes

the weak: in whose midsts he finds himself to go over. . . to the camp of the strong. It is treachery. It is a coward's choice. Its perpetrator ceases to be not only Jew but man." Not observant himself, he opposed the efforts of men of "Jewish dissuasion" to modernize or assimilate. As editor of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* for almost 20 years, he lectured tirelessly for Israel. Yet he witnessed in his lifetime the persecution and wholesale slaughter of one-third of his people. He could not reconcile this with the belief inherent in his nature of a benevolent God.

He embraced other just causes and was equally frustrated. Klein resented being termed a "Jewish poet" — he called it "this whimsical opening of another man's fly" — and regarded himself primarily as an artist, yet he failed to attract the international recognition he undoubtedly deserved. A.J.M. Smith in his *Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943) ranked him "the greatest poet living today in Canada," and E.K. Brown concurred. But for the world at large Klein was always a "Jewish poet."

In politics too Klein fell between two stools. He campaigned hard as a CCF candidate in a Jewish riding in 1949, and fared poorly, even trailing behind the Communist. The traditionally Liberal

Montreal Jews admired Klein but were loath to vote socialist and Klein, who had given so much to his community, took the loss badly.

Perhaps the strangest example of Klein's inability to separate the ultimate from the mundane was his obsession with James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In the manner of a Talmudic scholar he embarked on an explication of the levels of meaning behind Joyce's work: for 13 pages of *Ulysses* he managed to write 100 pages of commentary. This is one instance where Caplan speaks his mind: "If Klein had gone astray, it was in so idolizing Joyce that he began to treat his novel as holy writ." But Klein seemed to have been driven by a demon. At a conference at Harvard in the summer of 1950 he portrayed Joyce as a humiliated pauper and neglected genius: later a psychiatrist in the audience remarked to F.R. Scott, "Your man Klein is seriously ill. He wasn't talking about Joyce. He was talking about himself."

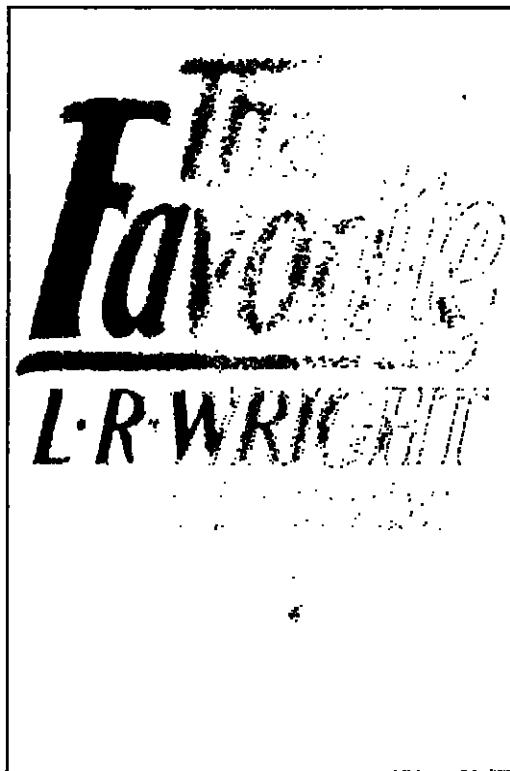
For Klein's breakdown Caplan advances a number of possible causes: Joyce's "mad side," overwork, the election defeat, his ambivalent feelings about his PR duties for Sam Bronfman. But his whole life added up to one inexorable conclusion: the world was not as it should be. "We are not God," he wrote

in a poem, "Les Vespasiennes," reprinted by Caplan. "Not God. Why, not, / not even angels, but something less than men." Klein struggled in vain for a more hopeful vision. The height man achieves, he felt, has "meaning only because of the depth, the ethereal only in relation to the palpable," as he wrote in an unpublished novella completed in 1954. The same spring he tried to commit suicide and was institutionalized for about 10 weeks: "How was I to know, those months in my mother's womb, / that exit meant ambush?"

Caplan is vague on the exact chronology of Klein's breakdown but there is a surprising amount of method in the poet's madness. Klein was capable of one final poetry reading at McGill in 1955 and he continued to work for Bronfman until 1960. He remained active within his family circle, playing with his grandchildren, reading, watching TV, taking walks. He was available to such persistent friends as Irving Layton, with whom he discussed books, politics, and gossip. After his wife's death in 1971 he managed to look after himself until his own death the following year, of a heart attack.

But to the outside world Klein seemed intent on fulfilling his vision of the thwarted, anonymous poet, "his status

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L.R. "Bunny" Wright lives with her family in Burnaby, British Columbia. Her first novel, NEIGHBOURS, won the Alberta Search-for-a-Novelist Award in 1979. Following a 12-year journalism career, she now writes full-time and is working on her third novel.

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as zero." After his psychiatrist's suicide in 1960, he refused further medical treatment and indeed was never physically ill. He declined various publishers' requests for a collected edition, refused to endorse his royalty cheques although the small sums were needed, and ignored the greetings of people he met on his walks. It was a sad ending for a man of Klein's stature. He was no more a "Jewish poet" than the author of the Book of Job. Both posed the universal question — How can a loving God tolerate injustice? — but Job received an answer, one that Klein couldn't accept. Nor did he heed another Jewish prophet who said the world is still aspiring for the perfection that exists in the spirit. "Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moths nor rust consume and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Usher Caplan's *Like One That Dreamed* is the record of how a great heart was plundered. □

REVIEW

**Red letter
days**

By PAUL WILSON

Letters from China, by Maureen Hynes, The Women's Press, 256 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88961 071 1).

IN THE SPRING of 1980, Maureen Hynes, who teaches English as a second language at George Brown College in Toronto, was sent to China with a colleague to give a five-month course in English to a group of teachers. Her posting took her to Chengdu and the University of Sichuan, a province of 100 million that had only recently been opened to foreigners after a long period of almost total isolation from the outside. Hynes was quick to recognize the uniqueness of her opportunity to observe at close range a tiny portion of the vast and secretive Chinese empire, and she made full use of her meagre spare time to record, in her diary and in letters to friends and relations in Canada, the fascinations and frustrations of her daily encounters with the Chinese and the system under which they live.

A large portion of her correspondence is taken up with good-natured belly-aching about the difficulties of being a resident "foreign expert": getting used to the food, the red tape, the staring, the spitting, and to being manipulated, mollycoddled, and generally hedged in with what seemed to her to be sophomoric restrictions. Given her expectations, she found herself under considerable pressure, and for all their enthusiasm and gritty cheerfulness the letters radiate a strong aura of strain and discomfort.

The real substance of her book, however, is her encounter with the Chinese themselves, and in particular with her students. No amount of bureaucratic paranoia could have prevented genuine relationships from developing in the classroom, and happily Hynes's curiosity about how her students lived and thought was matched by their own willingness to convey to her what their everyday lives were really like. Her reports on classroom discussions on topics like love and marriage, and her frequent quotes from their essays, are among the most revealing and valuable parts of the book. Here, for example, is a stunning piece of black humour by one of her charges:

I live in an institute, around which are some factories. Most of the people in my neighbourhood are common teachers as I, workers and clerks in the institute. We call the area where we live "the Third World". Because the "First World," well-equipped apartment, is for the super leaders; "the Second World" is for the cadres of each level. In "the Third World" each room means a family, often two or three generations. The kitchen and toilet there are shared by several families.

Paradoxically, the locus of Hynes's greatest achievement is also the locus of her greatest failure — a failure to register, or examine, the impact of what she saw and heard on her own preconceptions, not only about China but about the nature of ideas and ideology and their relationship to action. Hynes went to China as a "socialist feminist" with "a general interest in communism and a desire to see it work," and from what she says it is clear that the Great Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976 (she frequently appends the dates to it as if to reassure us that the process had a beginning and an end) was one of the great formative intellectual experiences of her life. Her journey to China, therefore, was something of a pilgrimage to discover how much the Chinese shared her own enthusiasm for their revolution.

Not surprisingly, she was continually being disappointed. This student's essay

is typical of the general reaction she got when she asked about the GCR:

In China, the Great Cultural Revolution was the worst disaster-ridden war, both on the land and in the people's minds. It was without parallel in history. This is not to mention that it held back the economic development of the whole country. The deaths of thousands of people, the breaking up of countless families, and the destruction of property will forever make history itself feel pain. And why did Mao Zedong launch such a terrible war? The people and history will soon answer.

Despite the slogan-like conclusion, this is a statement from the heart, one that is even full of hope for the future. But Hynes calls such statements "discouraging," and whenever she encounters them she adopts one of the standard ideological tactics for evading truth: never accept evidence from the victims of your

ideology. "Don't you think people like you — intellectuals," she asks one student, "are more critical of the Cultural Revolution, and of Chairman Mao, than, say, the peasants are, because your experiences are so bitter?" The student replies that the peasants are even more critical of Mao than the intellectuals. "More critical!" she laughs. "I can't believe it." And clearly she cannot.

When you take away the rhetoric, Hynes's point of view is quite hair-raising, and I wonder what her students really thought of this innocent, well-meaning woman from across the sea, from the land of affirmative action, who argues with them that the ideas that had circumscribed their lives with so much terror and constraint were "essentially good," and who is made "uneasy" by the ideas in which they now place their modest hopes? They might well have

thought her a fool. Or perhaps they concluded, as I did, that her human virtues — as a dedicated teacher, a chronicler, a seeker after truth — might one day redeem her.

And there are signs that the process has begun. Her diary entry for August 23, 1980, reads:

Ran across a Chinese proverb translated in a student's diary: "The grass can't be burned out by a prairie fire but grows again with the spring breeze." I was struck by how much it seemed like a response to Mao's famous old saying, "A single spark can start a prairie fire."

Here is the crux of the matter: Hynes's mind sides with the logic of prairie fires fanned by the capricious breezes of necessity; her heart is on the side of the grass. In the end, it is the whisper of the grass growing that dominates *Letters from China*. □

FEATURE REVIEW

Between ourselves

Gabrielle Roy's collected essays reflect the same concern for the human future that made her our most popular French-Canadian writer

By **GEORGE WOODCOCK**

The Fragile Lights of Earth: Articles and Memoirs 1942-1970, by Gabrielle Roy, translated from the French by Alan Brown, McClelland & Stewart, 224 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7710 78285).

I AM SURE the connotations we derive from the titles of books even before we have read the texts differ according to generations, and perhaps according to the special ambience of one's developing years. As soon as I read the title of Gabrielle Roy's latest book, *The Fragile Lights of Earth*, I thought, as any man of my time and background would have done, of Auden's "September 1, 1939," and its poignant last verse:

*Defenceless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages . . .*

Looking at the French original of Roy's title, *Fragile lumières de la terre*, I doubt if she was thinking of Auden, yet when I

read these essays picked from four decades of writing, I sense in her a very similar concern to his for the human future, for a world "Defenceless under the night," and a similar sense that only in the continuing exchange of messages can man preserve himself.

Gabrielle Roy, as I have more than once argued, occupies a unique position as an exchanger of messages in Canada's pluralistic cultural world. Her *Bonheur d'occasion*, published in 1945, was an understandable success in Quebec; more surprising was the extraordinary success it achieved in English Canada when, in 1947, it appeared in translation as *The Tin Flute*. English-speaking critics and readers took the book to their hearts. In the first 25 years of the Governor General's Awards, only four fiction prizes were given to French-Canadian novels, and this only after translation into English; of the four one went to *The Tin Flute* and another to *Street of Riches* (1957), the English translation of Roy's *Rue Deschambault* (1955). When I

started *Canadian Literature* in 1959 I was for a long time impressed — and perturbed — that the only francophone author about whom anglophone critics wished to write was Gabrielle Roy, and that they treated her as a kind of honorary English Canadian, the one token comprehensible writer living in Quebec.

The reasons for this peculiar position of Gabrielle Roy, as the French-Canadian author with whom a whole generation of English-Canadian readers felt most comfortable, become clear when one reads *The Fragile Lights of Earth*. Roy has lived for more than 30 years in Quebec, but she was born in a French-speaking rural community in Manitoba. Perhaps her best-known novels are those set in Quebec, *The Tin Flute* and *The Cashier*, but she wrote two excellent novels on the far North (*The Hidden Mountain* and *Windflower*) and three collections hovering between fiction and autobiography that are set in her native Manitoba: *Where*



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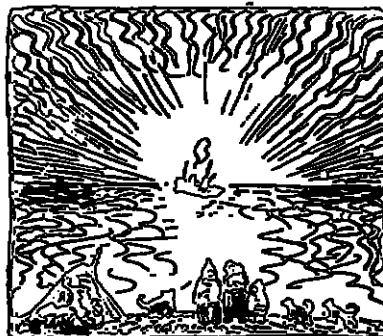
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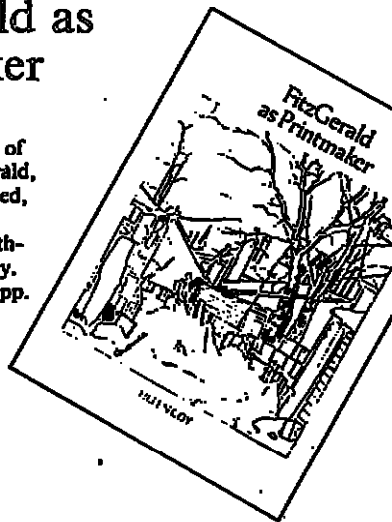
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Indeed, it is hard to think of any writer in either of Canada's major languages whose perceptions have been more widely open to the regional variations of our land than Gabrielle Roy, and the essays in *The Fragile Lights of Earth* emphasize the breadth of her sympathies. They cover a long span of time: the earliest are journalistic pieces that appeared in the *Montreal Bulletin des agriculteurs* in 1942, three years before Roy published her first novel, and the latest of them appeared in *Mosaic* in 1970, so that they have a historical appeal for literary scholars. But they also cover a considerable geographical spread and an equally striking variety of cultures; they range from accounts of non-francophone ethnic minorities in the Prairies, through sketches of life in Quebec, to haunting evocations of the imperilled regional cultures of France — Breton and Provençal.

The pieces are of varying quality, and their success, I think, depends on the extent to which Roy has put her fictional gifts to the service of reportage. The early group of seven pieces collectively entitled "Peoples of Canada" strikingly illustrates this fact. They all appeared in the *Bulletin des agriculteurs* between 1942 and 1944, and six of the seven describe Prairie minorities: the Hutterites, the Doukhobors, the Mennonites, the Jewish farmers, the Sudeten Germans, and the Ukrainians; the last concerned the fishermen of the Gaspé. None of these pieces has been updated,

so that nothing is said about the controversial attempts in recent decades to hamper the Hutterite communities through tax measures and restrictions on land purchases. But the portrayal of the Hutterites, which is mainly a sketch of the personal encounters Roy had when she visited one of the communities, is still remarkably vivid, because it has the sharpness of characterization and visualization one expects from a novelist. By contrast, the essay on the Doukhobors, which is much more a discussion of the rights and wrongs of the Doukhobor record, relieved by few personal encounters, seems dull and redundant. It leaves out of account so much that since 1942 has become basic Doukhobor history through the recent accounts of their people's past by such Doukhobor writers as Peter Maloff and Koozma Tarasoff and through definitive histories by outsiders, like *The Doukhobors* by Ivan Avakumovic and myself.

It is quite evident that Gabrielle Roy does not pose as a historian; otherwise she would not have allowed the "Peoples of Canada" essays to be published 40 years after writing without at least some basic updating. It is equally evident that as an impressionistic reporter she is excellent. For example, very few of us are even aware that Sudeten Germans opposed to Nazism emigrated to Canada in 1939 and formed settlements in the Prairies. But so vividly does Gabrielle Roy bring to life the three or four of them she met, without telling us overmuch of their history, that they are likely to retain a corner in the memory of anyone who reads "The Sudeten Germans of Good Soil." And, as a lover of that strange region of Pro-

vence known as La Camargue — the marshy delta of the Rhone — I can think of few better evocations than hers in the section of the book called "Landscapes of France," though I wish she had extended her exploration westward to Aigues Mortes, that marvellous stark citadel surrounded by salt marshes and by vineyards that produce an extraordinary saline wine. Yet the best of all the pieces in *Fragile Lights of Earth* are those like "Manitoba," "My Manitoba Heritage," and "Memory and Creation" (originally written as a preface to a late edition of *Where Nests the Water Hen*) in which Roy evokes the duality of her inspiration — the French cultural heritage and the locale of her childhood. I was reminded of some very similar statements by Margaret Laurence when I read the following passage:

The place to which you go back to listen to the wind you heard in your childhood — that is your homeland, which is also the place where you have a grave to tend. Though I chose to live in Quebec partly because of the love for it which my mother passed on to me, now it is my turn to come back to Winnipeg to tend her grave. And also to listen to the wind of my childhood.

The secret of Gabrielle Roy's special appeal to both francophones and anglophones in Canada, and also of her own interest in minorities other than her own, springs from this constant tension between her Quebec ancestry and her deeply felt attachment to the place of her childhood. Perhaps it is such tensions that make us aware of "the fragile lights of earth" and the Just exchanging their messages. □

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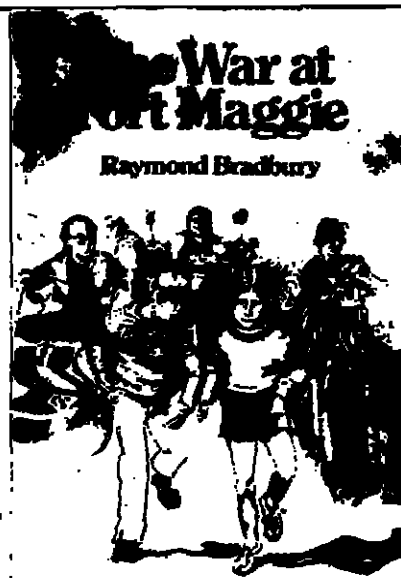
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Leaven of malice

Behind Evelyn Waugh's comic genius lie a fierce devotion to Christianity and a deep distaste for almost everything else

By I.M. OWEN

The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and His Writing, by Jeffrey Heath, McGill-Queen's University Press, 352 pages, \$35.00 cloth (ISBN 0 7735 0377 3).

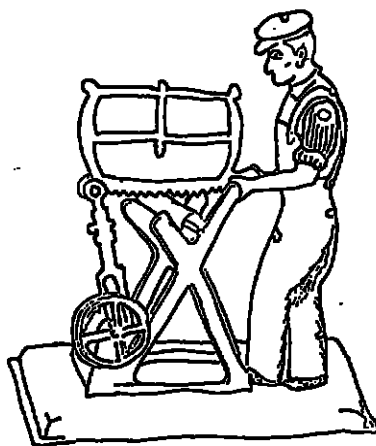
FOR ALL THE shining clarity of his prose, Evelyn Waugh takes a lot of explaining. Just as his habitual offensiveness didn't prevent his having a circle of loyal friends, so the long sequence of novels expressing his deep distaste for his own times captivated both his generation and mine. And lately we have seen *Brideshead Revisited* overcome some of the most lifeless direction in the history of television drama to win him a whole new audience.

Jeffrey Heath has been thinking about Waugh for 15 years, and *The Picturesque Prison* is the fruit of his deliberations. It does provide a coherent explanation — in spots, perhaps, more coherent than is appropriate to so wild a comic genius. But whether or not we accept all he says, it's an enormously useful book, bringing much material from Waugh's diaries and his vast correspondence to bear on the novels.

The picturesque prison of the title is the City of Man as opposed to the City of God — a prison because man is free only when he makes his submission to God. The prison is represented in Waugh's novels by "lush places" like Boot Magna in *Scoop*, the illusory City that Tony Last seeks in *A Handful of Dust*, the Castello Crouchback in *Men at Arms*, and of course Brideshead Castle. Some critics have been so dim as to think that Brideshead represents the Church. Heath rightly knocks this down. Brideshead is ultimately false — not a castle at all (Heath misses this point by always calling it Brideshead House) but a creation of the 18th century, the most firmly Protestant epoch of the Church of England. Waugh happened to love 18th-century craftsmanship, just as Charles Ryder loves Brideshead, but it was not the highest art, which to him was art in the service of God, performed within the discipline

of the Roman Church, the only true embodiment of Christianity. No other religion would do. Anglicanism was bogus. "The nearer these people are to the ways of Catholics the nearer they approach flat blasphemy." Eastern Orthodoxy, like all Eastern things, was fraudulent. Heath points out how often the possession of something Eastern gives warning that a character is a fraud — Lord Copper's Byzantine vestibule, Sir Ralph Brompton's Turkish cigarettes, Ivor Claire's turban and Pekinese, perhaps Father Rothschild's imitation crocodile-hide suitcase, which he puts down "with Asiatic resignation." (A reader troubled by Waugh's bigotries soon finds that they cancel each other out: he was bigoted against everybody — except, rather oddly, Armenians; and he was quite kind about American Indians, though he deplored their marked similarity to the English.)

The main theme of Heath's book is Waugh's finding of his vocation as a writer, his attempt to escape from it into the life of action during the war, and his return to it with books that are for the



first time explicitly Christian.

Waugh felt that he had failed as a man of action. Yet his failure during the war was not in the action itself — far from it — but in the practice of the elementary charity that his religion enjoins. In the

Marines he made himself so unpleasant that when he dined in the Mess there were usually five empty chairs on either side of him. And his commanding officer in the Commandos told Lord Birkenhead that Waugh and Randolph Churchill "were two of the bravest officers he had ever known," but "that it was necessary to place them in special positions . . . rather than as Troop leaders, as he suspected that otherwise both might be shot by their own men as soon as battle was joined."

Heath says: "In *Brideshead Revisited* the theme of vocation moves to the fore with particular clarity as Waugh depicts Charles Ryder's arduous journey towards the right kind of art." That's so. But just at this point Heath's own clarity gets fogged up by a verbal confusion. He cites Cordelia Flyte's discussion of vocation during the dinner Charles gives her at the Ritz. But here Cordelia is using the term in its restricted, technical, Roman Catholic sense as the necessary precondition for becoming a priest or a nun. Heath treats the word in this conversation as if it simply meant "faith." It's not the only place where he has trouble with the vocabulary of religious discussion. In the chapter on *Decline and Fall*, he makes this extraordinary comment on the beheading of Mr. Prendergast (the Anglican clergyman with Doubts) by the crazed carpenter: "as a Calvinist, the lunatic is a product of Prendergast's schismatic Anglicanism: . . . Prendergast is killed by what he has created." Either Heath doesn't know what Calvinism is or he doesn't know what Anglicanism is; if the latter, he must completely miss the point of Waugh's rejection of the Church of England. Or is there here a typographical error of unimaginable dimensions?

Most of the time his interpretations are convincing. But occasionally they suffer from the academic critic's urge to read significance into everything. When in *Scott-King's Modern Europe* Waugh parodies Walter Pater's famous and pretentious passage on the Mona Lisa ("He

was older . . . than the rocks on which he sat") Heath says: "By associating Scott-King with Pater's Mona Lisa . . . Waugh seems to establish him as a dispassionate and experienced observer who will take adversity in his stride. But the comparison is ironic, for insular Scott-King has not been abroad since 1939." All this solemnity seems misplaced. To me it seems much more likely that Waugh said it because he thought it would be a funny thing to say, and that it has no more significance than his running joke in Yugoslavia in which he invariably referred to Tito as "she." (When Birkenhead begged him to stop doing this for fear a Partisan might overhear, pointing out that Tito was not only a man but an exceptionally handsome one, Waugh pursed his lips and said: "Her face is pretty, but she has very thick legs.")

Similarly, Heath identifies various characters with real people with a firmness that would have irritated Waugh. It's true that the opening scene of *Scoop*, in Julia Stitch's bedroom, describes a real scene in Lady Diana Cooper's bedroom, but this doesn't mean that Julia Stitch is to be understood throughout as Lady Diana — still less as the fickle moon and hence the goddess Fortuna. I enjoyed too his effort to explain Lucy in *Work Suspended*: "Julia calls her an 'angel' and she 'recognizes' Plant, so we might be justified in regarding her as a secular Santa Lucia, patron saint of light and vision. In view of the fact that she gives birth to both John Plant and her own baby, she is possibly Waugh's version of the light-bringing goddess Lucina, who was said to bring unborn infants to the light of day." After this, I looked forward to his explanation of the name Virginia for Guy Crouchback's promiscuous wife. But he's disappointingly silent about this.

Never mind. *The Picturesque Prison* is on the whole an admirable and thorough piece of work, and I expect to refer to it often and gratefully. □

IN BRIEF

Eastmall, by Percy Janes, Potlatch Publications, 299 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 919576 28 6). Janes's first novel, *House of Hate*, came out about 10 years ago to a good reception and has since been reissued as a New Canadian Library title. His new novel, *Eastmall*, isn't nearly as successful.

It's the story of Craig and Morley Wareham, the sons of a wealthy family in St. John's. Craig is a savage young

realtor who makes a lot of money fast and decides to crown his achievement by building a complex of offices and shops in the downtown area, not far from the harbour. Morley, an idealistic young musician and something of a dropout, regards his brother's project as a symbol of everything that's wrong with society and initiates a feeble, ill-defined protest against it.

The novel doesn't work on any level. It purports to be about business life in contemporary St. John's, but there is not a hint that the author really knows how people accumulate and spend huge sums of money. Oil, which is a rather big factor in Newfoundland life right now, is not mentioned at all. And at one point an older businessman agrees to lend Craig \$500,000 — without asking him what he wants it for. Things don't happen that way.

The various characters all act and talk (tiresomely and at length) as if they or the author are still living in the late '60s. A couple of times we even hear about doing your own thing, which is only one tiny indication of how woefully unfocused this book is. — PHIL SUROUY

REVIEW

Present at the creation

By ROBIN MATHEWS

William Arthur Deacon: A Canadian Literary Life, by Clara Thomas and John Lennox, University of Toronto Press, 339 pages, \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 5593 1).

WILLIAM ARTHUR DEACON lived at the centre of the Canadian literary milieu for more than 40 years, from 1922 when he became literary editor of *Saturday Night* until after 1960 when he retired as literary editor of the *Globe and Mail*. He reviewed endlessly, corresponded voluminously, and pushed shamelessly for recognition of living Canadian artists and for greater knowledge of Canadian literary and cultural history. Tireless in spite of personal adversity, undaunted in his self-appointed task, and deeply sympathetic to participants in both the francophone and anglophone literary communities, he earned 10 times over

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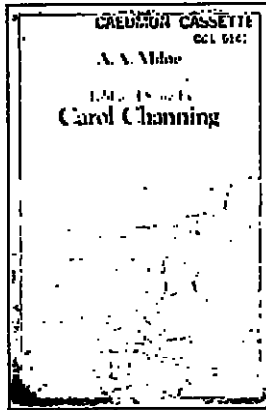
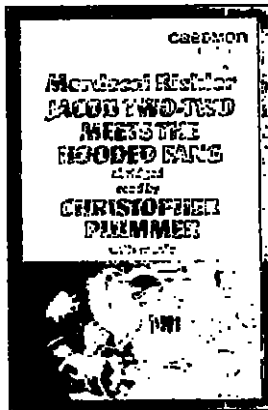
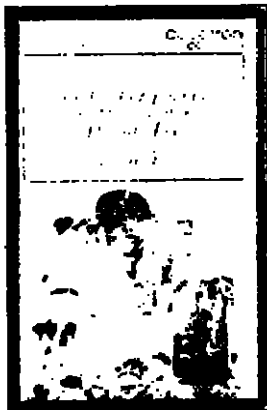
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The University of Alberta Press

the praise he received from Gabrielle Roy who remembers him as "*cet homme bon, perspicace et grand ami des lettres.*"

This biography of Deacon by Clara Thomas and John Lennox is an absolute must for anyone interested in Canada in the last 60 years. It is one of those books that open a window on the life of an extraordinarily significant man, his cultural milieu, the political flavour of the years, and some of the major arguments that are as important today as they were then. Deacon had dealings with a large cross-section of thinking, arguing, caring Canadians. Hector Charlesworth, for instance — famous for his denunciations of the Group of Seven — helped to have Deacon removed from a job. J.S. Woodsworth, leader of the new CCF, described to Deacon the demands upon a member of the newly formed political party. Philip Panneton admitted that his monumental novel, *Trente arpents*, forecasts the assimilation of the Québécois into the English Canadian majority (but asked Deacon not to say so publicly). A.R.M. Lower, historian, wrote about his attempt to build a new Canada First organization — anti-imperialist, independentist, centralist — and even sent Deacon a kind of manifesto. Frederick Philip Grove sent him maps precisely locating the settings of *Over Prairie Trails*, *Settlers of the Marsh*, and *The Yoke of Life*.

His biographers tell the story of the young married Winnipeg lawyer who fell in love with another man's wife, went to Toronto where she joined him, confirmed his ambition to work as a writer, became literary editor of *Saturday Night*, book page editor of the *Mail and Empire* and literary editor of the *Globe and Mail*. He wrote with wit and insight about the arduous discipline and responsibility literary journalism demands, especially to one who took his vocation seriously, as Deacon did. Indeed, for those who think Canada had no one like the famous Maxwell Perkins of Scribners in those years — someone who regarded authors highly and helped them personally — Deacon's biographers tell another story. He was not connected formally to a publishing house. But in a country where he could fairly call himself Canada's first full-time literary journalist, he filled a role probably more selfless and more valuable than Perkins or his admirers could have dreamed of.

In writing of his struggles as a self-described theosophist, pacifist, socialist, and nationalist, Deacon's biographers provide a thumbnail sketch of a man who was a central builder of what we

know today of Canada's literary and cultural milieu. He published several books of his own work. He was significant in forging, around the publications he edited, a community of Canadian writers and scholars. He pressed for an awards system that eventually became the Governor General's Awards. He helped fight into being the Canadian Writers Foundation for indigent writers. He helped organize and administer the Leacock Awards. He piled up a huge correspondence full of wit, enthusiasm, compassion, knowledge, and constructive criticism.

Deacon believed quite sincerely that Canadian literature would develop and cement a great nation. If the country's literature failed, he had no doubt the failure in literature would be a sign that all hope of a separate existence for Canada was lost. "By pure instinct at first, and later consciously and deliberately," Deacon wrote to an English immigrant correspondent, "I have tried to be an intellectual and moral brick in an invisible wall protecting this germ civilization from too great dominance by the two sizeable and proximate English-speaking nations. I strive to keep out English and American ideals, institutions, and viewpoints. In a crass practical way, my task is perfectly hopeless."

That firm — but always ironic — attitude in Deacon reveals how much he occupied a significant moment in history. A large portion of serious and influential Canadians were devoted to the confirmation of Canadian culture and identity. Many were not as eloquent in their public assertions as Deacon, but testimonials of commitment came from as widely separated people as Harold Innis, Canada's most illustrious economist and communications theorist, and Malcolm Lowry, English immigrant author of *Under the Volcano*.

The galaxy of major thinkers and creators who contacted Deacon were, of course, not merely venting an unsolicited patriotic enthusiasm. They were providing one manifestation of a large national struggle extending into our own day. In that regard Deacon's biographers seem to have slighted an important part of the story. For they don't tell much about the battle between the "native" and the "cosmopolitan" forces that raged especially sharply through the Deacon years.

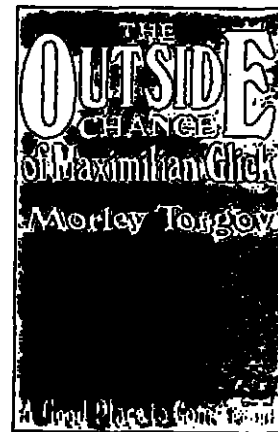
The "McGill Movement" and its growing "cosmopolitan" adherents after 1925 spurned Canadian artistic achievement, damned the state of Canadian criticism, and offered an exclusive list of foreign models as a basis for beginning serious writing in Canada. The "cosmopolitans" were, in part, a

cultural manifestation of Canada's growing "junior partner" status on the North American continent and the economic and cultural Americanization of this country. There is a significant thinness of reference to them: A.J.M. Smith, Douglas Bush, Morley Callaghan, Frank Underhill, Louis Dudek, and W.E. Collin, for instance. There is too little explanation of their relative absence.

Deacon admitted he was deaf to certain aspects of modern writing, it's true. But the divisions between persons and groups that appear in the biography are deeper and more important than those of literary taste alone. For that reason the biographers might have sharpened their critical analysis in a number of directions. Other critics and writers who follow will have to put Deacon's biography into the larger context of battles for Canadian cultural identity in this century.

The publication of *William Arthur Deacon: A Canadian Literary Life* and of the recent Hugh MacLennan biography makes us aware of a new dimension to our writers. They have been theorizing about art and the practice of writing much more significantly since the 1920s than we have been aware. Buried in so-far unpublished letters and manuscripts is an earnest, highly intelligent, and important body of cultural theorizing. Now we can have several necessary books of writers' letters. And we can have, at last, critical work done on theories of the novel as they developed in this country. Indeed, time may show that William Arthur Deacon and his contemporaries very really made possible the present, confident mood in Canadian literature. That was precisely Deacon's intention. He wrote and solicited a huge body of extraordinarily interesting material because his task was to build and declare and defend the existence of a nation with a real and self-respecting culture and literature.

I have just finished reading an interview conducted in 1980 between a leading literary journalist (Robert Fulford) and a leading academic critic (Northrop Frye). They express surprise that Europeans are now genuinely interested in Canadian literature: a "miraculous" situation, it is called. Moreover, the interview tells us that Canada has benefited by going "from a pre-national phase to a post-national phase without ever quite becoming a nation. . . ." William Arthur Deacon would have choked if he had been able to read such statements. But perhaps his work and that of his contemporaries secured the Canadian literary edifice so well that it can now afford the self-indulgently eccentric attitudes of Frye and Fulford.



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The biography includes, at the end, some 50 pages of selections from Deacon's essay-writing. There seems to be little reason for them when so much more of the biographical milieu deserves attention. Unfortunately, too, the book lacks an index for which the "notes" to chapters simply don't make up. But this work, built on a mountain of record, will act as an incentive, a goad, and an inspiration for work that can fill out and elaborate the first, courageous beginnings undertaken by Clara Thomas and John Lennox on a period that has only just begun to give up its riches. □

REVIEW

Our lady of sorrows

By BARRY BROWN

Black Madonna, by F.G. Paci, Oberon Press, 198 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88750 419 1) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 420 5).

F.G. PACI'S first novel, *The Italians*, came close to winning the Books in Canada Award for First Novels. Among the dissenting voices was Sheila Fischman, who wrote, "Paci's *The Italians* showed effectively the kind of tensions, cultural and personal, that can exist in any immigrant family, but he tried to crowd too many important themes and questions into one shortish novel." His second novel, *Black Madonna*, fails and succeeds in much the same way.

As the title suggests, *Black Madonna* is about death. Death of the individual, death of a dream, death of tradition. For "Black Madonna" is the name given to those Italian women who garb themselves in black for a funeral and follow the burial procession, wailing like "a chorus of professional mourners."

Black Madonna begins with Marie and Joey preparing for their father's funeral and trying to cope with their aggrieved mother, Assunta. In chapters that alternate between flashback and present action, we follow the story of Assunta's breakdown as she is forced to face a life in which her children are becoming "like the English," and her old Italian neighbourhood in Sault Ste.

Marie's west end is bought up by developers.

As with many immigrant families, tensions arise between the old ways of the parents and the new ways of the adopted country. Marie despises her mother's "peasant ways and stupid dialect," and the fact that Assunta was a "mail-order bride." Marie so desperately wants to escape her past that she moves to Toronto, but neither a university education, nor marriage to a man of English descent, nor self-induced anorexia can solve Marie's problem; she loves her mother and wants to make that love fit her new identity. Assunta will have no part of her "ingrata" daughter, and so Marie is drawn to the only tangible link with her mother, Assunta's locked dowry chest, which she tries in vain to open.

Joey feels less threatened by his mother and is ready to take on responsibility for her after her father's death. Joey wants more than anything to be a professional hockey player. His goal, like his sister's, is scoffed at by his parents, but the game is in his blood, and it takes on a symbolic power for him in a "familiar dream of skating on a limitless expanse of a

lake as huge as Superior."

The book ends with Assunta's death, Joey assuming his father's role as he finishes laying the bricks for an unexplained pyramid in his garden, and with Marie coming to grips with the mother-daughter relationship.

The novel's power is that it draws all these elements together without losing sight of the need to tell an entertaining story. Where it fails is its inability to absorb the reader completely, and in Paci's subtle and not-so-subtle use of irony. Because the book is written in the past tense, the reader develops a sense of sympathy with Paci's characters but is never allowed to fully identify with them. The sense of urgency implied in some of the characters never entirely comes across. Irony is a sharp-edged literary tool that cuts both ways. If it sneaks up on the reader, catching him unaware, the effect can send pleasurable chills up the spine. But when it is predictable, the reader finds himself waiting for the inevitable punch-line.

Paci is a good writer and sensitive toward his characters. His main failing is that he too often keeps his characters on a tight rein, and it shows. □

INTERVIEW

Regionalism is a link to the universal,
says Alden Nowlan. Whether in New Brunswick
or Toronto, everybody belongs to a village

By DAVID DONNELL

ALDEN NOWLAN was born in 1933 near Windsor, N.S., and now lives in Fredericton, N.B. A veteran newspaperman and prolific poet, he began his career as a reporter for the *Hartland, N.B., Observer* and later worked as a reporter and editor for the *Saint John Telegraph-Journal* until 1968, when he became writer-in-residence at the University of New Brunswick. His first book of poetry, *The Rose and the Puritan*, appeared in 1958. Since then he has published more than a dozen poetry collections, as well as books of essays and articles, local history, a number of scripts for stage and television, a collection of short stories, *Miracle at Indian River* (1968), and a novel, *Various Persons Named Kevin O'Brien* (1973). His latest poetry collection, *I might not tell*

everybody this, has recently been published by Clarke Irwin (see page 14). While on tour to promote it, he talked with Toronto poet David Donnell:

Books in Canada: Do you think all writers are regional writers in a certain sense? Shakespeare, Melville, Hemingway, Faulkner, Farrell?

Nowlan: I'd go along with William Carlos Williams, who said that "localism alone can lead to culture." Hemingway had something like this in his stories in the form of a global village kind of thing. Any area or class can be regional. Farrell could become a major writer again if we have a full-fledged depression in the 1980s.

BiC: But what distinguishes regional literature from folklore or provincial

reporting? What does a great writer like Faulkner do to material that is fundamentally regional that a lot of lesser writers fail to do?

Nowlan: Well, the folklorist is a purist, what he's making is a kind of museum piece, it's closed off rather than opened up. Whereas a real writer, as opposed to a scholar, say, regards the basic material as living motion, going somewhere, becoming something.

BiC: So it's how you develop the regional that makes it not only universal but also regional in the first place as opposed to provincial?

Nowlan: I think so. Yeats said the more Irish Synge became the more universal he became. But that's because he was being increasingly true to what he was doing, to his own feelings and the underlying causes of his material. Some of the flag-wavers, now, they're folkloric, they thought Synge was betraying Ireland. The flag-wavers just wanted to wave their flags. But the people, reactionary or not, who rioted against Synge's plays were also contributing something to the collective identity of Ireland.

BiC: Do you think you've been more influenced by some of the great Irish writers than you have by North American writers?

Nowlan: My whole ethnic background is Irish, the whole Irish thing, but I began to read North American writers at a much earlier age. Farrell was a fine writer. Ray Souster, Irving Layton, Louis Dudek, other Canadians, that group, had a large impact on me when I first began writing. One of the first poems I was ever profoundly affected by was Ray Souster's poem, I think it's called "An Address to the Canadian Poets," and starts something like, "Now the taverns are closing and the whores are emerging from the alleys." Harsh but liberating compared to the lack of realism, or regionalism for that matter, that existed in Canadian literature at the time.

BiC: The beginnings of the post-modern tradition in Canada?

Nowlan: Whatever you want to call it. I believe very strongly in the apostolic succession. David Adams Richards, a fine writer, tells me he had an experience with my book *Miracle at Indian River* that was very much like my experience with the poem by Ray Souster. I think it's a perfect metaphor, the laying on of hands, the idea of a tradition that goes back for centuries.

BiC: Do you think that serious literature begins with the regional, even if the work happens to be a thriller or a horror film, and develops by expanding rather than by limiting and closing?

Nowlan: I think it's true in everything.

Dickens and Thackeray in the 19th century. Dickens was a popular writer with lots of regional elements. He came out in monthly instalments. The really major writers were playing the game with the popular people. There's such a dichotomy now that this can't happen as



Alden Nowlan

easily as before. A Jane Austen Harlequin would be interesting. People weren't judged by what they read as much in the 19th century. Now it's all a lot more serious and that inhibits a number of things. The novel became too

much of an art masterpiece and now we're reacting against it.

BiC: With novels in new forms, journals, letters, historical cut-ups, and things like that?

Nowlan: Well that's all been done before too. Defoe's *The Journal of the Plague Year*, for example. And letters, letters have always been popular forms.

BiC: Your new book of poems, I might not tell everybody this, seems less specifically regional than earlier books like *Bread, Wine and Salt*, for example, but also more reflective, more stretched out to accommodate something like a sense of Christian redemption. Do you think I'm reading the book upside-down or do you partly agree with that?

Nowlan: Grace for the world perhaps. My grandmother used to say that she cooked for her own sense of amazement. I've probably become more tolerant of my own frailties and therefore more tolerant of other people's. The most stupid thing can be forgiven. I don't know if I've acquired a sense of grace for the world politically. Maybe a sense of grace that I want to live by. A more collective sense. I've been very influenced by the King James version of

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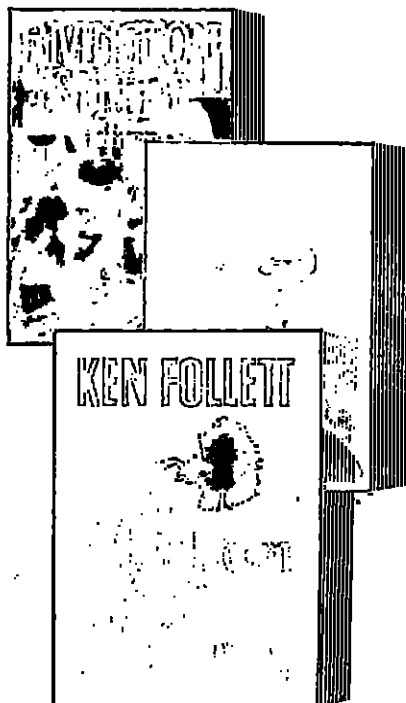
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the Bible. The human parts of it. They weren't really motivated by such different things than we are. Jesus, for example, speaking to Judas at the banquet when he felt that Judas was about to betray him. "What thou must do, do quickly." A Christian sense of redemption is a bit abstract. You can say I'm an intensely personal artist, and I've become more tolerant as a human being partly through reading Shakespeare and Tolstoy.

BiC: *Shakespeare's a fine balance for any idealist. Are you a Flann O'Brien fan?*

Nowlan: O'Brien was a great writer. And Behan, another great writer. I don't think O'Brien's read that much in North America. Not right now anyway.

BiC: *He should be. What about O'Brien's great dictum, "A pint of plain is your only man."*

Nowlan: They have better beer over there. I've never felt like insulting any man by turning down whatever he might offer. But I wouldn't disagree with his thinking on the matter.

BiC: *How much newspaper work are you doing these days?*

Nowlan: I'm doing a column a week and I miss the daily life of it a bit. I like the newspaper business as a central kind of thing and I don't really think it's the chains that have ruined it or that it's been ruined. It's amazing to go back and look at how bad some of the independents really were in the old days.

BiC: *Do you think your novel, Various Persons Named Kevin O'Brien, is generally informed, the sharp detailed observation in it, by the amount of newspaper work you've done?*

Nowlan: Probably. A lot of writers have had a newspaper background — Hemingway, Anderson, Mark Twain, Bret Harte. Makes me sound in good company. And if you take it back to the 19th century you could have somebody like Dan Rather or Walter Cronkite and they'd be writing a possibly great book with a popular audience at the same time they were doing news stories. Damon Runyan, another one. Runyan has a great story that begins something like, "I was walking back and forth, and up and down, and to and fro, and I didn't know which way I was going."

BiC: *Can you imagine yourself ever leaving New Brunswick?*

Nowlan: New Brunswick's one of those straightforward places that you can't give a straightforward answer about. It depends on your terms of reference. Villages remain intact. Everybody belongs to a village, despite their differences. The human psyche is capable of knowing only about 1,100 people anyway, so what's the difference between living in Toronto and knowing 1,100

people and living in a village in New Brunswick and knowing everybody?

BiC: *What would it take to persuade you to leave New Brunswick? What would you miss most?*

Nowlan: Well, I'd miss Claudine, I couldn't leave my wife. And I'd miss my books and the cats and I'd miss my cat. I wouldn't miss the ocean because, contrary to whatever people think, I don't live on the ocean anyway. One of the things that surprises people from outside the Maritimes is that we can be intensely inland without being very far away from the ocean. My grandmother used to say that a completely successful man was a fellow "good enough to manage a three-

masted schooner." But that's more Nova Scotia than New Brunswick. I've never lived directly on the ocean. Most of where I've lived in the Maritimes is somewhat similar to the Ottawa valley.

BiC: *What about bars and other writers and landscape and traffic?*

Nowlan: Bars are only different before the first drink; after that they're all the same. As for traffic, and I like driving my car, you shouldn't think of me out on a boat somewhere. I'm the sort of person who's such an incompetent driver that it wouldn't make any difference; people would be shouting and waving their arms at me in Toronto just the way they do down home. □

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Illusion and reality: one woman's search for identity and an Iowa farmer's sweetly evocative monument to baseball

By DOUGLAS HILL

IT'S HARD NOT to enjoy the slapdash verbal and narrative energy of *Nobody's Daughter*, by Aviva Layton (McClelland & Stewart, 224 pages, \$16.95 cloth), but as the saying goes, there's less here than meets the eye. The book has vivid scenes, strong imagery, some snappy if overheated prose, the titillation of the *roman à clef*. But for me there's also a curious lack of compulsion to anything Layton talks about; she seems unable to give the novel a centre, to persuade that there is substance, meaning, insight under all the glitter and froth.

The book moves like a hurdler. It whips the reader past some scorching glimpses of Jewish girlhood in Australia (incest, infantile sex, mutilation, freakishness, sadism all go zooming by) through the heroine's adolescence and devirgination to her tumultuous affair and marriage, part adoration, part masochism, with Canada's Most Important Poet. It's fun, I'll grant it that.

The thread that's supposed to tie this together is the heroine's search for identity. She does in the end find herself, but somewhere after the childhood section Layton begins to force her conclusions, I think. She seems unsure of her distance or perspective on the material, and her attempts to impose coherent significance upon it appear unintegrated.

Layton handles the language well, with nerve and bluster. But she's wildly unselective; the effect too often is of a

little girl trying out dirty words for their shock, not their emotional or erotic value. The book is high-class pulp — rather like *People* magazine with continuity by Lenny Bruce and Erica Jong.

FOR THIS MIDWESTERNER who grew up with baseball and memories of baseball, *Shoeless Joe*, by W.P. Kinsella (Thomas Allen & Son, 265 pages, \$14.95 cloth), is hard to be dispassionate about. It has some wonderful inventiveness at the core, a sweet, evocative, funny mood, and if it threatens to drown in extended whimsy from time to time, that doesn't detract, for me, from its many charms.

The book is set in Iowa, where the narrator, named Ray Kinsella, responds to a voice out of the air — "If you build it he will come" — and erects a baseball diamond in his cornfield. Shoeless Joe Jackson does appear, along with, eventually, the rest of the banished 1919 Black Sox, Ray's father (a former minor-league catcher), a couple of other players, and J.D. Salinger, whom Ray kidnaps/entices into his schemes and dreams. Through all the ripples of temporal magic the book starts, baseball is "the one constant": "Colours can change, lives can alter; anything is possible in this gentle, flawless, loving game."

The generative impulse of the novel comes in its tribute to vision, to the imagination of other lives in ours, ours in them. Does the writer — the dreamer —

summon the shades of his fantasy? Or does he himself step back through the screen? The point of the story is a shimmering paradox: "it would destroy anyone to know his own future."

Kinsella's prose is full of simile and metaphor — "a toothachy May night," "a moon bright as butter" — and has more than a touch of the warmhearted kookiness one associates with Richard Brautigan. Ray's wife, Annie, with "her fierce warmth" and her habit of saying things like "Oh, love, if it makes you

happy you should do it," is a bit much; but it's not my business to interfere with that sort of happiness.

Shoeless Joe now and then appears to run out of steam, slow down lazily to a crawl. But then it fires up and astonishes. You feel it going slack, then you're suddenly "brushed with wonder." On balance the book's heart is impressive; its moments of fictional inspiration linger in the mind like the thrill of those Iowa cornfield nights and voices Ray Kinsella opens himself up to. □

ON THE RACKS

An old imprint and a new design
free two series of literary paperbacks
from a legacy of dowdiness

By ANNE COLLINS

AH, THE self-consciousness of lying on the beach or sitting where anyone might watch, reading a New Canadian Library book: in its dingy, dowdy covers — enough to cast one back to school days, when Sinclair Ross was a cross to bear and even Margaret Laurence turned to stone like her angel. Older, maybe wiser, at least interested in the writer rather than foraging for the consciousness of the nation, still it was an effort to overcome the earnestness of those covers, creep past the academic introductions and into the book. NOT TO BE READ FOR PLEASURE.

At last McClelland & Stewart has woken out of a dream and redesigned the whole works, tossing out the introductions, and brightening the series immeasurably by the simple expedient of making the books white, out of which author's name and title spring in bright colours. Even better, after a year and a half of planning, consulting university teachers, and digging around in its own multi-branched corporate backlists and those of other houses, General Publishing has got into the act of mass-marketing a competing line of good literature. It has dusted off an old imprint, New Press (an independent bought by General to improve its Canadian-content rating but allowed to languish since the mid-1970s) to prefix its new series, New Press Canadian Classics. What the company has produced is simply the most attractively designed line of its kind in Canada.

General has always viewed itself in a kind of Avis-Hertz relationship with

M&S — they try harder. And some of that chip on the shoulder is evident in these books. Open the front cover of each and printed on the first page is a proclamation of its worth: "Distinguished by the use of Canadian fine art on its covers, New Press Canadian Classics is an innovative, much-needed series of high-quality, reasonably priced editions of the very best Canadian fiction, non-fiction and poetry." They could have left such things for us to say.

Though the first eight books are fiction (the other categories will come in upcoming seasons of four to six new titles each spring and fall), their range is heartening, all sitting there in paperback and costing only \$3.95 apiece. My favourite of the batch is Leon Rooke's *Fat Woman*, and its heroine Ella Mae:

She would make her wide flesh be everything, a lake of cream to drown in, a field of earth in which Ella Mae Hopkins and everybody like her, all the world's poor and miserable, all the maimed and the bereft, one in which all lost souls might forever cuddle — cuddle and hide.

It's the kind of book that has been well and extensively reviewed but might have been stuck forever wearing the literary hide of the original Oberon edition.

Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* needs no comment here, except perhaps to say that Ondaatje had never even sold paperback rights to this story of Buddy Bolden, legendary jazz trumpeter who blew himself into silence, since its publication in 1976. Then there is *Kamouraska*, sleighbells, snow, and

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Deacon was an intellectual patron and prophet in Canadian writing. For almost forty years (1922-1960), as literary editor for *Saturday Night*, *The Mall and Empire*, and *The Globe and Mail* he contributed to building a readership and a sympathetic climate for Canadian writers. "This is not only a biography of a great and generous man...it is also a spirited account of Canadian letters. Anyone interested in the literature of our country should read this book." Margaret Laurence \$24.95

University of Toronto Press

passion more intense than the movie version, imagined by Anne Hébert out of a real love affair and murder in 19th-century Quebec. Robert Kroetsch takes on Alberta dinosaur country and Anna Dawe's search for her bone-hunting father in Badlands, and David Helwig explores character in the context of Kingston, Ont., in Jennifer.

Two books of short stories: the first is an early collection of Mavis Gallant's called *My Heart Is Broken*, which includes the novella "Its Image on the Mirror" and a perfect Gallant story, "Bernadette," about the jolt when two strange orbits intersect: that of a sophisticated Montreal couple, Nora and Robbie Knight, and their servant girl, Bernadette, "not a year out of Abitibi." Bernadette, by just being Bernadette, a dull cabbage of a girl, but "working-class" and therefore to the Knights' eyes somehow profoundly "simple," upends all the illusions the Knights have cultivated in their carefully tended marriage. Two of Matt Cohen's previous collections of stories and a new story that gives the book its title make up *The Expatriate*. Cohen suffers a little in the company that he is keeping here. But comparing his work to Gallant's is the

unprofitable apples and oranges game. "The Expatriate," which opens the book, may be new but it isn't his best. Start at the back instead, with "Columbus and the Fat Lady" in which the resurrected explorer becomes a sideshow creature, recreating his "freak" story for the crowd night after night.

An *Answer from Limbo*, a 1962 novel by Brian Moore, explains to me at last (having been familiar with only the last few years' work) why Moore's reputation is as it is. Brendan Tierney, an expatriate Irishman piddling away his talents at a magazine job in New York City in support of a wife and children acquired too young, is pushed by envy of a less-talented but soon-to-be-published novelist friend into the terrifying task of closing the gap between what he is and what he wants to be. He is quite capable of sacrificing others to achieve his goal as a writer: pushing his wife toward enacting her destructive fantasy life, bringing his widowed mother over from Ireland to tend his children. (Moore, like all great writers somehow androgynous, lives very well inside the brains of elderly Irishwomen.) The chilling thing to watch is Tierney's slow and ruthless sacrifice of himself.

The new releases from McClelland & Stewart's New Canadian Library: Hugh Hood's *The Camera Always Lies* (\$5.95) predates his Proustian labours on his present projected 12-part novel. Audrey Thomas proves again to be an excellent short-story writer in *Two in the Bush and Other Stories* (\$5.95), especially the ones set in Africa. She has not fallen for the new romance of the dark continent, sensing in the eyes of black politicals, gun-runners and white money-men some of the dead disillusionment that Henry James saw in the eyes of his Europeans; the only political act the narrator of "Two in the Bush" commits is inadvertently setting a cockroach loose in the plush colonial Hotel Ivoire.

Three novels of varying virtues: Shirley Faessler's *Everything in the Window* (\$5.95) is beautiful in voice but not quite there yet as a structure, as it tells about Sophie Glicksman and her sexually exciting but culturally suicidal elopement with a Gentile swimming instructor in Jewish Toronto in the 1930s. Playwright Patricia Joudry's *The Selena Tree* (\$6.95) and *Bloody Harvest* by Grahame Woods (\$5.95) might have been better served by the brief lifespan of the real mass market.

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I've saved for last a strange one, the only piece of non-fiction in the group, Franklin Russell's *Watchers at the Pond*, first published in 1961. Russell is a professional naturalist and writer who this book claimed as "Canadian" because he was living here when he wrote it, though he comes from New Zealand and has been in the U.S. since 1963. I found it was necessary to sit calmly for a while before starting the book because Russell is trying to slow his readers down to the movement of

seasons and the watch that various inhabitants keep over a small North American pond. Nature's pond, not Walden's. Too often for my taste he slips into the fatuous stance of the "nature-lover," but every now and then his naturalist's training reasserts itself and animates the sex life of birds, turtles, dragonflies, the martial arts practised by bumblebees, the hunter's drive of a red-tailed hawk. When that happens he turns his reader successfully into another watcher at the pond. □

IN THE BEGINNING

Making history: from family tragedy during the Winnipeg Strike to adolescent capers in the Second World War

By MARY AINSLIE SMITH

A FEATURE OF this spring's list for young Canadian readers is the number of books set in specific historical contexts. *Goodbye Sarah*, by Geoffry Bilson, illustrated by Ron Berg (Kids Can Press, 64 pages, \$3.95 paper), the fourth book in the Kids Canada series for grades four to six, tells what happens to the friendship of two little girls whose parents are on opposite sides of the bitter Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. The story is told by 11-year-old Mary, whose father is a strike committee member. She knows, because her parents have told her, that her father and his colleagues are striking for "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work," but much more real to her are the hardships caused by the strike. Food is scarce at home, furniture and clothing have been pawned, her younger brother is hospitalized for malnutrition, and finally creditors force the family out of their home.

Most difficult for Mary is the breakdown of her friendship with Sarah, the girl next door. Sarah's father believes the strike is Communist-inspired and joins the Specials, a group hired to replace the city policemen sympathetic to the strikers. With their fathers so totally opposed, it is hard enough for the girls to stay friends, but their final separation comes when Mary realizes that Sarah can't understand what the strike is all about. Sarah thinks it is silly and stupid. Mary knows it is not.

This is a good story, but somehow just fails to be either as entertaining or as informative as it has the potential to be.

Perhaps the 64-page limit imposed by the series design curtails its development. Mary's personality and her relationships with her family and friends remain merely sketched in, and the events of the strike, particularly at its violent and futile conclusion, are confusing — probably as Mary herself would have perceived them. An afterword by historian Irving Abella provides an outline of the events of the strike, and would remedy this confusion if children will read it. The afterword emphasizes that for this series the historical event is what is important; the plot and character development are secondary.

A specific historical event is also of major importance in *Billy Higgins Rides the Freights*, by Gloria Montero, illustrated by Olena Kassian (119 pages, \$10.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper), the first in James Lorimer's new series, *Adventure in Canada*. In this case, the setting is Western Canada and the event is the On-to-Ottawa trek of 1935 — an attempt by a large number of unemployed men to present their case in person to Prime Minister R.B. Bennett. Billy Higgins, a 13-year-old who has to leave school and go on relief to help his family, is one of the men who travel on top of freight cars as far as Regina. There the trekkers — by then 2,000 strong — are delayed and, following a riot, dispersed by the police.

Because this book is twice as long, both the characters and the events are more deeply explored than those in *Goodbye Sarah*. As a result, the common theme — ordinary people fighting

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an unequal battle for their rights against an unfeeling establishment — comes across much more effectively. The story starts slowly, rather self-consciously establishing a context for the trek and a rationale for Billy's part in it, but once the freight cars begin to move out of Vancouver, Billy's excitement and fears, his discomfort and exhilaration carry the story along very convincingly.

Laura: A Portrait of Laura Secord, by Helen Caister Robinson (Dundurn Press, 240 pages, \$7.75 paper), is the second in yet another series, this one called *Canadian Heroines*. Robinson has obviously done a great deal of research to back her story of a woman whose life stretched from the American Revolution to Confederation, but mostly she emphasizes the war of 1812-14, traditionally associated with Laura Secord. She uses a means of presentation often found in historical biographies for young people, creating dialogue for her characters and narrating, like a fiction writer, from an omniscient point of view. Such exchanges as this one, between Laura and her wounded husband on the eve of her famous expedition to warn Lieutenant Fitzgibbon, would probably offend historical purists:

She paused a moment, as if hesitant to commit herself, and then said in a firm voice, "James, I'm the only person who can alert the Lieutenant. I shall have to go to Beaver Dams."

"You, Laura! Will you not be afraid?"

"Yes, terribly afraid, but you are the only person who will know that. I will gladly do anything I can to defeat the Yankees and bring peace back to Upper Canada."

Robinson also admits in a foreword that she has supplemented historical incidents with fictional ones and that "authentic historical figures mingle with imaginary characters to round out the life story of a woman who has become a legend in many homes." Still, *Laura* is a readable account of life in an interesting period, and will be useful as a supplemental book for history students in middle and senior grades.

In *Freshie*, by Pat Krause, illustrated by Suzanne Cook (Potlatch Publications, 101 pages, \$7.95 paper), the Second World War is in full swing, but 1943-44 is more important to narrator P.S. Scott as her first year at Central Collegiate in Regina. Krause has done a first-rate job of portraying P.S. and her friends as believable adolescents — self-conscious and self-centred, arrogant and naive, awkward and athletic, obsessed by their appearance and social life. P.S.'s diary, her inner monologues and conversations are filled with bravado and humour, and embellished with contemporary slang and references. However, the authenticity of the language may create a barrier for today's teenagers, and the story may appeal more to readers who remember Ipana, Betty Grable, V-letters, and dreamboats — all mentioned in the first chapter. Also the large format seems more suited to nine- and 10-year-olds, rather than the older readers the contents are apparently intended for.

The spring list also offers young readers some worthwhile books with contemporary settings. In Raymond Bradbury's novel, *The War at Fort Maggie* (Kids Can Press, 64 pages, \$3.95 paper), a grade six class goes on an overnight expedition to a historic site, planning to re-enact a famous battle as a class project. Food poisoning among the adult chaperones and the presence of a not-too-friendly motorcycle gang on an adjacent campsite are a couple of the factors that enliven the trip beyond the teachers' expectations. The story emerges in the form of tape transcripts and journal entries — the students' own records of their experiences. When the pretend war becomes a very real affair, predictably the kids come out in much better shape than the adults. The story's clear intention is to provide fun and

entertainment, and it succeeds.

Black Diamonds (McClelland & Stewart, 170 pages, \$12.95 cloth) is James Houston's sequel to *Frozen Fire*, his popular Arctic adventure story. The same characters — 15-year-old Matthew Morgan, his best friend Kayak, Matthew's prospector father Ross Morgan, and the helicopter pilot Charlie — set out on another expedition in search of treasure. Houston's special knowledge of the Arctic, its people, and its terrain gives this adventure yarn a depth it otherwise would not possess. At the end, the treasure hunters are marooned on Prince Charles Island, west of Baffin, where they encounter a Stone-Age community untouched by contact with white men. Obviously Matthew and Kayak's adventures are not yet over, and Houston fans can anticipate another sequel.

A different sort of expedition is undertaken by the young hero of *Patrick and the Actors*, by Margaret Keith (Penumbra Press, 206 pages, \$15.95 cloth, \$10.95 paper). Patrick leaves home to join the Caravan Theatre company, travelling through Ontario presenting plays to school audiences. The story is an interesting blend of the realistic and the fanciful. The life of an itinerant actor is realistically presented (although Keith admits in an introduction that her description of working conditions "thoroughly contravenes the rules of Canadian Actors' Equity") but it's less believable that Patrick, a minor, manages to travel with the actors for a whole school year without being missed at home. Keith solves the problem by providing Patrick with a set of absentee parents and a lazy babysitter and leaving it at that — much better than a long, contrived rationalization. She also provides a melodramatic villain — a truant officer who pursues Patrick across Ontario — to add a series of narrow escapes to the plot. Glenn Priestley's illustrations, detailed and realistic but



dark and full of shadows, emphasize the dichotomy of the story.

Emotionally demanding, but the most rewarding of these new books is Monica Hughes's *Hunter in the Dark* (Clarke Irwin, 131 pages, \$12.95 cloth). When 16-year-old Mike Rankin develops leukemia, his life is suddenly circumscribed by hospital stays, debilitating medication, his parents' fears, and

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above all his own terror and nightmares. His determination to go deer-hunting and to bag a trophy leads him on a solitary journey, a quest for the courage

and understanding to meet his future. This book is well written, sensitively presented, and offers an enriching experience for any reader. □

ENGLISH. OUR ENGLISH

Grave matters: the language of sports commentators, and similar confusing, if not specious, attempts to maintain order

By BOB BLACKBURN

I'VE BEEN ASKED why I don't take an occasional shot at the language of TV sports commentators. The answer is simple: the language of sports commentators bears so little resemblance to English that I'm not sure any discussion of it belongs in this column. However, it was a CBC hockey commentator who caught my ear recently with a compound error common enough to warrant some attention here.

What the man told us was that "both goalies are very similar." *Both* is wrong here. It lumps the goalies together and suggests that they are similar to someone else. Similarity is reciprocal; if A resembles B to some degree, then B resembles A to the same degree. That's two strikes against *both*.

Very is wrong. Similar is not an absolute like unique. Sports commentators who say (and, God, do they say it!) "very unique" are wrong because there are no degrees of uniqueness. There can be varying degrees of similarity. However, there is a *very* implicit in *similar*. It means almost the same, and *very* is redundant here.

That's not all. Similar sometimes can stand alone, but often it requires modification. You can say two peas in a pod are similar and let it go at that. What the commentator was trying to convey was not that the goalies were similar, but that their styles of play were similar. But, rather than be accused of nitpicking, I'd be willing to let the man say the goalies are similar if he were willing to drop the *both* and *very*.

IMAGINE YOU ARE doing a crossword puzzle and are faced with a SP-IOUS, and the definition is "counterfeit." If you are as easily confused as I, you might turn to your copy of Room's *Dictionary of Confusibles*, wherein you would find neither *spurious* nor *specious*. (The trou-

ble with Room is that he is obviously not as easily confused as many of us; only 800 pairs or groups of words in all the language confused him sufficiently to merit inclusion in his dictionary.)

Were I confronted with such a puzzle (fortunately, I have not been), I'd probably choose *spurious*, but not before looking up both words in a conventional dictionary, as I still have to do every time I want to use either of them. You might say (and get highly paid for it) that both words are very similar. *Spurious* is a reasonably straightforward word from the Latin for *bastard* or *illegitimate*, and it still carries the basic meaning of having an illegitimate or irregular origin. *Specious*, on the other hand, is a more beguiling word. Its original meaning of beautiful to behold or fair in appearance survived the move from Latin to Middle English, but later it came to mean showy or flashy, and then beautiful in appearance *only*. Eventually, the *OED* assigns it the meaning of "having a fair or attractive appearance but in reality devoid of the qualities apparently possessed." And *spurious* is defined as "superficially resembling or simulating but lacking the genuine characteristics or qualities of something."

It is quite common to see *specious* used to describe counterfeit money or other objects, and it also is common for writers who use it thus to be told that they are wrong; that they mean *spurious*. But, apart from the fact that *specious* implies a compliment to the skill of the counterfeiter, it seems to me quite correct to apply it to any successful forgery. While the two words are not generally interchangeable, they are similar, and I say they belong in anybody's dictionary of confusibles.

DURING LIVE CBC coverage of one of the constitutional conferences, Peter Mans-

bridge told us that the prime minister was now "gaveling the meeting to order." I was already reaching for a dictionary when I heard Mr. Trudeau say he was going to "inverse the usual order," and thought perhaps I had learned two new verbs in a matter of seconds. Not so. There is, of course, no such verb as *gavel*. It's a noun, and that's that. You *call* a meeting to order, with or without using a gavel as a means of attracting attention. (Furthermore, you do not pound a gavel; you pound *with* a gavel, although I suppose you *could* pound a gavel, perhaps with another gavel, if you happened to have two handy.)

However, no matter how wrong Prime Minister Trudeau may be about so many things, his use of *inverse* was absolutely correct, albeit a bit quaint. *Inverse* is, indeed, a transitive verb, although the *OED* qualifies it with a *now rare*, and it simply means to invert. It is pleasant, and by no means impossible, to catch Mr. Trudeau committing a solecism or barbarism, but it pays not to pounce without checking.

A WOMAN IN a TV commercial for disposable diapers tells us that having a baby was the ultimate experience of her life. One presumes she was speaking from the grave. □

CANWIT NO. 74

IT HAS OFTEN struck us how appropriate some people's names are to their jobs. What, for instance, could a man with a handle like Northrop Frye be, if not a literary scholar (perhaps a short-order cook?), while we have no doubt that Joe Clark failed to stay in office simply because his name was not sufficiently prime ministerial. And did Tim Buck miss his calling when he didn't become a rodeo rider? We'll pay \$25 for the best list of well-known Canadians and the jobs they *should* have had. The deadline is September 1. Address: CanWit No. 74, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

Results of CanWit No. 72

CALLS FOR A nickname for the Canadian flag drew a multitude of responses (121 from one correspondent!). Scott Joplin fans will be pleased to learn that "The Maple Leaf Rag" was a popular choice. Variations on "Pearson's Pennant" — the alliterative monicker adopted by editorial writers during the flag debate

of 1964 — also abounded, as did references to the similarity between the National Flag of Canada (as it is officially known) and the hockey uniform of Team Canada ("Old Hockey Shirt"). But of the ideas that were run up the flagpole, only one receives our patriotic salute. The winner is Barbara J. Halladay of Kingston, Ont., for a suggestion that is best put in her own words: "I think we should call the flag Gord. Then we can consider ourselves 'One nation under Gord.'"

Honourable mentions:

- The Maple Laugh
- Old Frog Blood
- Floyd (or perhaps Red Floyd) — W.P. Kinsella, Calgary

CLASSIFIED

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- The Substandard
- The Scarlet Harlot
- The Union Joke — David J. Paul, Lucan, Ont.
- Flapeau — Richard Parker, Liverpool, N.S.
- The Blanc of Canada — Robert O'Connell, Halifax
- The Make-Believe — Julian Lewin, Ottawa
- The Make-Believe Forever — J.A. d'Oliveira, Don Mills, Ont.

THE EDITORS RECOMMEND

THE FOLLOWING Canadian books were reviewed in the previous issue of *Books in Canada*. Our recommendations don't necessarily reflect the reviews:

FICTION

- Pélagie: The Return to a Homeland**, by Antonine Maillet, translated from the French by Philip Stratford, Doubleday. Maillet's richly anecdotal recounting of the 10-year odyssey of her forebears, the intrepid band of Acadians who returned to Atlantic in 1780 after years of dispersal in America following "the Great Disruption of 1755."
- The Neighbour and Other Stories**, by Naïm Kattan, translated from the French by Judith Madley and Patricia Claxton, McClelland & Stewart. Kattan's short stories, though cosmopolitan in content, explore a familiar Canadian duality: the plight of the stranger in his own land.

POETRY

- A New Improved Sky**, by Don Kerr, Coteau Books. Kerr places the comedy of ideologies, the tragedy of personal loss, and the universal reach of history into a context abundant with detail and insight.

BOOKS RECEIVED

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

- Amphibians of Canada**, by Barbara Froom, M & S.
- Apple Love**, by Jean McCallion, South Western Ontario Poetry.
- Author and Editor at Work**, by Elsie Myers Stainton, U of T Press.
- The Basement Book**, by Harris Mitchell, Personal Library.

- Between Knuckle and Palm**, by Chris Redmond, South Western Ontario Poetry.
- The Bridge**, by Jack Brooks, South Western Ontario Poetry.
- Broadcasting Policy Development**, by Frank Foster, Frost Communications.
- Canada's Competition Policy Revisited**, by Irving Brecher, The Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Career Information**, edited by Sybil Huffman and James Huffman, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
- Christopher and the Elevator Close!**, by Allen Morgan, illustrated by Franklin Hammond, Kids Can Press.
- Civilizing the West**, by A.A. den Otter, The University of Alberta Press.
- Das La Prairie Canadienne/Ou le Canadien Prairie**, by Gaston Giscard, translated by Lloyd Ferson, Canadian Plains Research Centre.
- The Demolinguistic Situation in Canada**, by Rejean Lachapelle and Jacques Henripin, The Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Down the Honeycuckle**, by Wendy Scott, Three Trees Press (1981).
- Everyman's Book of Nutrition**, by Jane Hope and Elizabeth Bright-See, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.
- Les femmes dans la sociologie**, by Nicole Laurin-Frenette, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
- Final Things**, by Richard B. Wright, Ace Books.
- Flanagan as Priestmaker**, by Helen Coy, University of Manitoba Press.
- Frame of Darkness**, Russell Thornton, Athabasca Press.
- The Great Uranium Cartel**, by Earle Gray, M & S.
- How Ottawa Spends Your Tax Dollars**, edited by G. Bruce Doorn, James Lorimer.
- The Incessant Seal**, by Christopher Hyde, M & S.
- The Light Must Be Perfect**, by Constance McRae, Dreadnaught (1981).
- Man Descending**, by Guy Vanderhaeghe, Macmillan.
- Mimes: The Step Beyond Words**, by Adrian Pecknold, NC Press.
- Molly and Mr. Maloney**, by Allen Morgan, Kids Can Press.
- Mountain Rose**, by Pauli Siren, Clarke Irwin.
- Mr. 5BX**, by John J. Jackson, Sono Nis Press.
- The Murder of Napoleon**, by Bea Weider and David Hapgood, Methuen.
- The Old Paths**, by Frederick E. Benson, Crown Publications.
- Paper Boy**, by Stuart Keate, Clarke Irwin.
- Preparing for Sabbath**, by Nessa Rapoport, Seal Books.
- Patel, I Love You, You Little Square**, by John Marilyn, Coach House.
- Return Fire**, by John Lane, Turnstone Press (1981).
- Scanderbeg**, by Charles Ewert, Double Eagle Publishers (1981).
- Selected Poems of Christina Logan, Dreadnaught (1981).**
- Several Cranes in the Blue Air**, by David Skyrle, South Western Ontario Poetry.
- Shrubs of Ontario**, by James H. Soper and Margaret L. Heimburger, Royal Ontario Museum.
- Small Wonders**, edited by Robert Weaver, CBC.
- Still Life**, by Brenda Marshall, South Western Ontario Poetry.
- Surplus and Other Poems**, by Shaunt Basmajian, Unfinished Moment Press.
- Tales of Heritage**, by Hedi Bouraoui, engravings by Saul Field, Upstairs Gallery.
- Turks and Muggers**, by Susan Musgrave, M & S.
- Teaching the Gifted, Challenging the Average**, edited by Norah Maier, Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U of T.
- The Temptation of Eileen Hughes**, by Brian Moore, Seal Books.
- This Age of Reason**, by Norma West Linder, South Western Ontario Poetry.
- The Thumbless Man is at the Piano**, by Marianne Bluger, Three Trees Press (1981).
- Thumbail Stitches**, by Virginia Kent-Brown, South Western Ontario Poetry.
- The Tongues Between Us**, by Bruce Meyer, South Western Ontario Poetry.
- Temple Outlaw**, by David Ricardo Williams, Sono Nis Press.
- The Used Car Believer's System**, by Robert Appel, Doubleday.
- Vers et L'Envers**, by Hedi Bouraoui, ECW Press.
- Voyage of the Stella**, by R.D. Lawrence, M & S.
- What's the word?/Cherchez le mot**, by Lesley Fairfield, Kids Can Press.
- Water**, by Harold Rhenisch, Sono Nis Press.
- A Woman Called Seyla**, by David Gurr, Seal Books.



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