

A NATIONAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

# BOOKS IN CANADA

## CALLAGHAN AT 80

*An intimate portrait by Norman Levine*



Focus on F.R. Scott: a film-maker's diary  
Reviews of poetry from Avison to Zeng

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BOOKS IN CANADA



FEATURES

- Old Acquaintance.** A Canadian writer's 20-year friendship with Morley Callaghan. *By Norman Levine* ..... 9  
**The novelist as poet.** Lawrence Durrell's new novel is 'the log-book of a poet.' *By Alberto Manguel* ..... 11

REVIEWS

- Junction,** by Elizabeth Brewster ..... 12  
**Women and Children First,** by Michele Landsberg ..... 13  
**For Services Rendered: Leslie James Bennett and the RCMP Security Service,** by John Sawatsky ..... 14  
**Stanley Knowles: The Man from Winnipeg North Centre,** by Susan Mann Trofimenkoff ..... 14  
**The Arab-Israeli Wars,** by Chaim Herzog ..... 17  
**A Peculiar Kind of Politics: Canada's Overseas Ministry in the First World War,** by Desmond Morton ..... 18  
**Winter Sun/The Dumbfounding,** by Margaret Avison; **Digging In,** by Elizabeth Brewster ..... 19  
**Beyond Labels,** by Robert Zend; **Old Mother,** by Patrick Lane ..... 20  
**Stonefish and Other Poems,** by Kevin Roberts ..... 21  
**The Rain Falls Like Rain,** by David Helwig ..... 22  
**A Boy's Own Story,** by Edmund White ..... 23

DEPARTMENTS

Field Notes

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Rhyme and Reason,</b> by Donald Winkler ..... 3              | <b>The Browser,</b> by Morris Wolfe ..... 28 |
| <b>Quest for Crusoes,</b> by Rupert Schieder ..... 4            | <b>Paperbacks,</b> by Anne Collins ..... 30  |
| <b>English, Our English,</b> by Bob Blackburn ..... 7           | <b>Letters</b> ..... 31                      |
| <b>Interview with Leon Rooke,</b> by Philippe Desquieu ..... 24 | <b>CanWit No. 81</b> ..... 33                |
| <b>In Translation,</b> by Paul Stuewe ..... 25                  | <b>The Editors Recommend</b> ..... 34        |
| <b>First Novels,</b> by Douglas Hill ..... 27                   | <b>Books Received</b> ..... 34               |

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# Keeping stride with F.R. Scott: notes from a film-maker's diary

## Rhyme and reason

VANCOUVER, FEBRUARY, 1981. A cavernous, mirrored ballroom in the Georgia Hotel, site of the opening reception for a conference honouring "The Achievements of F.R. Scott." We have spent the day hanging lights and trying to reassure the organizers, from Simon Fraser University, that our presence will not be overly disruptive. Everyone is nervous. They are nervous. We are nervous — as nervous as one can only be just before the first feet of film roll through the camera on a new production. I am always superstitious about that first shot. Only the gentlemen from the RCMP do not appear nervous, peering behind curtains and methodically tracing our cables to their point of origin (the Prime Minister is to be one of those in attendance). My concern at this point is not, immediately, how to accommodate the breadth of Scott's long

strains of 1930s melodies wafted from a piano at the other end of the room. (Not too loud, madam, please, we'll be recording sound.) Slowly, lava-like, the assemblage spreads across the floor. Poets, politicians, academics, deans of law — a dazzling array of the Canadian intellectual elite. Now Scott is there, head and shoulders above the multitude, wading into his element. He is, has always been, magnificently, robustly gregarious. "Oh, Grace!" — he spots his old comrade-in-arms, Grace McInnis — "Har-oid!" Each greeting is a joyous declamation. Scott loves people, parties . . . and attention.

"Used to be in the headlines, now I'm in the footnotes," he murmurs to one of the assembled. "I'm in the headlines again today!" We scurry after him with our camera, burrowing our way through the crowd. Suddenly he swivels our way. "Don!" He strides forward. I shake his hand, trying to stay out of camera range. (In order to maintain his object-

pause for effect, twinkle nascent in the eye — "This one's optional, the next one's . . . obligatory!" Turns on his heel, and he's off. Timing perfect. Delivery masterful. Frank Scott has passed his screen test. First shot is in the can. The film is on its way.

NORTH HATLEY, JULY, 1981. Out of this must come the spine of the film, for it has been my conviction from the beginning that Frank must tell his own story. Scott's memories, Scott's ideas — his mind at work. ("The most orderly mind I have known." — David Lewis.) Order, reason — but reason defended *with passion*. That's what will make it work on film.

This seamless web of an active career that spans 60 years of history and four fields of human endeavour: how to begin to deal with it? We devise a battery of interconnected interviews, each one with a separate theme, conducted over a period of several days, both at Scott's summer house at North Hatley, Que., and his home in Montreal. "The Early Years," "McGill and Modern Poetry," "Politics," "Civil Liberties," "French Canada," "The Constitution." Frank ensconced in a succession of chairs, myself crouched beside the camera, clutching my stenographer's notebook with its scrawled list of questions. Five, seven, nine rolls of film per session — never mind, this is for posterity. Occasionally he tires, but comes roaring back if by chance, or deliberately, we touch a contentious nerve (the October Crisis, Duplessis, the CPR). Always, the poetry readings are superb, whether it be the satire of "The Canadian Authors Meet" or the lyricism of "Old Song" and "Surfaces." We try to choose poems that coincide with important turning points in Scott's life — thus "New Paths" and "Overture." Gradually, we are getting the ingredients we need. And Scott seems to be enjoying himself — enjoying the opportunity, and enjoying the comradeship of the crew.

After the interviews, it's a relief to go off into the Eastern Townships countryside to shoot purely visual material. Late one afternoon we get the shot that will remain my favourite: Frank on the end of a dock jutting out into Lake Massawippi, standing, cane in hand, reflected



F.R. Scott

career (literature, law, civil liberties, politics) in one 60-minute film, but whether, tonight, we will succeed in capturing some of the man's wit, verve, conviviality, and robust appetite for life. He is 81 and arthritic, and he has not yet shaken off the effects of jet lag from his long flight from Montreal.

The guests begin drifting in to the

ivity, a documentary film-maker must remain invisible.) "How do you feel," I stammer, "about the event that's about to begin?" Scott half turns toward the camera, sizing it up out of the corner of his eye. "It's like a wake — and I'm not asleep!" Pause. "It's like a . . . pre-mortem, you know? I said to a friend, it's like a pre-mortem. He said" —

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full length in the water, like the "tall frond that waves/its head below its rooted feet" in "Lakeshore."

At the end of the day, it's drinks — ice tinkling in the martini glass, puns, good conversation, and laughter. The company not only of Frank, but of his painter wife Marion, whose wit and intelligence are an exquisite foil for Frank's inimitable table-talk. It is at times like this that one recognizes film-making to be the privileged activity that it is.

WINNIPEG, JUNE, 1982. Another ballroom — this time at the Fort Garry Hotel, in Winnipeg. The Governor General's Awards. The hall is packed to overflowing. Film and television crews are lined up along the walls on either side of the room. We've spent the better part of the day hanging lights. We've spent the entire winter editing, and compiling the archival material we need to flesh out the film, including an old National Film Board clip from the 1948 CCF convention, which took place in this very hotel, with Frank Scott presiding as national chairman, 34 years ago.

These will be the last frames to shoot. Scott is the winner of the 1981 Governor General's Award for his *Collected Poems* — the poetry prize being the one cherished honour that has eluded him down through the years. The announcement is made. The cameras roll. Adele Wiseman reads the citation. Scott makes his way to the stage, faltering slightly on the steps, and receives the award to deafening applause. As Frank steps to the microphone and the camera continues to roll, I realize there are tears in my eyes. Frank has his award. I have my film. And the film (christened *Rhyme and Reason*) has its ending.

After the ceremony, we are all going out to celebrate. — DONALD WINKLER

## Quest for *Crusoes*

THE SPARSELY-STOCKED shelves — you couldn't call them a library — of the one-room school house in our little division point — you couldn't call it a town — on the Canadian National in North-western Ontario boasted a supply of cheap reprints that Nelson's marketed so energetically here in the early decades of the century. I've never forgotten one of my favourites, for the spine bore a detail that to my literal mind seemed puzzlingly contradictory: how could a book called *Lost in the Backwoods* be written by a "Mrs. Traill"? I did not foresee then the puzzles of an altogether dif-

ferent kind in which that often-reread story would come to involve me. For some 55 years later I am in the throes of preparing a scholarly edition of the same book, which was published originally in England in 1852 as *Canadian Crusoes: A Tale of the Rice Lake Plains*.

Despite my early devotion, I don't believe that I ever saw the book again until about two years ago. It was specifically for the recovery or restoration of just such "lost" or maltreated works that the Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts (CEECT) was established. Based at Carleton University's Department of English, under the efficient direction of Mary Jane Edwards, the Centre has undertaken, in the words of its submission to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, to produce by "researching, editing, and preparing for publication," "scholarly editions" of some of the "landmarks of early Canadian prose." With funding by the council and Carleton, work is proceeding on such classic texts as *The History of Emily Montague*, *Wacousta*, and *Roughing It in the Bush*. When it was suggested that I undertake to edit Mrs. Traill's book I could visualize only that dog-eared copy with its grey-green cover decorated by a swastika — you can see how long ago that was — with what I now realize were quite foreign, anachronistic illustrations; the only edition I had ever seen.

Since then I have handled a great many different copies in my search for that key object, the copy-text on which the scholarly edition is to be based. Eventually I managed to unearth four main editions — the original 1852 edition by Hall, Virtue in England; the 1853 American edition published by C.S. Francis of New York; Hall, Virtue's second edition of 1859; and an 1882 edition put out in England by Nelson's — and 17 subsequent impressions of these original four editions. This stage of the search, the collecting of copies to be collated and compared with the aid of light-table and computer by the CEECT staff in Ottawa, could be completed on this side of the Atlantic through the extensive holdings of Toronto libraries supplemented by the resources available by inter-library loan.

Less straightforward was the second stage, the search for primary materials — letters, journals, manuscripts — that might still exist after 130 years. This part of the job was made much easier by the work of Carl Ballstadt, Elizabeth Hopkins, and Michael Peterman on the letters of Catharine and her sister Susanna Moodie, both of whom belonged to the famous "literary Stricklands" who settled near Peterborough. Just as accessible were the papers of the

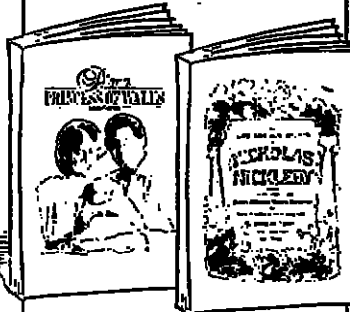
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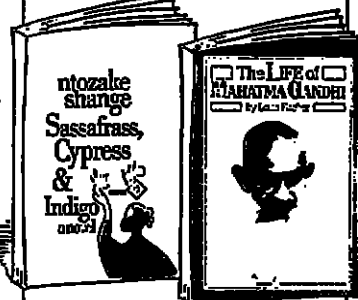
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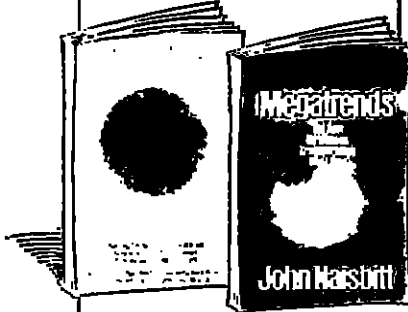
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Traill family and Catharine's manuscripts in the Public Archives of Canada. The latter, survivors of the fire that destroyed the Traills' log house in 1857, were interesting but too fragmentary for my purposes.

In the hope of finding additional material and of tracing the publishing history of *Canadian Crusoes*, I crossed the Atlantic to London, where the novel first appeared in 1852. The laborious search through the conventional sources — the British Library (formerly the British Museum), the Department of Manuscripts, the Royal Commission on Historical Documents, the Public Archives of Canada in Chancery Lane — was disappointing. I think that I had half expected to be disappointed, but one works on the principle that no possibility can be left uninvestigated. More interesting, partly because of the towns themselves, was the search through the county archives of Norfolk and Suffolk, where the Stricklands lived before emigrating to Upper Canada. One authority for that region is Angus Wilson, who lives near Bury St. Edmunds, where the West Suffolk archives are located. When I telephoned him on the insistence of a mutual friend, the names of Catharine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie meant nothing to him

— I had come to expect that in Great Britain — but my mention of Agnes Strickland, their sister, brought an immediate reaction: "Oh yes, *Queens of England* Agnes Strickland." Unfortunately he was leaving for a whirlwind lecture tour in North America, including Toronto, that evening, so I couldn't see him when I arrived in Bury St. Edmunds. Perhaps missing him was not really so unfortunate, for I soon recalled my rude review of his latest novel, *Setting the World on Fire*. (Then again, perhaps his clipping service does not cover *Books in Canada*.) My visits, made in typical miserable, raw, wet East Anglian weather, were quite unrewarding; I turned up nothing new.

That left one major possibility: the records of publishers and printers, a faint chance after 130 years. Despite false starts and deviations, my hopes were raised by having tracked down the successors of Hall, Virtue, the original 1852 publishers. Then came a blow: in 1941 their records were wiped out by a direct bomb hit in the Blitz. The original printers, still operating, short of space, had junked their early files. Nelson's, who had published *Canadian Crusoes* as *Lost in the Backwoods* in 1882, had unloaded their papers on Edinburgh University.

Ignoring a discouraging reply from the university librarians, I took a "fast" train — being Sunday, it turned out to be just the opposite — to Edinburgh. There I was confronted with a room in the stacks strewn with bundles of papers, unsorted, uncatalogued, undusted, some in locked volumes, keys missing: a daunting mess. After dreary hours of random digging, quite by chance I happened on a bundle labelled "Toronto Papers." In it were two crucial letters, dating Nelson's purchase of the copyright of *Canadian Crusoes* in 1867; but, frustratingly, not naming the seller. Was it Catharine or her original English publishers? Immediately I went south to the records office at Kew, outside London, to see who owned the copyright. No entries. No one had registered the book. Impatient, I flew home to recheck the letters. There it was: Nelson's offer to Catharine of \$40 for "the copyright of *The Crusoes* and 'Lady Mary.'" So far, fine.

But what of the American connection? Had the 1853 edition of C.S. Francis been pirated, like so many others in those days before international copyright agreements, from the Hall, Virtue edition of the previous year, or did Francis deal with Catharine directly? Once more, records of both publisher

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WILLIAM ARTHUR DEACON: A CANADIAN LITERARY LIFE  
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University of Toronto Press

THE KNOT by Tim Wynne-Jones  
McClelland and Stewart

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and printer had vanished. Again the answer turned up in a few words in one of Catharine's letters: "Francis sent me a nice present." Next question: how did Catharine, living in the backwoods of Upper Canada, know about this relatively obscure New York publisher? A mystery — until quite recently one of her letters to another New York publisher, in which she thanked George Putnam for passing her novel on to C.S. Francis, chanced to come up for auction. At the moment there is one more problem: What was the relation between the two publishers named on the 1853 title page — C.S. Francis of New York and

Crosby, Nichols of Boston? So far, I don't know. I hope that in the introduction to the CEECT edition I'll not have to resort to some vague word like "evidently." Perhaps I'll be lucky again.

So two years later the guest for *Crusoes* continues. "Search" or "research": what is entailed? Certainly persistence, mobility, and adaptability; but also, apparently, to counter natural human error, fires, and bombs, a great deal of what some charitably call "educated guessing" and others might call just blind luck.

—RUPERT SCHIEDER

## ENGLISH, OUR ENGLISH

'My life,' mourns our honourable watchman,  
'has been garbage, because it has  
always been wrapped up in newspapers.' Pity!

By **BOB BLACKBURN**

HERE IS A HEADLINE from the *Globe and Mail* that I wish I had not noticed: "Expos wait and see."

The story explained that the baseball club had decided not to sign a contract with pay-TV interests until it knew more about the prospects of the new medium.

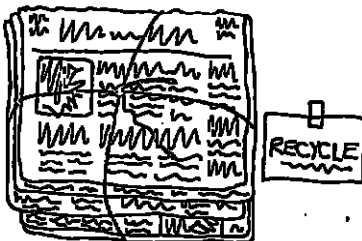
*Wait and see* is so well entrenched that I'm not going to rail at its use as I am forever doing in this space about its disreputable cousin, *try and*. In Coventry in 1040 someone may have said to Peeping Tom, "You're wasting your time sitting at that window," and he may have said, "I'll wait and see." That would have been precise usage. (Please do not write to tell me he subsequently was made blind.)

I see nothing wrong with saying *wait and see* when I mean that I will delay making a decision until I know more. But, like many idioms, this one can cause trouble in some situations, and there is no environment more hostile to this sort of expression than the newspaper headline, which is traditionally mired in the present tense.

In headline English, "Expos wait and see" means that the Expos waited and, sooner or later, saw something. "Expos wait to see" would tell us that the Expos are waiting to see something. That, in fact, is what the story said, and what the headline should have said. *See* as a verb is given more than 16 columns in the

*OED*. That should suggest to us that we sometimes might be wise to seek a more precise word or phrase.

*My life*, I guess, has been garbage, because it has always been wrapped up in newspapers. But I do not know much about the origins of headline English. (I would appreciate being told of any good book on the subject.) I do know that, contrary to the teachings of Hollywood movies, reporters and editors do not talk in headlines. And I know that there are reasons — the need for spatial brevity being the main one — for headline English as it is used in newspapers. But there is no good reason whatsoever for the current and widespread use of head-



line English on television news broadcasts, and I hereby invite any broadcaster to justify his misuse of it. Time is money in broadcasting, just as space is money in newspaper publishing, but broadcasters' use of headline English does not result in a significant saving of

time. Headline English is used by broadcasters not for the sake of economy but in the hope that it will make them be taken seriously as journalists. They should be judged accordingly.

**MORE ON HONORIFICS:** Don Munro (PC, Esquimalt-Saanich) has written me to point out that while any MP is properly referred to in the Commons as "the Honourable Member for [whatever riding]," he is not entitled to the attachment of the prefix "Hon." to his name unless he has been sworn in as a member of the Privy Council. (I had said that MPs were entitled to be called "honourable," and he has me on a technicality. I don't know just how much less than honourable they become outside the House.)

Anyway, Munro is one of the more conscientious talkers in the Green Chamber, and his was the second letter in as many days to complain correctly about the increasingly common misuse of *both*. "When 'both sides meet' during labour negotiations, with whom do they meet?" Munro wonders.

The other letter cited an article in this magazine (tskl tskl, chaps) wherein something was said to the effect that "both A and B had the same score" — the *both* obviously being superfluous.

"This can be blamed on both the federal government as well as on its provincial counterpart" is a ludicrous but astonishingly common mistake, as is "He was despised both by his wife and his mother-in-law" (instead of ". . . by both . . .")

Does it matter? "I think both in questions of clarity and graceful expression that it does." What in hell does that mean?

*Both* should always be given a close look by both writer and reader to determine that it is both necessary and correctly placed, and then, in a sentence like this, should be excised.

**FOOTNOTES:** I am puzzled at being criticized for using *coin* as a verb. It has been a verb for at least 600 years.

I frequently read of something being proved (or proven) "conclusively" and wonder how something might be proved inconclusively. Inconclusive proof, I think, must be at least moderately unique. But the fact is that *prove* is a word in transition (and has been for centuries), and is weaker in this context. It is most commonly used nowadays to mean establish as being true, but even modern dictionaries cheerfully allow it to mean test or try, although today's writers seem to find little use for that sense of it.

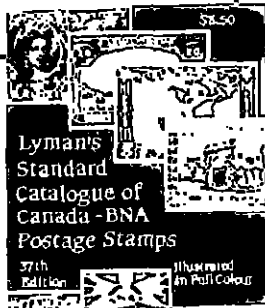
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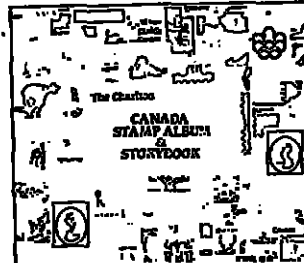
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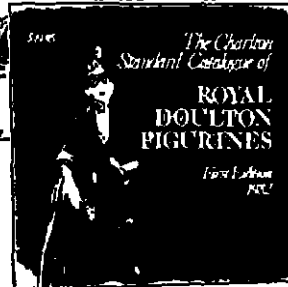
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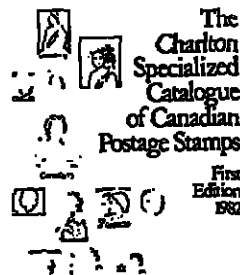
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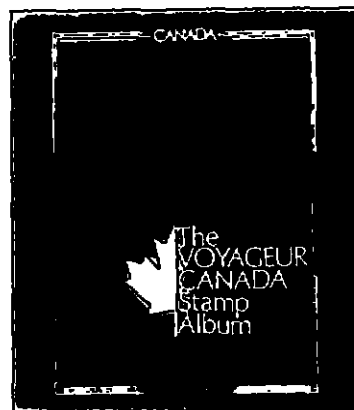
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# OLD ACQUAINTANCE

'At my age, you don't make new friends,' says Morley Callaghan, who has just turned 80, but the warmth of an old friendship lingers on

By *NORMAN LEVINE*

AT MCGILL, just after the Second World War, the only Canadian writer who meant anything to me was Morley Callaghan. I hadn't read him that much at the time, but it was what he represented that was important — a link with the writers, mainly Americans, who left North America to go to Europe. For I knew that was the way I would go as well.

I met him in 1960, in the autumn. In those days I would make infrequent short trips back to Canada from England. Most of the visit I would spend with my parents in Ottawa but I would also go for a day or two to Montreal (to see McGill friends) and Toronto (mainly to see Robert Weaver and Robert Fulford).

On this particular visit I had seen Weaver for lunch and Fulford was to come to the hotel several hours later. I was alone in the hotel and wanted to talk to someone. So I phoned up Callaghan and told him who I was and that he was the only writer here I wanted to see.

He said he would be right over.

We met in the hotel bar. We were about the same height. I asked him questions, mostly questions about Scott Fitzgerald.

"What did he look like?"

"Like those ads for a Brooks Brothers shirt."

Then he told me how Fitzgerald noticed small things.

And how he would press a handkerchief by wetting it then spreading it out flat against the glass of a window for the sun to dry. He also mentioned Hemingway. And said he was thinking of writing a book about his time in Paris.

When I told him that Fulford was due in a few minutes he said he would go. He thought Fulford was coming to do an interview with me about my work and he didn't want to distract from this by being there. As he was leaving he asked where could he see some of my short stories? I told him I had two coming out in *The Montrealer*. He said he would look out for them.

Back in England, whenever he had a book out I reviewed it in the *Sunday Times*. And I remember being surprised how in what I thought was a very materialistic society (I had not long published *Canada Made Me*) here was someone concerned with innocence.

MY NEXT MEETING with Callaghan came almost 21 years later, in the late spring of 1981. I had come back to Canada to live in Toronto. Once a month I would see Robert Weaver for lunch in the Hampton Court Hotel across from the CBC on Jarvis Street. Callaghan also saw Weaver once a month for lunch in the Hampton Court. So I suggested to Weaver perhaps we could all have lunch together. And he arranged this.

Callaghan looked shorter than when I last saw him. But otherwise it was the same. We talked about writers and writing and after lunch Weaver went to the CBC across the road and

Morley and I walked up Jarvis to Bloor, then turned right.

We walked slowly and talked about a variety of things. About sport — we both had been pitchers. About life — he said we were just tourists. (As I had said this in an interview for *Books in Canada* the year before I didn't know if he was telling me that he had read it and approved or did he really believe this?) I said I thought it was meaningless, but we gave meaning to it by our lives. He said that there were some questions we couldn't answer.

He mentioned that he had made a visit to Rome.

"How was it?" I asked.

"Like coming home."

Passing a supermarket he said he had to do a bit of shopping. (His wife wasn't well and he looked after her). He picked a few small things from

the shelves for him and his wife, and food for the dog. Then we walked on towards where he lived. Going across a wooden bridge, over a ravine, we met his son Barry. He introduced me. And after we had chatted slowly for a minute or two, he said to Barry:

"He knows Francis Bacon."

HE LIVES IN A large comfortable old house with his wife Loretto and an oversize off-white poodle-like dog. He is proud of the house and it looks as if it has been lived in. Muted colours, high ceilings, oil paintings on the walls, Eskimo sculpture on the mantelpiece. As you come in, to the right, there is a small room, like a den, filled with photographs of himself and Loretto over the years with some well-known people.

After that first meeting he asked me to come and see him again. And I did.



Morley Callaghan in 1929

Now, whenever I phone him he inevitably says:  
"Why don't you come over. How about tonight?"  
I do. And we talk freely.

He is a good listener. And he speaks well. There is an economy of words. He doesn't gush. Nor does he start asking too many questions . . . as if to say, it will all come out in its own time. You can sense the warmth, the courtesy in the man. But also the mental toughness, and the scepticism.

He senses what you want to hear. In one of the early evenings I was with a friend who had lived in Paris for several years and she was going to show me France that summer. That evening he talked about Paris. He talked about it as if it was last week. And Loretto was looking and listening as if she was hearing these things for the first time.

From what he was saying I had the impression that he had lived in Paris for several years. I was a bit surprised when, later, he told me he lived there nine months.

He can tell good stories. And now that time has done its work the stories sound more like short stories. I remember one he told about Djuna Barnes — how beautiful she was in the Paris days — whenever she came into a room people stopped and looked. And Robert McAlmon — how, in Paris, he had money and helped writers and published their early work. Both returned to America. McAlmon ended up working for a relative somewhere in the Midwest, in some hardware store, living in a single room, poor. And Djuna Barnes — in New York, also broke. Needing some money to fix her teeth, she thought of McAlmon. And wrote to him to see if he could send her the money. . . .

**DID HE HAVE any regrets?**

Yes, he said. In his treatment of Ford Madox Ford.

It happened one night in those Paris days when he and Loretto went to see Ford and there was Alan Tate and his wife

and another poet. Ford brought out a cake. He suggested that they all write a sonnet. And the one who wrote the best sonnet would win the cake.

Callaghan said he could only write two lines and quoted them:

*I would rather be chasing fly balls in the park  
Than sit beside Ford with his groping in the dark.*

But a reader can see this side of him surfacing again in *That Summer in Paris*, when he is writing about James Joyce's wife Nora. After meeting her, for the first time, he sees her ample bosom, remembers Molly Bloom's soliloquy. And, for a while, can't look her in the face.

Another regret is that he hasn't written what he calls "a blockbuster" (a best-seller, on the American best-seller lists, with a film at the end of it). But he is very proud that the Russians have done a couple of his books and are doing two more. And that they have published them in editions of over 100,000. Then he told me about the Chinese interest, the Bulgarians, the Rumanians. And that two of his books in Canada, over the years, have also sold more than 100,000 copies. . . .

I mentioned that one or two Canadian writers, in the past, were widely translated. But, then, no one was teaching Canadian literature in other countries the way they do now.

"You need to have about six or seven writers — to be able to teach a literature," he said.

**I HAVE JUST REREAD *That Summer in Paris*. It's a fine book. The voice is Callaghan's speaking voice.**

I have to tell how Paris came to have such importance as a place for me, and if possible, what I was like too in those days. It can only be done by telling where I was and what I was doing in 1923 when I was twenty and in my second year at College in Toronto. Five foot eight, with dark brown curly hair and blue eyes, I was not overweight then. I was fast with my tongue and, under

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pressure, fast with my fist, but they tell me that I moved around rather lazily.

There is also quite a bit in the book about writing. He says how suspicious he was of metaphor. Things should not be described like something else. But exactly as they were.

In the mid-1960s I was putting together a small anthology of short stories for Macmillan England and Macmillan Canada called *Canadian Winter's Tales*. For Callaghan I picked his short story "It Must Be Different." I picked it because it seemed that he was trying to trap an area of feeling I hadn't seen anyone else attempt. (Besides the religious sense in his work there is also a strong social one.) Recently he told me it was the first time that that story had been put in an anthology. Now others were doing the same, with other stories, that no one had previously selected.

JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS I was having lunch with Weaver and he told me that Morley had handed in a new novel. No, he hadn't had a chance to read it as yet, but they would be doing

something on *Anthology* about it.

Later, when I spoke to Morley on the phone I told him I was glad about the new novel. I had heard of it from Weaver.

"What did he think of it?" he asked quickly.

"He hadn't had time to read it as yet," I said.

I used to think it was only at the start, when you're young, that you need encouragement. Now I know that a writer needs it in middle age. And perhaps even more so as you get older.

He doesn't see many people. "At my age, you don't make new friends. You don't want to get involved."

But he is accessible in a different way. Some school children from out of town, through their teacher, wanted to come and see him when they were in Toronto. He thought there would be only a few. But when he opened the door in walked the whole class and they filled up the large front room.

The last time I saw him, I arrived around 7:30 p.m. Sometime past midnight I got up to leave.

"Do you have to go now?" he asked. "The evening has just started." □

#### FEATURE REVIEW

## The novelist as poet

Lawrence Durrell captures the mood  
of the past for us to revisit, if not in safety  
at least in a bearable kind of order

By ALBERTO MANGUEL

*Constance or Solitary Practices*, by Lawrence Durrell, Stoddart, 393 pages, \$16.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7737 2002 2).

IN THE DYING LIGHT before evening, in a bare Mediterranean room, an old man sits in a fragile wicker armchair, looking at the photographer with a faint smile on his face. We may believe we are staring at a portrait of Lawrence Durrell (his photograph on a postcard sits on my desk as I write), but the truth is that Durrell, as always, is staring at us. He is there to observe. *Constance or Solitary Practices* is a treasury of observations, the third in a planned series of five novels, set one inside the other like a set of Russian dolls. Each can be read independently, but the faithful reader who has followed the game step by step is rewarded by new-born images reflected in the other mirror-novels, each vaster in scope than the previous one, each acting on the others like a dream within a dream. *Constance* is the log-book of a poet.

Our times have not been kind to poets who venture into prose. Writing about Durrell in an essay precariously called

"The Novel Today" (in *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*), Gilbert Phelps notes his dislike of him. He compares him unfavourably to Joyce Cary and Anthony Powell, complains about the superficiality of Durrell's characters, denounces the lack of sympathy between them and the reader, and finally credits Durrell only with "energy" that Phelps sees as "almost entirely cerebral." He says nothing of Durrell's poetic vision, nothing about Durrell's intention to create a picture of emotions ("not snapshots of people"), nothing about Durrell's concern with a clear vision of time, eternity, sexual longing, and the artist's despair in his effort to portray all this. "It is not the meaning that we need," reads one of his poems written in the 1970s, "but sight." With *The Alexandria Quartet* Durrell achieved part of this purpose; with *Monsieur, Livia*, and now *Constance* his achievement becomes even more evident. More than Powell (because Durrell is a better man with words), more than Cary (because his scope is wider), Lawrence Durrell has set out to observe our recent past and capture its mood, its essence.

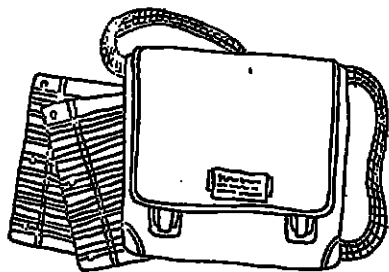
Durrell is not a historian. "For the historian," he writes in *Constance*, "everything becomes history, there are no surprises, for it repeats itself eternally, of that he is sure. In the history books it will always be a Friday the thirteenth." Durrell knows that a writer does not change the present; he changes the past. He educates our recollections, bullies the ghosts of things that were into giving accounts of themselves, organizes dates and events and places in what Durrell calls "the filing cabinet of his memory." Durrell the writer signposts the dusky regions gone by for us to revisit if not in safety, at least in a kind of order that the brain will grasp and the heart will bear.

Durrell's country is the world at war in the 1930s and '40s: Alexandria, Paris, Geneva, and especially Avignon, the city of Rabelais, whose two towers are called "He-who-speaks" and "He-who-grumbles." Through these ghostly cities — ghostly because Durrell describes them as they once were, in days gone by — move the passions and desires of men and women. Writers, Nazi politicians, women in love, spies whose knowledge

of the Secret Service comes from the bad style (not the plot) of Sherlock Holmes stories, characters created by characters, are invoked to say their piece. The plot is complex, too intricate to summarize, and ultimately not essential.

The art of the novel and the erotic sciences are two related subjects with which almost all of these people are obsessed. There are wild theories about women ("The power that women have to inflict punishment on men is quite unmanly, quite terrible; they can reduce us to mentally deficient infants with a single glance"), Hitler ("It is not cupidity or rapacity which drives the Führer but desire for once to let the dark side of man have his full sway, stand to his full height"), sex ("an exchange of semen for milk"). In an essay on Victor Hugo, Stevenson noted that "the artistic result of a romance, what is left upon the memory by any really powerful and artistic novel, is something so complicated and refined that it is difficult to put a name upon it." In the case of *Constance* that something mainly conveys a feeling of loneliness. *Solitary Practices* (the subtitle) refers not only to the masturbatory (that is, fruitless, egotistic) pleasures; it describes men and women in their lonely quest, above whom hovers Freud, the god custodian, "Old Fraud" as one of the characters calls him.

But, as in *The Alexandria Quartet*, the convoluted, tortured characters are superseded by the writing, which acts as a distancing, wise hand between the reader and the novel. It has the abstract quality of music: "The women . . . glide along like the unconscious patricians which they are, and their bear-like, gloating walk seems to draw its rhythm from the pace of the Nile's green blood, flowing steadily from some distant wound in the heart of Africa." The language, however, can also be clean-cut and explicit: "How beautiful they are, little children. . . . Each carries its



destiny in its little soul — a destiny which slowly unrolls like a prayer-mat." (Notice how the phrase is saved by the final twist.) Even the epigrams are so astounding they barely need a character to speak: "In Egypt one acts upon impulse as there is no rain to make one reflect."

Henry Miller, who was Durrell's close friend, wrote his books out of his own immediate past, setting himself as an excuse for others to understand his age. Durrell chose to make up the characters that illustrate his subject. But the past they deal with is finally the same. What makes Durrell's exploration richer and more dangerous than Miller's is not the subject: it is the wonderful, neglected ability to put things into words, to spin webs of glass out of the language, to be that endangered species — a novelist of genius. □

## REVIEW

# Ariana, then and now

By LIBBY SCHEIER

*Junction*, by Elizabeth Brewster, Black Moss Press, 147 pages, \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88753 089 3).

ELIZABETH BREWSTER IS a traditionalist, and some would like to dismiss her for it. This is unfair: Brewster writes intelligently about such modern themes as illusion and reality, individual freedom and fate, and — surprise — feminism, themes that figure importantly in her poetry as well as in her second novel, *Junction*. There is, however, a feeling of neatness and restraint and propriety, a certain primness, to both the style and content that sometimes keeps the reader from becoming fully engrossed in the book.

For example, when one of the characters tells a personal wartime tale about a young boy who deserts, is captured, and executed, the passion and emotion of the passage contrasts with the well-mannered and unflustered detail of so much of the rest of the book. Brewster might argue that she did not intend to write a gripping book, but rather a more peaceful and reflective one — a Wordsworthian novel, as it were. Indeed, the book's main character and the one who appears to mirror the author's attitudes — Ariana — reacts with great discomfort to the war story and is relieved when the teller, her father, regains his usual control and appearance of equanimity.

The plot centres on Ariana, a woman in her 50s who both dreams about and in

fact returns to the past, visiting her family in the days when she was a teenager and, later, a generation before her birth, inhabiting the body of an aunt after whom she was named. At the end of the novel it is suggested that more such visits are in store for her.

This familial, reverse-epic/science fiction format is the envelope for an exploration of the themes. The major one appears for the most part to be a classical Christian questioning of free will and predestination. Brewster bumps off from the traditional Christian mode from time to time, taking a more modern stance about dreams within dreams ("Am I dreaming you or are you dreaming me?" one character asks another), and casting the free will/predestination debate more in an existential framework of freedom of decision versus the fate of random accident. Brewster's style and approach to philosophical discussion (the characters address their questions directly rather than letting them be indirectly filtered to the reader through events and character development) bring Nathaniel Hawthorne to mind, however, not Jean-Paul Sartre, despite the recurring foray into more modern terminology. There is certainly a 19th-century feel to much of the writing.

While it is not a major theme of the book, Brewster returns several times to feminist issues — without calling them that — from conversations about women getting the vote in the 1910 section, through the marriage and/or career discussion in 1948, to the remarks in 1980 about the unfairly lonely social situation of a widow in her 50s.

Brewster is also concerned with time and the idea of progress; she appears to agree with one of her characters who states that all progress is an illusion. The real situation of women in *Junction* is the same in 1910, 1948, and 1980, and there is the same violence, the same false preachers, in each era. There has never been a time of innocence, says the wise, time-travelling fortune-teller, Mary Ellen. Ariana can thus travel easily through time — what's the difference? — she might as well be in one time as another.

One cannot escape the feeling that Brewster is pushing herself to catch up with modernism in this novel — and let's leave post-modernism out of this — when she would really be more comfortable with a more traditional approach and style. She handles philosophical and religious ideas with sharp and easy intelligence, however, and is always in control of her smoothly constructed narrative, making each event, description, or conversation serve one of the book's themes or story lines. □

## View from the edge

By ANN D. CROSBY

*Women and Children First*, by Michele Landsberg, Macmillan, 256 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 7715 9726 6).

IN ATTEMPTING TO define her particular brand of feminism, Michele Landsberg borrows a phrase from geographical jargon: "The edge effect," she writes, "describes the scientific principle that more life will be found where two ecosystems meet than at the heart of either of the two systems." In feminist terms, Landsberg puts herself on the edge between the radical feminists on one hand and the blinkered traditionalists on the other.

It is a bold and generous position for someone like Landsberg to take, primarily because it is open to criticism from women themselves. The traditionalist, the wife-and-mother woman who is most often the victim of wife beating, desertion, poverty, and unfair work laws, can understandably question the sensitivity of the author with her glamorous, well-paying career, her secure marriage, privileged children, and exotic travel. The radical feminist, on the other hand, can reasonably accuse Landsberg of thinking she can have her cake and eat it too, of refusing to pay the price of change, of equivocating.

Yet Michele Landsberg knows what she is talking about precisely because she is managing two careers and because both, her parenting and her writing, are rooted in women's issues. Whereas other women in her position smugly assume they got there by themselves, leaving the rest of womankind feeling inadequate by comparison, Landsberg braves criticism and extends a helping hand.

*Women and Children First* is a collection of the author's Toronto *Star* columns, meticulously chosen and strung together with strong connecting prose to reflect "the subject matter that most touches all of us: the kindling of a feminist consciousness, mingled with delight in and concern for all our children."

On political issues Landsberg excels, writing with honesty and conviction and wisely supporting her passion with statistics. We know that statistics can be

manipulated to support any argument, but in discussions of women and poverty, the conditioned roles of women in society, and equal pay for work of equal value, the statistics speak for themselves. There can be no arguing with the fact that 41 per cent of all female-led families live below the poverty line as opposed to seven per cent of male-led families. Nor can we hedge about conditioning when studies show that television, our society's reflection, presents us with a world where men form 73 per cent of the population. That equal pay for work of equal value legislation is necessary is also incontestable when Landsberg points out that the mainly female Ontario government switchboard operators need a high-school education and a year of experience to qualify for their jobs, but are paid \$40 less per week than Ontario government male parking-lot attendants who need only grade eight and no experience.

Landsberg's writing and research continue to impress and convince when she discusses more directly confrontational issues such as wife beating, rape, and pornography, but here she disappoints slightly in not approaching the "why" of these issues. Understanding why men rape and beat is central to stopping it, and from a writer who can define the problem so lucidly we expect an honest grappling with the answer. She quite rightly raises anger, but a sympathetic understanding of men as well as women in these largely emotional issues would be more constructive and therefore more natural from one who inhabits "the edge."

Landsberg's more personal treatment of parenting and the future of the family is refreshing. However, in a chapter entitled "Superwoman Can't Fly" she undoes herself. Here she presents a collection of personal columns in which she expressly attempts to deal with "the chaos and near disintegration in the life of a working wife." A working wife-and-mother's problems centre on guilt, changing roles within a marriage, marital career competition, and balancing husband-wife-parenting responsibilities with career demands. Unfortunately, Landsberg describes the working wife's chaos as having to do with beauty parlours, shopping on the fly, and managing a home by phone when the cleaning lady fails to show. The chapter is supposed to be light, but by concentrating on trite frustrations and ignoring the true problems the author gives the impression that superwoman does, in fact, fly. Not that there is anything wrong with flying, it's just that it isn't the laundry that keeps us on the ground. □

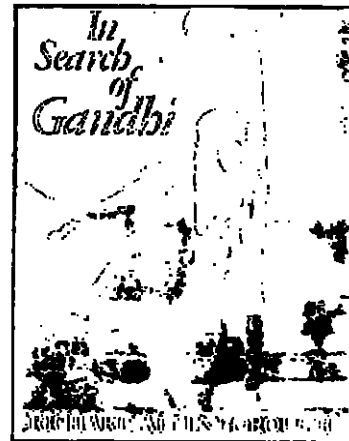


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## Double trouble

By GERARD McNEIL

**For Services Rendered: Leslie James Bennett and the RCMP Security Service, by John Sawatsky, Doubleday, 339 pages, \$22.95 cloth (ISBN 0 385 17660 0).**

WHEN I ASKED Fred Gibson, the deputy solicitor general who is setting up a civilian agency to replace the discredited RCMP Security Service, whether he had read *For Services Rendered*, he replied with a broad grin, "With great interest." Then he sped away with Bert Giroux, the RCMP deputy commissioner who is caretaker of the Security Service while the new agency is being formed. Giroux had looked unhappy when I asked him the same question, but he nodded that he had indeed read the book. He wouldn't express an opinion on it. But the fact is that *For Services Rendered* is a bestseller at the Alta Vista seminary where the Mounties make their headquarters. The "need to know" principle (only those who need to know are told) reigns there, and as a result nobody ever seems to know anything. Rumour and paranoia abound.

So Sawatsky's book about Leslie James Bennett, the Welsh-born civilian member who was forced out of the security service in 1972 after coming under suspicion by his uniformed peers, is a breath of fresh air. Sawatsky doesn't reach any conclusions in *For Services Rendered*, but his title suggests that after 32 years of intelligence work, Bennett got a bad deal. He was forced into a medical retirement at 52 on a meagre pension, and has since been living in Perth, Australia, doing odd jobs, unable to get a job with government anywhere in the Western world. A consolation is that he looks quite chipper in a photograph taken in Perth, striding down a sunny street in shorts and sandals, carrying a bottle.

Bennett came under suspicion because between 1954 and 1970, when he ran the Russian intelligence desk, promising counter-espionage cases consistently went wrong. Sawatsky examines these cases in detail. He is a truly amazing reporter (the book is dedicated to Allan Fotheringham, "who taught me that journalism is more than a job"), and

every side of a case is examined. At a number of places in the book I was convinced that Bennett must be a double agent, working for the KGB. But by the end of each chapter, after Sawatsky had canvassed all possible explanations, what had appeared obvious was no longer so.

The most interesting chapters deal with Operation Keystone, a 1950s episode in which the Mounties thought they had turned an illegal Soviet agent code-named Gideon. Gideon had picked up a Bronx accent as a child in New York, where his father was a Soviet trade official, and on their return to Moscow he was trained as an agent (microdots and all that) and sent to Montreal with a new identity. He was supposed to run a watch repair shop and await orders.

Instead, he fell in love with a soldier's wife in Kingston, Ont., confessed his identity to her (she didn't know what the KGB was), and finally, at her counselling, turned himself in to the RCMP. He wanted to be free of espionage, which was boring. He wanted to settle down with his love. But the Mounties wanted a double agent, so they had the soldier and his wife transferred to the Yukon. Gideon was called back to Moscow on leave, never to return. He had been betrayed, but by whom?

The answer turned out to be Long Knife, now a Winnipeg businessman, then a debt-ridden RCMP constable who, given the leaky internal security of the RCMP, had come to know about Gideon.

During the Second World War, Long Knife had enlisted with an RCMP unit and risen to captain. When he returned to the RCMP he was busted to constable and moved into security work. He had no qualifications for it, and Jimmy Lemieux, then head of the service, used him as an errand boy. "Long Knife was pulled off surveillance from time to time to pick up Lemieux's family at the train station, deliver his laundry, and drive to Montreal to pick up his favourite comics," Sawatsky writes. He was also used to deliver a plain white envelope each month to the president's office at Bell Canada. It contained \$1,000 in cash, "For services rendered." When the president's office complained that the payment hadn't been made for two months, suspicion fell quickly on Long Knife. He was given one week to repay it. Desperate, he went to the Soviets, exposed Gideon, and was paid \$4,200.

When he later confessed to this, he was taken to court, prosecuted for kiting a cheque, and drummed out of the RCMP. Bennett came under suspicion in this case because he'd gone fishing with Long Knife.

Bizarre, isn't it? *For Services Rendered* is full of such episodes. The Mounties poison a maple tree on the Russian Embassy grounds. The Russians plant another. The wife of a newly arrived KGB colonel drives to a super-market parking lot and gets into a car with a man. When she ducks down as the car heads for a motel, the Mounties assume she doesn't want to be seen. Instead she is. . . . But this story is so funny and so human it must be left to the reader to savour. □

## Man about the House

By MICHEL HORN

**Stanley Knowles: The Man from Winnipeg North Centre, by Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, Western Producer Prairie Books, 226 pages, \$17.95 cloth (ISBN 0 88833 100 2).**

THIS BOOK IS a labour of love. The author, Prof. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff of the University of Ottawa's history department, has known Stanley Knowles almost all her life. In 1944, when she was only three, the MP for Winnipeg North Centre became a boarder in her parents' Ottawa home. He was still there almost 40 years later. "He was in fact part of the furniture of the Mann household: family plans for travel, for construction, for grandmothers' visits, and for moving were all made with him in mind." Trofimenkoff's affection for her subject is evident on almost every page.

Stanley Knowles has spent most of his adult life and 36 of the last 40 years in Parliament. Born in Los Angeles in 1908 to Canadian-born working class parents, he came to Canada permanently in 1926. Already a skilled printer, he entered college in Manitoba and became a United Church minister. A fervent social gospel and an early member of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), he had a somewhat uneasy clerical career before he became a full-time politician in 1942. He entered the House at that time, having retained Winnipeg North Centre in a by-election necessitated by J.S. Woodsworth's death.

Once in Parliament Knowles made two causes peculiarly his own. One was pensions. He was shocked when his father — who strongly influenced him — was dismissed at age 59 as being "too old," without any claim to a pension from his employer. A good part of the book deals with Knowles's dogged attempts to improve pensions and pension rights for Canadians, and with some of his successes in this realm.

The other of Knowles's causes has been Parliament itself. In order to ensure that his interests became widely known, he became a procedural expert. In the process he acquired a deep concern for the effective operation of the House of Commons, and for the supremacy of Parliament. One chapter discusses the challenge to that supremacy contained in the Pipeline debate of 1956. Another deals with John Diefenbaker's 1957 offer for Knowles to become Speaker of the House. (More informal offers of the speakership came from the Liberals in 1956 and 1964.) Knowles, however, had no desire ever to be prevented from pursuing his humanitarian causes.

This book is episodic. Knowles did not wish to write an autobiography, but he was willing to talk at length with

Trofimenkoff about various important events in his life. Each chapter focuses on such an event, beginning with the death of his mother in 1919. In every chapter "the tale wove its way into the past and the future from that starting point." The strength of this technique is that it allows the author to pull together related aspects of Knowles's life. A weakness is that the chronology sometimes becomes confusing. The author also makes repeated use of the rather pointless observation that something that had not yet happened was still unknown.

The book is not a formal biography; Professor Trofimenkoff calls it a "biographical memoir." As a result we get neither Knowles's own reminiscences nor a critical account of his career. Indeed there is an element of hagiography: Knowles emerges virtually free of human fault or error. And he continues to seem rather dull and bloodless. Yet we learn that he feels hurts, his own and others', deeply. Aside from the death of his parents, the most shocking event of his life appears to have been his rejection by the voters in 1958, the year of the Diefenbaker landslide. By this time politics constituted much of his life as well as his job. He had a wife and

children to support, but for a while it was unclear how he would manage this. Rescue came in the form of a vice-presidency of the Canadian Labour Congress. He served in that capacity until he returned to the House of Commons in 1962. During his CLC years he played a key role in bringing about the CLC's transformation into the New Democratic Party.

One chapter aptly describes Knowles as "Best Supporting Actor." He has played a loyal second fiddle to CCF and NDP leaders from M.J. Coldwell to Ed Broadbent. In due time he became a sort of conscience to Parliament, and it is in that way that he is probably best known. The reputation is enviable and deserved. That he gained it in spite of major health problems — multiple sclerosis was diagnosed in 1946 — is proof of his drive and determination.

Trofimenkoff's book is not a major contribution to Canadian political history. It tells us little about the CCF, NDP, or the political process that is not already in print. However, it succeeds in doing what the author set about to do: it greatly increases our acquaintance with a man well worth knowing. For that we must be grateful. We must be grateful, too, for the book's reasonable price.

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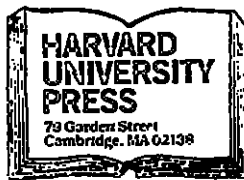


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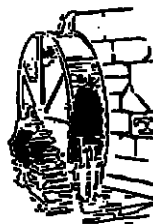
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One suspects that this is one of the many aspects of the book that its subject, now recovering from the stroke that he suffered in October, 1981, will certainly appreciate. □

## REVIEW

# Unholy war

By **MARIA HORVATH**

The Arab-Israeli Wars, by Chaim Herzog, Methuen, illustrated, 392 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 458 95820 4).

ORDINARILY, MILITARY history books have a limited appeal, but this book by Chaim Herzog deserves a wide audience. *The Arab-Israeli Wars* is a thoughtful and comprehensive study of Israel's 34-year fight for survival.

It is fitting that this book should come out when the conflict in Lebanon is still in the news. Reports in the media have been limited, often restricted to day-to-day coverage with little analysis of the causes of the war. Herzog reminds us that the fighting in Lebanon, like so many other conflicts, has a long and complex history. To understand the present, we must know the past.

Herzog is uniquely qualified to analyze the problems in the Middle East. He began his military career in the

British army in northwest Europe during the Second World War. In Israel he served as director of military intelligence, the first military governor of the West Bank of the Jordan, and was Israeli ambassador to the United Nations. He is currently a member of the Labour opposition in the Knesset, and was a supporter of the recent anti-Begin demonstration in Israel.

By no means is his book a jingoistic account of Israeli victories. He admits with candour Israeli mistakes and acknowledges acts of bravery on the other side. For example, he writes that "the Syrian soldier, once again, proved to be brave and fought determinedly" in the recent war in Lebanon. He praises Anwar Sadat's highly sophisticated deception plan that launched the 1973 Yom Kippur War, in which Sadat's misinformation campaign was so successful that he deceived not only Israeli intelligence but also the intelligence organizations of many other countries, including the United States.

The Middle-East comprises 21 Arab countries and one Jewish state. Most wars in this area during the past 30 years have been waged between the Arabs in a complex pattern of seesaw alliances. In 1970, for example, Jordan's King Hussein attacked the Palestine Liberation Organization forces within his country after they had set up a "state within a state" and tried to assassinate him. Taking advantage of this civil war, the Syrians invaded Jordan to "stab Hussein in the back." Israel, through the United States, offered to intervene to save Hussein, but with the help of his 40th Armoured Brigade, Hussein held off the Syrians and drove out the PLO. Only three years later, however, during the Yom Kippur War when the Israelis advanced toward Damascus, Hussein

sent that same 40th Armoured Brigade to help the Syrians repel the Israelis.

Unfortunately, the Arabs have often been united in one goal: to make every effort to annihilate Israel. There have been seven major conflicts between Israel and various alliances of Arabs.

Herzog writes, "The Middle East conflict has been a tragedy for all involved in it." Since 1948 thousands of people have been killed, millions of dollars wasted on war preparations and armaments, and hundreds of thousands of people left homeless. The 1948 war created two refugee problems, each encompassing approximately 800,000 people. When the state of Israel was established that year, the Arabs drove out the Jews in the Arab countries. These Jewish refugees were quickly absorbed by Israel.

But the tragedy of the second group of refugees still persists. During that war, when the Arabs, to their surprise, were defeated by the Jews, the Arab leaders advised the Arabs in Palestine (now Israel) to flee into the neighbouring Arab countries. They promised them that they would return with the Arab armies after their invasion of Palestine; this never happened. (About 150,000 Arabs remained and became citizens of Israel. Israel's population now includes about 15 per cent, or 550,000, Israeli Arabs.)

The Palestinian Arab refugees made several attempts, before the PLO was organized, to settle with Israel. In 1949, for example, their representatives tried to bring their case before the Palestinian Conciliation Commission in Lausanne to seek a compromise with Israel, but the Arab governments objected. These governments have used the refugees as political pawns, segregating them in refugee camps. As Herzog points out,

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"just one day's Arab oil revenues, even in 1949, would have sufficed to solve the entire Arab refugee problem." Instead, the refugee problem has widened. In 1965, the Arab countries set up the PLO which, among its many actions, established a "state within a state" in Lebanon and helped almost to destroy the only democratic Arab society.

Herzog also examines the role of the UN in the Middle East. Sometimes the organization has acted as an effective peace-keeping force, but often, under the control of the Arabs and the Communist bloc, it stepped in only when Israel was gaining the upper hand.

And what of the two superpowers? The Soviet Union has lavishly distributed sophisticated arms to the Arabs, encouraged them to fight Israel, at one time sent in 20,000 troops to help Egypt, and even threatened to intervene with airborne forces in the Yom Kippur War. U.S. influence in the region depends on its distribution of arms, especially to Israel, and its mediating efforts between the warring sides. Both countries see the area as a testing ground for new military strategy and weapons.

This book is not a soldier's record of personal reminiscences; we see little of Major-General Herzog. He focuses instead on the other generals, and the many officers, enlisted men, and civilians who have fought for this tiny nation. He has a lucid and direct style that helps one follow the complex strategies of armies in battle, which he describes so well. He also writes in a modest and unaffected tone, letting the facts speak for themselves. Readers will appreciate his clearly written prologues and summaries, which set each conflict in its proper context.

His descriptions of the battles detail both the close-up view from the ground and the overall perspective from above. As is clear from his accounts, modern warfare, even in the 20th century, cannot succeed on technology alone. The battles were won in large measure through the courage and determination of the men. Sometimes elements as prosaic as sunlight in the desert affected the outcome of a battle, and once, during the 1948 war, the hand-to-hand combat became so intimate that "ammunition ran out and men were locked in desperate 'cold-steel' encounters — Saudi Arabian soldiers even resorting to biting their attackers!"

Herzog remains hopeful that peace can come to the Middle East:

The area in most cases has moved away from a total rejection of Israel, to a debate on substantive issues. Israel has a peaceful border with Egypt. "Semi-peace" reigns along the Israeli border with Jordan, with over a million travellers a year crossing the Jordan in

both directions, in addition to tens of millions of dollars worth of trade annually. Israel's border with southern Lebanon is open at the so-called "Good Fence." If the process that has been developing will continue and the agreements reached at Camp David will be honoured, Israel and its neighbours will move forward slowly but inexorably towards peace. □

## REVIEW

# Arms and the man

By DAVID STAFFORD

**A Peculiar Kind of Politics: Canada's Overseas Ministry in the First World War**, by Desmond Morton, University of Toronto Press, 296 pages, \$22.50 cloth (ISBN 0 8020 5586 9).

IN 1915 Sam Hughes, the minister of militia and defence, was knighted by George V. The news was received in Canada with mixed feelings, and led one wit to coin a pun of which anyone might be proud. "Ah," he said, "Le roi Sam Hughes."

The rise and fall of Sam Hughes's private kingdom and its meaning for Canada's wartime development from a self-governing colony to an almost sovereign state provides the main drama concealed behind the careful academic prose of this scrupulous administrative history. Hughes is one of the most bizarre and unforgettable figures in Canadian history. The teetotal Orangeman and Conservative MP from Ontario first made his national mark when as a mere officer commanding a militia regiment he generously but unilaterally offered the British a Canadian contingent to fight against the Boers. This provoked a bitter feud with the British officer in command of Canadian forces, who denounced Hughes for his lack of judgement and insubordinate self-assertion.

Subsequently Hughes's bombastic claims to heroic action in South Africa led to his recall, after which he steadily nursed the increasingly paranoid conviction that his true valour had been deliberately ignored. His personal disappointments were transmuted into generalized attacks on a variety of

targets, and his outrageous attacks on the Americans, the British, and on distant authority in Ottawa were manna to frustrated nationalists. For a nation that relishes colourful characters Hughes was a gift, and was rewarded with great public popularity. But his hour of glory was yet to come.

In 1911 Hughes was made minister of militia and defence in Borden's Conservative government and was in charge of mobilization when the Great War broke out. It was a moment made for Sam. His patriotic zeal and energy knew no bounds. Borden had asked for a first contingent of 20,000 volunteers for duty overseas. Within a few weeks Hughes had established a vast camp of 30,000 at Valcartier, an almost private domain through which he would occasionally ride on horseback wearing a sword and feathered hat and dispensing indiscriminate largesse. He promoted nonentities to colonelcies and gave generous contracts for matériel to his own initiative — some of it utterly useless, such as the several thousand spades designed by one of his secretaries to act as both trenching tool and armoured shield.

All this assured him headlines and even greater public esteem, and with the departure of the first contingent in October, followed by a second, then a third, Hughes could claim that he had triumphed over the natural inertia of the mediocrity that surrounded him. By the end of the war over 400,000 Canadians had served overseas, and 60,000 had died. As every first-year student knows, this wartime experience marked a significant stage on the way to nationhood. Canada's separate representation at Versailles and in the League of Nations was won as a direct result of the war. Hughes the nationalist, who had so often denounced rivals for their anglophilia, had, it appeared, triumphed.

Yet autonomy came not as a result of Hughes's wartime empire, but out of attempts to control and dismantle it. As historians have long since agreed,



Hughes was in most respects a disaster, and his dismissal in 1916 was long overdue. The full dimensions of the administrative chaos he created, and of the new structures that replaced his personal fiefdom, have never been fully explored. Desmond Morton, who has already

traced the development of self-government through an examination of the late 19th century militia in his *Ministers and Generals* (1970), is more than qualified to lead us through the tangled web of wartime bureaucracy. It is not a book likely to stir the blood of those who believe the stuff of history lies with its characters and high drama, and it is written for a specialist readership. But what it has to say is of real importance for those who wish to understand better Canada's emergence as a nation in the context of war.

The mobilization imposed by Hughes was neither economical nor efficient, and he deliberately fostered confusion about the control of the Canadian forces in England in order to enhance his own power. His nationalism was often a cover for cronyism, and the administrative shambles he created eventually became a national disgrace. He was congenitally incapable of creating any systematic administration, and within his domain bitter personal rivalries festered and corroded the war effort. The contrast between the growing fighting efficiency of the Canadian Corps in France and the nightmare of Canadian administration in England finally forced the dilatory Borden to outflank Hughes by creating a resident

minister in England with cabinet status. It was the only way to eliminate Hughes from the responsibilities he had egregiously mismanaged. He took the message, and after an intemperate outburst was dismissed in November, 1916.

From then on, administration of the army overseas improved steadily under the patient and punctilious guidance first of Sir George Perley and then of Sir Albert Kemp. Competence rather than favouritism came to characterize appointments in the new overseas ministry, and under Kemp civilian political control was steadily imposed. Innovations such as the creation of a Canadian section at GHQ extended Canadian military autonomy from the British to all areas except that of command. By the end of the war the administration created in England provided what Morton describes as both a paradigm and precedent for Canada's own transformation from a colony to sovereign nation. It was a perverse testimony to Hughes that this structure had been created in large part to destroy and replace his mismanaged energies.

Of all the dominions during the First World War Canada took the most important steps toward autonomy. Their experiences were often similar, but only Canada had Sam Hughes. □

## Prayers and sermons

By KEITH GAREBIAN

*Winter Sun/The Dumbfounding*, by Margaret Avison, McClelland & Stewart, 191 pages, \$12.95 paper (ISBN 0 7710 0983 6).

*Digging In*, by Elizabeth Brewster, Oberon Press, 97 pages, \$7.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 447 7).

MARGARET AVISON can be so coolly cerebral, so subtly technical in her verse that she might well seem to be purely for the library. However, her poetry's difficulty is brightened by witty particulars that show her to be (like Gerard Manley Hopkins and Wallace Stevens) a metaphysician in love with this world or, at least, those parts of it that she can order into an understanding of being. There are no terrifying northern landscapes in her poems, no mere geophysical horrors

## COMING UP

in the April issue of

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or primitive travails of the land. Those who seek native emblems — maple leaves, beavers, bears, or bush gardens — are bound to be disappointed or perplexed. At most, they will find myrrh in "gardenless gardens," the "communal cramp" of suburbia, and Banff's "savage hauteur" where "skiers dwindle up out of the valley." As for animals, there is a horse — or, more properly, "the narrow Head" of one in "The Apex Animal," which is an all-seeing, all-knowing being, a metaphor for the imagination.

*Winter Sun* (1960), Avison's first book of poetry, won the Governor General's Award, and *The Dumbfounding* (1966) established her reputation as one of the most accomplished poets in the country. Now with their republication in a single volume as part of McClelland & Stewart's series of modern Canadian poetry, a new generation of poetry lovers can experience her power and scope of perception, which penetrate apparently discrete facts and arrive at the transcendental nature of reality. "Nobody stuffs the world in at your eyes./The optic heart must venture: a jail-break/And re-creation." This makes her verse mental exercise for readers, and shows that she has greater intellectual affinities with such poets as Francis Sparshott, Ralph Gustafson, and Phyllis Webb than with popular lyricists such as Margaret Atwood, Al Purdy, and Irving Layton.

Not that Avison ever speaks from on high. Although her diction is often wrought with words such as "seaborde," "mutabilitie," "congoleum," and "eporphyril," it can be gracefully familiar and exquisitely sensuous: "The honeycombing sun/opened and sealed us in/chambers and courts and crooked butteries,/cities of sense." One of her best sonnets, "Tennis," has an elegant, courtly tone, where geometry and music become a single dance: "Courts are for love and volley. No one minds/The cruel ellipse of service and return,/Dancing white galliards at tape or net/Till point, on the wire's tip, or the long burn-/ing arc to neither court marks game and set." The technical sophistication puts me in mind of A.J.M. Smith's "The Archer." Her onomatopoeic, alliterative lines have Hopkins's sharp accents and convolutions ("Skewer my heart and I am less transfixed/than with this gill that sloughs and slumps/in a spent sea."), and their rhythms beat like a heart excited into discoveries about the fallen world.

*Winter Sun* is about mortal doom, yet its mordant melodies are lively and challenging as they ring in the terrain that few of our poets have the wit or in-

clination to explore. When Avison writes of the "dance of the midges in the warm/Sandy reaches of infinity," her music swarms and we are shown to be like the very creatures who "sing with our busy wings a gay/Pas de million until our singeing-day." Our doom has rarely been made more luminous. At their best, her rhythms are organic to context. In *The Dumbfounding*, where her Christian searching and sounding lead her "through the garden to/trash, rubble, hill," and an outcast's experience of the divine fulfilment of time, she writes like John Donne and George Herbert. Her poems become prayers, shaped by wonder and astonishment, yearning to be burned in the Saviour's "beacon fire."

Elizabeth Brewster is of a different order and style. Her earlier poetry was concerned chiefly with landscape, memory, time, and dreams. Reminiscence was a defining cachet. These preoccupations and manner survive in *Digging In*, which is a compendium of all I find unsatisfying or attractive in her poetry. As usual, there is a commemoration of the past (the present being real only insofar as it remembers sensations, incidents, characters), a relish of the inner worlds of dream, and a large interest in the banal, which she defends in "You Say." Everything ought to be written about, she claims, for there are "no experiences, emotions so secret/or so boring/as not to deserve words/to clothe them or make them naked." True enough, perhaps, but she often lacks the imagery and power to give banality a value.

Her problem is surely not one of feeling, for she shows poignancy in "The Death of the Young Girl" and wry regret in "Comparing Beginnings." At her best — in such anecdotes as "Tibetan Jewel-Box," "The Legless Lady," "The Mouse on the Bridge," or "Comparing Beginnings" — she has something of Frost's conversational tone and some of Souster's direct literalness and facility, and manages to be succinctly ruminative. The best sermons, she shows, are silent in nature, and by her craft she makes good use of poetry's meditative voice.

Ultimately, however, her narrowness and gentleness get the better of her. "Bad Dreams" lacks snap; "Problems of Vision" suffers from triviality; and "Entrance Into Heaven" makes eternity a middle-class bore, despite a touchingly humorous quest for her mother. Brewster holds to an ordinary life, which she feels can be "as crazy and dangerous /as life on a flying trapeze/or going over Niagara Falls in a barrel." Following some of the connotations of her title-poem, she digs into the banal for

security, continuity, gratification, and nourishment, finding comfort in a simple life that responds to basic needs. But her craft is not always elevated beyond a child's skipping rhyme, a doggerel prayer, a forgotten love-letter, or a recipe for lemon bread. □

## REVIEW

# Prisoner of Zend

By GEORGE GALT

*Beyond Labels*, by Robert Zend, Hounslow Press, 159 pages, \$8.95 paper (ISBN 0 88882 057 7).

*Old Mother*, by Patrick Lane, Oxford, 88 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 19 540409 2).

THE BEST LINE in Robert Zend's new book is the last: "Z END." Here is a poet of some standing, widely published and promoted, a man with a reputation. I wanted to find something to admire in his poems, and I did — an inventive playfulness, best embodied in the amusing anagrammatic puzzles he calls Ditto and Drop poems. Artists have better luck in Zend's rearranged world than do politicians:

HAROLD TOWN

A O W

I

O CLARK

J E R K

The drop poem, more rigorous, has only two lines and demands more of the eye, but Zend's game is rewarding. Another example:

ARGAR T T U AU  
M E R DE

Zend wants also to be regarded as a penetrating philosophical observer with unique insights. I have to report that he deals largely in shopworn ironies and tired sentiments. He sets the art of aphorism back about 40,000 years with the simple-minded couplet "People have one thing in common;/they are all different." A love lyric like his "Three-Word Definition of Love" (Indescribably/sweet/suffering) displays all the originality of a detergent commercial. These are not isolated examples of trite-

ness. His book is flooded with similar ersatz inspirations.

Zend clearly has enormous faith in his own poetic powers. Perhaps the self-image of dazzling *artiste* and prophet has queered his aesthetic judgement. Any passing thought short of the laundry list seems to have been a candidate for these pages. There are moments of deep feeling in the longer poems, and some zany lines too, but what is most striking is the sheer force of literary ego proclaiming "Here I am" (to which must be added "less interesting than I pretend").

Patrick Lane's poetry operates with neither the wordy artifice nor the leaden irony of Zend, but also without the playful humour. Most of Lane's work in *Old Mother*, as in his selected poems four years ago, is a deadly serious probing of survival at the mean edges of existence. His range is narrow, but within the limits established for his vision he can make marvels.

The title work sets tone and theme for a sequence of Prairie poems opening the book. Beyond the carefully crafted walls of these poems lie vast solitudes of bleakness and menace. Inside the walls broods all manner of horror and violence, but it is named and known, and therefore capable of transcending itself. Central to this sequence is the image of a chicken coop, in which the birds are protected from wild predators but also trapped for use by the domestic predators in the farmhouse nearby. This tricky demarcation, between walled defence, named and known, and the threatening universe beyond, gives Lane all the scope he needs to explore Prairie sensibilities, and to make the Prairie farm credible as a metaphor for the mind.

One complaint I have about the Prairie sequence is that so much of it turns on images of violence. Knowing Lane's poetry, a reader comes to expect poems like "The Small Boy," which ends "and faster than the chicken's head can twist/he thrusts it in his mouth and bites down, hard." This is shockingly effective, dramatically satisfying as a finale, but also disappointing. Because we know these are vintage Pat Lane lines, they have lost some of their strength. Such lines are only as gut-wrenching as the showman hurling knives into the wall around his partner's head. With practice, it becomes more a titillating scene than an honestly dangerous one. Predictability, the knowledge that Lane's poetry has come to terms with this kind of hard violence many times before, saps the words of their power.

The other disappointment for me in this book is the long middle section

entitled "The Weight." It may be entirely a matter of taste. I dislike long, self-mythologizing poems, and I'm not interested in poring over cryptic diary-like entries trying to ascertain the meaning of obscure proper nouns and oblique references to a poet's family heritage. I think Lane is aiming here at a synthesis of family memories with communal history and I think he fails. But I begin with little sympathy for such an undertaking.

Closing the book is a superb collection of poems from Lane's trip to China. "The Great Wall" achieves a balance of rhetoric and image so delicate but also so robust that it defies verbal response. The poem "Lotus" and others arrive with the authority of ancient artifacts before their time. Here, for example, is "Against Blue Jade Curtains":

*Against blue jade curtains  
friends talk with first friends,  
sadness and the touch of wine.  
Our loss is our beginning.  
Outside bats dance.  
They pay us little attention.  
Such knowledge is a blessing.  
With wine we too hang upside down,  
our laughter the flight of bats,  
a small but perfect freedom.*

The lines are magic, word perfect, the envy of anyone who writes, and redeem any flaws in the pages before. □

#### REVIEW

## South of Eden

By **STEPHEN SCOBIE**

Stonefish and Other Poems, by Kevin Roberts, Oolichan Books, 78 pages, \$6.95 paper (ISBN 0 88982 033 3).

KEVIN ROBERTS'S FINE collection of poems, produced with their usual elegance by Oolichan Books, is divided into three sections. The first and longest section, the title poem, is a sequence on Gauguin in the South Seas: like Roberts's previous volume, *S'Ney'Mos*, it is a condensed documentary, the narrative largely suppressed in favour of concise imagistic flashes.

Roberts sees Gauguin as an archetypal romantic artist, rejecting the restrictions of bourgeois civilization and immersing himself in a dream of paradise that proves ultimately destructive, and self-

## PETER STRAUB Floating Dragon

Hampstead, Connecticut. On May 17th three men died from an industrial accident — it was said. That night a woman was murdered, a baby died, a terrible car accident occurred. No-one thought to connect these events — but they were only the forerunners to the disasters which were waiting in the wings.

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destructive. His image for the snake in this secular Eden is the Stonefish, whose "rich poison" lurks "in the green/shimmer of the lagoon," but also within the artist's own vision of a "beauty so rich it turns/decadent."

*who steps upon  
the Stonefish*

*steps upon  
his own  
image*

More literally, the sexual abandon of Gauguin's exploitation of the Tahitian women is also subject to "the great Stonefish poison/syphilis/the white guilt," so that the image of the paradisiacal garden is hideously realized and inverted on Gauguin's own body:

*consumes his flesh  
with running sores*

*sick red flowers  
on his legs*

*he becomes his own  
garden*

Roberts responds powerfully to Gauguin's painting, but the short, clipped lines preserve a distanced stance toward the man's experience. "Stonefish" reminds me in many ways of poems like Michael Ondaatje's "White Dwarfs": there is the same fascination with "beauty so rich it turns/decadent," the artist immersing himself in his own destructive element, and yet also a similar ambivalence, a holding back, a balance between fearful admiration and reverent revulsion.

The second section, "Heritage," is made up of poems on various topics: love, family, friends, animals. Most impressive here are "Skating Down Trout," an account of Indian ice fishing that wisely keeps its rich symbolic impli-



cations unspoken, and "Heritage" itself, an evocatively detailed portrait of (I take it) the poet's grandfathers.

The final section is made up of "Ghazals," the Persian 12-line form that, it seems, every poet in Canada now is writing. In Roberts the form releases a lyrical strain that his more accustomed versification held in check: "Look. The indelible colour of the universe/washes off on my hands." It's an image that Gauguin would have been proud of. □

## REVIEW

# Brave new words

By PETER O'BRIEN

*The Rain Falls Like Rain*, by David Helwig, Oberon Press, 204 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 088750 444 2) and \$9.95 paper (ISBN 0 88750 445 0).

WITHIN THESE POEMS is a voice that understands the intricacies of breathing, a voice that quietly distills and purifies, a voice that holds onto the internal life of words. David Helwig is a word-explorer: like Adam, Columbus, and the boy inventor, Matthew Edwards, he invents the world. Travelling to new countries, he describes what he sees. He calls out the names of things, and by so doing discovers bits of the world that have been found and lost and found, again and again. There are metaphors found within words, not only in extraneous wanderings of the mind. Each word realizes its own inner life. Despite Gertrude Stein's claim that the newness of words has long since evaporated, Helwig manages to recapture moments of everyday magic inside words. The reader hears new words in these poems — words such as "bird," "sky," "flame," "death."

*The Rain Falls Like Rain* is an introductory volume of Helwig's poems. There are poems from each of his five previous collections, and the last quarter of the book is given to his most recent work. In the early poems there is a careful silence, the poet's thoughts barely audible to the reader:

*On the porch rail I can see  
a tin can, one two  
three four five, no, one  
two three four, lost it  
again, one two three four  
five six seven stones*

There is a marvellously complex simplicity in Helwig's finest work. Secrets in the process of becoming. In another poet's hand "The Best Name of Silence," a long voice poem about Bluebeard, would become raucous and theatrical. Instead, what we get are the small sounds of pale colours, the slow movement at the bottom of the ocean, birds swimming through air. Helwig's poems are not only understated, they are poems of breath, with all the mystery and strength that breathing implies.

Reading through the book, I could hear a heartbeat in the rhythm of the words, the quiet thudding of life through the veins. The more righteous, moral poems ("Good Friday, 1968," "Vision," "Passing the Cathedral") are not as successful as the poems that pulse with their own life. The moralizing poems are not as strong as the poems of calmness and (can the word still be used?) feeling:

*I walk in circles through the house,  
a burning child against my chest  
crying with fever.*

*Kitchen, hall,  
living-room.*

*kitchen.*

*In circles.*

There is a soothing quality to the poems, even in such poems as "Words From Hell," which is told in a regulating iambic pentameter. The violence is contemplated, numbing rather than tactile.

In the 50 pages of new poems Helwig is becoming braver in his explorations of words and their innate metaphorical ability. The poems are becoming more muscular, elastic. And of course, more extreme. The line, "We don't need words" is more comfortable with these newer poems. Likewise with the line, "This is serenity, or we call it that/until we break the code." Visually, the poems are becoming more disjointed, tending toward a post-modern sympathy. There is a box of old photographs, notes for a ballet, fringes of words, the place where words sometimes disintegrate: "Faces/can talk without words"; "This is the song of the running man."

Throughout his poetry, Helwig has been concerned with painting and the painterly possibilities of words. In the new poems this is particularly evident. There are landscape poems, passages flooded with colour, an exploration of light and dark:

*the skin all the various  
colours of skin,*

*the sky blue or the dim  
grey light of rain,*

*sunfire,*

*pressed out to tones of silver grey for  
reconsideration*

Some of the poems recall Vermeer's calm interiors, a jug pouring water, a piece of tapestry, while other poems recall Cézanne's thick brushwork, one swipe of paint rendering an orange bursting with juice.

Any collection such as this is bound to prompt personal reservations. There are strong poems that have not been included ("The Middle Passage" from *Atlantic Crossings*, for example), and there are poems that could have been deleted ("A Fragment From Sappho" and "The Death of Joseph Stalin"). But my main

criticism is technical rather than editorial. The book's design is regrettably boring, and a few words of introduction would be welcome. Certainly a table of contents or index of some sort should be included somewhere. And those page numbers, buzzing around like mosquitoes — why are they always biting into the poems?

Fortunately, Helwig's poems survive unscathed through these minor discomforts. The poet breathes life into the strange shapes of words. He shows us how words can speak themselves. □

## REVIEW

# Growing up gay

By JOHN HOFSESS

*A Boy's Own Story*, by Edmund White, E.P. Dutton (Clarke Irwin), 218 pages, \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0 525 241280).

AS ANY READER OF *Strong Opinions or Lectures on Literature* will know, Vladimir Nabokov was not given to praising other writers. He regarded Dostoevski and Thomas Mann as hacks who created monuments in bad taste. Toward Joyce and Proust he maintained a skeptical reserve. A writer such as Hermann Hesse wasn't even worth mentioning. The more notable then that a few months before his death, in an interview published in *Esquire*, Nabokov named Edmund White as the contemporary novelist he admired most.

White's first published novel, *Forgetting Elena* (1973), sold 1,200 copies and was quickly remaindered. By the time Nabokov bestowed his accolade upon it, *Forgetting Elena* was out of print and seemed doomed to be forgotten. White, in the meantime, looking for a way to make a more forcible impression in the "book world," had co-authored a new work that Nabokov would have viewed with dismay, if not abhorrence: *The Joy of Gay Sex*, the only book, according to White, that he has written opportunistically. The next novel, *Nocturnes for the King of Naples* (1978), was highly praised by Gore Vidal and Susan Sontag, among others, and sold 4,500 copies. A series of homoerotic prose poems that for its poetic density and verbal glitter rivals Durrell's

*Alexandria Quartet, Nocturnes* is written in a style that turns some readers on but turns many more off. Whatever else may be said about it, it is not the style of a panderer.

White's next book, *States of Desire: Travels in Gay America* (1980), sold 10,000 copies in hardcover and landed him in a quandary. A writer who is homosexual and modestly talented may accept the limited fame and low standards of being a ghetto writer bent on producing the kind of novels and plays that are ideologically in tune with whatever is fashionable in the "gay community." But a writer who is homosexual and substantially talented, and who has enough self-respect to want to be tested by the more complex and sophisticated standards of world literature, is faced with resisting that which comes easy (acceptance, praise, and maybe even high sales among gay people) and attempting to do something much more difficult (gain the respect and admiration of heterosexual editors and readers for the cogency of one's analysis, the originality of one's vision, or the technical mastery of one's writing style). In short, what Edmund White has been trying to do over the course of his career (he now is 42) is to be true to what he knows best (the psychology, sociology, history, and culture of homosexuality) while nevertheless transcending it so that his work is important to far more people than a minority within a minority — the cultured few of a subculture.

His new novel, *A Boy's Own Story*, is White's "cross-over" book. It has proven popular (over 20,000 copies sold to date), has received critical raves (in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Nation*, among other leading American publications), and it is White's most accessible work, written with a chiselled plainness that many writers attempt but only gifted writers achieve.

In plot, *A Boy's Own Story* is common enough: the recollection of a middle-aged man of the pivotal points in his adolescence. What makes the novel one of the finest works of fiction to be published in recent years is the astuteness of its observations about North American life in the 1950s, and its unsentimental delineation of the process of "growing up." White's unnamed hero may acquire one additional layer of alienation from society by being homosexual, but in all other respects his story is the story of many (male and female, straight and gay). Most of what affects us in everyday life, after all, takes place irrespective of sexual orientation.

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## INTERVIEW

'I don't know anybody who is like everybody else,' says Leon Rooke. 'The job of fiction is to show what the differences are'

By PHILIPPE DESQUEIU

"I THOUGHT I was an amazing thing to aspire to, being a writer," says Leon Rooke, who began his writing career at the age of 17. "That attitude from the start eliminated a lot of my problems, because the hardship was accepted as being part of the deal." A prolific fiction writer, Rooke is the author of two novels, *Fat Woman* (1980) and *The Magician in Love* (1981), and his short-story collections include *Last One Home Sleeps in the Yellow Bed* (1968), *The Love Parlour* (1977), *The Broad Back of the Angel* (1977), *Cry Evil* (1980), and *Death Suite* (1981). A new collection of stories, *The Birth Control King of the Upper Volta*, has recently been published by ECW Press. Born in North Carolina in 1934, Rooke studied drama at university, and taught creative writing in the U.S. and Canada before settling in Victoria, B.C., in 1969. He was interviewed at his home there by Philippe Desquieu:

**Books in Canada:** *Before the publication of Fat Woman, did it occur to you that some readers could find this title offensive?*

**Leon Rooke:** Yes I was aware of it, but the title imposed itself.

**BiC:** *Generally speaking the novel was very well received, yet some critics have deplored that its main character — Ella Mae Hopkins — was reduced to the stereotype of victimized and helpless womanhood. Has the novel been subjected yet to a thorough feminist analysis?*

**Rooke:** No, not yet. Although some feminists have trouble with it.

**BiC:** *What kind of trouble?*

**Rooke:** They look and see the story just by the surface, and they say, This man has locked his wife up in her bedroom to prevent her compulsive eating habit. Well, of course; but that's so superficial in terms of the novel that it's not worth talking about. That's something some

feminist readers find themselves unable to get beyond. It's strange because the writer, it seems to me very clearly, is on the woman's side.

**BiC:** *This leads to the question, does the life of Ella Mae, not as a character but as a person, really matter?*

**Rooke:** Yes, her life matters to me. I think she is an important human being. What critics are saying is, Why didn't she do something? Why did she submit? Well, she doesn't submit, it just happens to her, and she knows nothing about it. If one could project beyond the closing page of the novel, one could predict what she might do. Certainly she might do something.

**BiC:** *It has been mentioned that your characters tend to be on the odd side of society. How would you respond to that?*

**Rooke:** I am always baffled when the reader sees the characters I choose to write about as being off-beat or unfortunate people. I find that utterly baffling. It seems to me the people I am writing about are pretty much like the



Leon Rooke

people who are reading the things I write. I don't know any average person. Everybody is pretty strange and pretty normal. I don't know anybody who is like everybody else. I think that part of

the job of fiction is to make the discovery of what the differences are.

**BiC:** *In both of your novels you use the third-person narrative. Could you say something about the nuances in the point of view?*

**Rooke:** In *Fat Woman* the narrator is omniscient, moving from the distance to very close to the character's mind. In *The Magician in Love* the narrator's perspective is limited. There are very few explorations of the inner self in *The Magician*, in fact none. Mostly we get it from what the characters say to each other.

**BiC:** *How do you decide which point of view to use in a story?*

**Rooke:** Finding the right point of view depends on what effect you're trying to achieve. It depends on how you want to get to the characters. Sometimes it is important to try to get inside the character's mind. I have always liked the interior monologue because it seems to be part of nature. We all walk around with these secret voices in our inner selves. The interior monologue captures these voices.

**BiC:** *Do you find any difficulty in keeping control of the point of view?*

**Rooke:** Consistency isn't the difficulty. Getting the point of view right in the first place can be difficult; the rest is just a matter of language. First of all, you have to discover what point of view the material requires. You don't always know that when you start, which is why a good many stories are written in one point of view in one draft, then the next draft is written from another point of view. If you know from the beginning from which perspective a story must be told, then your task is made easier.

**BiC:** *You are currently working on a fictionalized life of Napoleon. Are you faced with the same problem?*

**Rooke:** It's one of the problems, one thing I haven't figured out with this Napoleon story. Most of the story is told from his point of view, but his voice becomes too ugly and I don't want to hear it for an entire novel.

**BiC:** *You are saying that you dislike the character of Napoleon. Why did you decide to write about it in the first place, since now you will be forced to live with it for months?*

**Rooke:** I got more and more involved; then after I had written about 20 pages I realized that I disliked the character. What could I do? Should I disregard what I have done? No, because the more I read about it the more fascinated I become by the material I've gathered. I can see the potential of this imaginary life taking shape. I don't make the absolute demand that I like the character I write about, it would be too impractical.

**BiC:** *Isn't the use of the third-person*



narrator a convenient way to avoid being identified with the work?

Rooke: There are a lot of writers who do write out of the self. Clark Blaise for instance — his work is sort of straight autobiography. You can see him in a great many things he's written. It's obviously the same narrator and usually the same characters who are involved. Thomas Wolfe wrote out of the self. He created a lot of stuff around it; he used real people, then embroidered upon them. In some cases he turned them into fictional characters, but at the centre of his work was this real self: himself. I don't think I am interested in writing that way.

BiC: What's the difference?

Rooke: Writing of the self illustrates one

angle of vision. It's just that some writers have themselves at the core of their work. On the surface a novel written from the point of view of a dog sounds very different from a novel written in the first person, but in a way it is from the same person making the same argument.

BiC: Do you write mostly to entertain, or is there another level of commitment in your fiction?

Rooke: It is exhorting the reader to be moved, to acknowledge certain social and political values. I think there is a kind of moral vein that's so thick, it's almost like concrete at times. This aspect of my writing is very rarely seen so far as I can tell from the response I get from reviewers. □

### IN TRANSLATION

Rue Désolation: two new novels reaffirm the impression that something is rotten in the state of Quebec

By PAUL STUEWE

ASHES TO ASHES, dust to dust and, if you read much contemporary literature from Quebec, putrefaction to putrefaction. The inexorable decay of our bodies is for many Quebecers writers a biological analogue to the malfunctioning of our social and political systems: the "leprosy youths ruined in the seminaries" of Marie-Claire Blais's *David Sterne*, the "blasphemy and filth" that acts "like some rotten yeast upon the souls of her defenceless companions" for the protagonist of Anne Hébert's *Children of the Black Sabbath*, and the "hot putrid summer" that graphically accelerates a corpse's decomposition in Russell Marois's *The Telephone Pole* are three characteristic descriptions of human decline in a morally and materially insanitary environment.

Two recently translated novels suggest that this is a continuing trend. Almost every page of Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's *Jos Connaissant* (translated by Ray Chamberlain, Exile Editions, \$9.95 paper) contains something like this:

... Soon the worms and the music of their necrophilic songs in the deserted corridors of our veins. Soon the great faint, the white loss of the body sleeping in the bosom of the irrecoverable earth. Soon there shall be only the law of total rottenness.

Pierre Turgeon's *The First Person*

(translated by David Lobdell, Oberon Press, \$15.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper) takes a more cerebral and entropic approach to the awfulness of it all, but here too thoughts of bodily corruption are never far away: skyscrapers are "cancerous growths," and one of the narrator's numerous fantasies of self-destruction finds him "being gnawed by worms, reduced to a handful of dust." While English-Canadian writers have been surviving nature's cruelties and clearing little gardens in the bush, many of their French-Canadian peers seem to have given up the struggle for existence and skipped directly from the cradle to the grave.

But if these two novels exemplify a current thematic preoccupation, they are quite dissimilar in terms of their ability to construct a credible fictional world. *Jos Connaissant* vibrates with the pulse of intensely felt life coursing along a hypersensitive nervous system, as its down-and-almost-out narrator takes a geographically circumscribed but emotionally expansive journey through Montreal's lower depths. The specific incidents and background contexts described are reminiscent of much Beat-generation literature, and particularly of the work of Beaulieu's spiritual and ethnic kinsman, Jack Kerouac; but whereas Kerouac is often slapdash and

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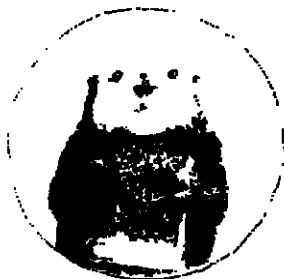
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incoherent, Beaulieu's images of death and decay are as aptly chosen as they are painstakingly delineated.

The very special qualities of the resulting narrative aren't easy to convey through quotations, but this description of the protagonist's grandfather digging a grave seems to me to catch the reflective vivacity and cumulatively overwhelming impact of the book as a whole:

... I watched him as he stood still, caught up in thoughts that sucked him in, twisting his mouth as his hands balled up into fists, and I realized that grandfather had gone blind, he was in darkness, his reflections had dug a large hole in the ground where thousands of stinking dead bodies were stacked; on top was grandmother, tiny and misshapen in her old blue polka-dot dress, and Pa and all his children, and all the kin people ... before me I had the vision of the world absorbing itself, becoming a funnel of broken life, of purulent life eaten up by vermin, and I tugged at grandfather's sleeve and he snapped out of it, staring wide-eyed, and said, "What is it, boy?"

The creative tension between life and death, between desperately seeking sensation and becoming resigned to its inevitable loss, is at the core of this extraordinarily compelling novel, and thus even its most morbid and depressing scenes are animated by the turbulent energy of Beaulieu's imagination. Although life may end in total rotteness, *Jos Connaissant* is so beautifully written and strikingly observed that one never regrets participating in its dark and terrible visions.

These qualities are conspicuously absent from Pierre Turgeon's *The First Person*, which reads like several thousand other post-Sartrean novels wherein sensitive young intellectuals discover alienation, anomie, and angst amid an atmosphere of absolute apathy. While it may still be possible to create viable fiction out of such jaded material, Turgeon hasn't succeeded in doing so: there are no literary graces or philosophical perceptions here to illuminate his monotonous psychic landscapes, but merely the kind of existentialist truisms that were old hat back when Camus and Sartre were still on speaking terms. Imagine, if you will, the effect of 79 pages of

... my freedom is restricted by the advent of images, whose pressure I feel throughout my entire body, like a diver sinking into the watery depths. Now, the internal transmitters announce only catastrophes, fleshquakes, volcanoes that fizzle out beneath the inoperative brain. Never again will I allow myself to become trapped in a life that offers nothing but the empty form of routine.

I cannot retrace my steps. . . .

and you'll know all you need to regarding this extremely flat — the failure to flesh out and vivify the "images" is characteristic — and excruciatingly boring book. Fairness demands an acknowledgement that *The First Person* won the 1981 Governor General's Award for fiction in French, a fact that wins my personal "Truth Is Stranger Than Fiction" Award for 1983.

Although bodily decline, and in the case of the story "One Arm," dismemberment, play prominent roles in Yasunari Kawabata's *House of the Sleeping Beauties and Other Stories* (translated by Edward Seidensticker, Fitzhenry & Whiteside, \$5.95 paper), translated into English in 1969 and now available in an attractive paperback edition, the world of the Japanese Nobel laureate is far removed from that of the writers discussed above. The title novella relates an elderly man's fascination with an unusual kind of brothel, where those who can no longer make love to women pay to watch them sleep. This may sound like an unpromising or even precious conceit, but Kawabata develops it beautifully. Evocative memories of love affairs past are delicately compared to the subtler attractions of voyeurism, and the starker contrast between old age and youth is muted by expressing it in terms of the corresponding varieties of sleep: turbulent but refreshing for the young, fitful and imminently permanent for the aged. Life must end in death, but in "House of the Sleeping Beauties" a life is temporarily revived by the contemplation of youth in temporary repose, and the manifold nuances of this charged situation are stunningly rendered.

The book also includes two short stories of similar excellence. The narrator of "One Arm" first borrows and then exchanges his own arm for that of a young girl, as what initially seems an amusingly surreal experiment gradually becomes a very serious exploration of the boundaries of individual identities. In "Of Birds and Beasts" the protagonist, who can no longer tolerate human companionship, seeks solace in the observation of his pets. But this too proves dissatisfying, and as the story ends he is becoming fascinated with the diary of a girl who died at an early age: the implicit conclusion is that life is attractive when fixed at a beautiful moment, and death may be negated by artful preservation. This could also serve as a motto for Kawabata's writing, which confronts the most basic contradictions of human life with poise and serenity, and makes high art out of the existential ebb and flow that will ultimately lay us low. □

Schemes and dreams: from communal quilting in rural Nova Scotia to municipal corruption in small-town Wyoming

By DOUGLAS HILL

DONNA E. SMYTH'S *Quilt* (Women's Educational Press, 121 pages, \$7.95 paper) is set in rural Nova Scotia, and balances the newsworthy subject of wife-beating against the traditional homely values implicit in pickles, quilts, and chickens. The novel is carefully organized and controlled, makes its points respectably, but fails to stir the imagination.

The widow Sam Sanford, passing time, takes in strays. Her latest is Myrt, whom a social worker has placed with Sam to keep her out of reach of a drunkenly violent husband. The reader learns something of Myrt's character (she's a poor limp soul), a good deal more of Sam's. The old woman has organized a quilting project; much of the action of the novel unfolds in the sewing circle's reactions, separate and collective, to the meaning of their task and to the changes in society that threaten it and upset their lives.

*Quilt* is predictable; the structure of the book is correct to a fault. In a few places, like the scene of physical abuse, Smyth's language is vivid. In others, like this description of Sam's face, it's too studied: "Creased, criss-crossed, crumbled, a lot like a rock with rain, with wind. Erosion of age, time slow like a rock." The novel's imagery strives to be natural, earthy, and often ends up only dull.

There are some nice touches in *Quilt*, a few affecting moments. It does its job adequately, but it offers nothing unexpected, by way of insight or analysis, into either ordinary life or pathology.

DON'T BE PUT off by the back-cover copy for *Goodnight, Sammy Wong* (Westlands, 175 pages, \$7.95 paper), by Michael J. Cullen. What sounds oh-so-precious there turns out to read fairly well, after a score or two of getting-acquainted pages. Cullen's an original; his talent is hardly tidy or polished, but he's got energy and invention to spare.

The novel is set in Lethbridge, at the O.K. Confectionery, the Dallas Hotel Bar, Henderson Lake. The cast includes Sammy and Wifey Wong, aging enigmatic Chinese Canadians; Napi

Running Water, homesick Indian and bootlegger; Peter (no last name), loser at life, victim of appendicitis; Walter Coglin, philosopher/sociologist/messiah. These characters and a few others equally odd revolve through a haze of beer, sex, schemes, and dreams. None of it exactly makes sense, yet it's all interconnected, all has a kind of sad nutty logic.

Cullen's susceptible to inexact language now and then, and I don't find his racial dialect-joking particularly funny, but he has a gift for lyric image and what one character calls "trigger-happy metaphors." The central fact — or spirit — of the book is the Chinook, the sudden warm wind that blows memory and hope into these spaced-out lives. "I don't miss the past," we read; "what I'm afraid of is that the past is coming tomorrow. Do you understand?"

There's not much here besides an assortment of conceits, and a mélange of characters stumbling, comically or pathetically, after the meaning of their existence. But Cullen's slapped it

together with an evident instinct for fictional possibility; it stands up somehow.

"HAS IT BEEN said that killing a man can start up a new life?" For Joe Levy, the hero of George Szanto's *Not Working* (Macmillan, 230 pages, \$16.95 cloth), the question is pertinent on a number of levels. This is a solid novel of suspense, cleanly and expertly written; it takes moral authority from its sensitivity to a few unportentious human difficulties.

As a cop in San Diego, Joe has killed a teenaged boy. To find his equilibrium again, he leaves the job, goes with his wife Helly and their two daughters to Dobie, a small town in eastern Wyoming, where Helly has found a job teaching history in the local junior college. Now he's a full-time house-husband, puzzled and rueful, not entirely dissatisfied, not quite able to start his life rolling in a new — or any — direction.

Dobie and the country around it — the time is the mid-1970s — sit on a fortune in low-grade coal, and by accident Joe finds himself drawn into a web of corrupt local politics, high-rolling land speculation, and eventually violence that touches his own family. The novel is grounded in the social and economic realities of a community waking up to its good and bad fortunes; Szanto unobtrusively works a surprising amount of necessary and satisfying information into his story.

He knows how to build a narrative, how to apply pressure and take it off. Best of all, he can enter into the mind of

## First novel awards

ALTHOUGH LAST YEAR was not a big one for most of Canada's better-known novelists, it was an active time for some of our more "literary" writers, many of whom are published by the country's small presses. Their energy is vividly reflected in the year's crop of first-time novelists. Among the finalists for the seventh annual Books in Canada Award for First Novels — which offers a prize of \$1,000 for the best first novel published in English in Canada during calendar 1982 — several writers venture well beyond the mainstream.

The six titles on the short list are: *Coming for to Carry*, by Lorris Elliott (Williams-Wallace); *Dead Ends*, by Keith Harrison (Quadrant Editions); *Shoeless Joe*, by W.P. Kinsella (Thomas Allen & Son); *Blue*,

by Geraldine Rahmani (Coach House Press); *Preparing for Sabbath*, by Nessa Rapoport (Seal Books); and *The Bee Book*, by Ann Rosenberg (Coach House Press).

This year's panel of judges is chaired by novelist Douglas Hill, who teaches English at the University of Toronto's Brindale College and contributes a column about first novels to *Books in Canada*. The other judges are: Toronto freelance journalist Anne Collins, who writes a column about paperbacks for *Books in Canada*; West Coast novelist and short-story writer Jack Hodgins; Toronto novelist and poet Gwendolyn MacEwen; and John Richardson of A Different Drummer Books in Burlington, Ont. Their verdict will be announced next month. □

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his hero and hold a reader firmly there. Joe Levy is not a superman, but he's a complex man trying to act responsibly, and Szanto gives him his due. Though there are a couple of unresolved ques-

tions in the novel, a few loose ends here and there, and a page or two where the pace goes flat, on the whole *Not Working* works, and works with confidence. □

### THE BROWSER

Making history: from the perils of heterosexual feminism to the prospect of a future without nuclear war

By MORRIS WOLFE

THE WOMEN'S PRESS recently celebrated its 10th anniversary with the publication of *Still Ain't Satisfied!* Canadian Feminism Today (edited by Maureen Fitzgerald *et al.*, 318 pages), a collection of 27 articles that review feminist activities over the past decade. I know of no better introduction to the Canadian women's movement than this book. The most interesting article is Joanne Kates's, on the difficulties of being a heterosexual feminist. Her lover, she points out, is committed to feminism. "He has demonstrated his rare and precious willingness to listen to my fury, and his reward for that is to get a lot of it." But some of her women friends make her feel guilty about consorting with the enemy. And she asks herself "Why, after all, when all my friends are women, when I do my politics with women and my socializing with women, do I keep on falling for men?" Later in the article Kates reflects on the feminist sexual catechism: "Being active is correct. Being passive is incorrect. Having powerful fantasies is correct. Having submissive fantasies is incorrect. But to restrict sexual behaviour to certain role prescriptions, even feminist ones, is sexually repressive."

CHEERFUL PESSIMIST that I am, I was delighted to receive a copy of *Optimistic Outlooks: Latest Views on the Global Future* by a Galaxy of International Experts, edited by Frank Feather and Rashmi Mayur (Global Futures Network, 197 pages). Futurists are congenial optimists. But that's part of the fun for someone like me. As is their rhetoric. For example, "The galaxy of international experts" we're promised in the subtitle turns out to be mostly American men. According to one of these experts, "nuclear weapons are too big and clumsy to use in real-world

politics." Another expert tells us that "we are the first generation to practise the new art of conscious evolution." (I don't know what that means, but it sounds good.) The word "war" doesn't appear in the index of *Optimistic Outlooks*. I look up the word "unemployment" and I'm told, "See: Employment." As I say, this book is full of laughs.

DESPITE ITS annoying title, *The Super-historians: Makers of Our Past* by John Barker (Scribners, 365 pages, \$19.95 cloth) is a fascinating, highly readable introduction to historiography for the general reader. Barker, who teaches at Trent University, has chosen the 13 most influential historians. His list — Herodotus, Thucydides, Augustine, Petrarch, Machiavelli, Voltaire, Scott, Ranke, Marx, Nietzsche, Du Bois, Toynbee, and Wells — contains a



number of surprises. Who, for instance, would have expected to find Sir Walter Scott on the list? "Perhaps no figure in our study," argues Barker in defence of his choice of Scott, "has altered the historical outlook of his contemporaries more quickly and effectively." I confess I knew nothing of the work of the German historian Leopold Ranke. It was he who first enunciated the 19th-century scientific view that the task of historians

is "to show the *actual* past." Of particular interest to Canadians is the fact that Ranke was a cultural nationalist. He believed that every country had a distinctive culture and that each was evolving along its own path. Countries shouldn't imitate others; they should be true to themselves.

LESLIE FIEDLER asks interesting questions in *What Was Literature? Class Culture and Mass Society* (Simon and Schuster, 258 pages, \$19.95 cloth). Unfortunately, Fiedler is so tangled in his own ego that he simply confuses the issues he raises. What Fiedler *seems* to be saying is that "art is all over," as Ian Baxter of the N.E. Thing Co. once put it. (Were he still alive, I would have loved to read a review of this book by Dwight Macdonald, author of the famous essay "Masscult and Midcult.") By far, the best part of *What Was Literature* are the five chapters Fiedler presented on CBC-Radio as Massey Lectures in 1978. It seems ungracious that nowhere in this book does Fiedler acknowledge his debt to the CBC.

THOSE WHO WERE put off by the rhetorical excesses of Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth* might prefer the more restrained presentation of the same argument by Robert J. Lifton and Richard Falk in *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case Against Nuclearism* (CBC, 301 pages, \$7.95 paper). Lifton, the psychiatrist who wrote *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*, is probably the world's leading authority on the psychological effects of nuclear war. His section of this book was adapted last fall for broadcast as the CBC's 1982 Massey Lectures. Lifton and Falk report that the Kyoto Central Hotel in Japan now is offering its patrons three extra weeks of life if a nuclear war breaks out while they're staying there. As the hotel's manager proudly explains, "The shelter was built in line with our policy of providing our guests with the best service and facilities."

*Dreams of Empire: Records of Our History* by André Vachon (Public Archives of Canada, 387 pages, \$14.95 paper) is the first of a series. *Dreams of Empire* surveys Canadian history from the first explorers to 1700. It does so through reproductions of 250 maps, engravings, paintings, seals, medals, and other documents from over 50 archives in Canada, the U.S., and Europe. The brief text and explanatory notes are generally clear and useful. My only complaint is that the paper used allows too much bleed-through. Still, this book would be a bargain at twice the price.

I'm glad to see the Public Archives doing more publishing.

I HAVE TO register a dissenting view on the highly overrated film, *Poetry in Motion*. It seems to me a film about poetry for people who don't really like poetry. It reminded me why I rarely go to readings. Mostly what you hear (and see) in this film are bad poets reading bad poems (Allen Ginsberg). Occasionally you get a good poet reading a bad poem well (Michael Ondaatje), or a good poet reading a good poem badly



(Jim Carroll). All too rarely do you get a good poet reading a good poem well (Christopher Dewdney).

Because I had *Poetry in Motion* on my mind, I was particularly interested in *The Insecurity of Art: Essays on Poetics*, a handsomely made book edited by Ken Norris and Peter Van Toorn (Véhicule Press, 159 pages, \$7.95 paper).

The book contains 25 essays by 19 contemporary anglophone poets from Quebec on the theory and politics of poetry. Some of the more interesting comments deal with poetry as "showbiz." Sharon Nelson says bluntly that the "oral tradition continues to thrive among illiterate peoples." Here's Louis Dudek on the same subject:

The popularity of a certain kind of poetry — the huge "poetry readings," the multitude of subsidized books, the singing and performing poets celebrated in weekend newspapers — is no sign that we are living in an age of great poetry, or that poetry is thriving in our culture. Rather, it is a sign that poetry, like almost everything else in this bread-and-circus culture, has gone rotten.

John Glassco agrees:


It is very doubtful if the interests of poetry are being served by making it a social event at all. Poetry, at any rate as we now know it, is best received in a state of isolation and tranquillity through the printed page. Moreover, for such reception, the eye is vastly superior to the ear; moving faster than the voice and serving the intelligence more directly, it can also take in at a preliminary glance the shape and length of a poem, so that the mind is prepared, as it were, for the degree and kind of attention it will be called on to give. . . .

Take that, *Poetry in Motion*. □


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General

— INDEXES —

Literary lives: the private loneliness  
of Emily Carr and the public  
independence of James G. Endicott

By ANNE COLLINS

IN THE FIRST line of the preface to her biography of Emily Carr, Maria Tippett lists all our preconceived images of the painter: "the lonely, struggling artist; the undaunted traveller; the endearing memoirist; the doughty eccentric." Tippett herself grew up in Victoria, B.C., and fell early under the spell of Carr's Indian villages, decaying totems and forests. But in *Emily Carr: A Biography* (Penguin, \$12.95), she takes up the good biographer's deadly little hammer and unerringly chips away at the sentimental array of selves Carr presented to the world. And there you have it, the bare bones of a painter: a lonely, disagreeable, paranoid, and egocentric soul who somehow seems all the more remarkable for the fact that her work didn't show it. Her art — a struggle toward seeing something that really had never been seen before, the landscape of the West Coast — contained all the best parts of herself. It didn't hint at her unhappiness, or even at her failure, over 73 years, to grow up.

Born in Victoria in 1871, Carr was the precious baby of the family (even though she had one younger brother). She was the youngest of five daughters, the apple of her upstanding and religious father's eye. She was coddled and rather spoiled, until the summer of her sexual maturity. Then something happened with her father: Carr, when she would even talk about it, called it the "brutal telling" wherein her father roughly acquainted her with the facts of life.

Tippett speculates that even in Victorian Victoria it must have been a little more than just a "telling" for it to have had the impact it did on Carr's life. The episode put a permanent mark on her that made her feel "different" and maybe less than everyone else. It destroyed her feelings for her father and shattered her sense of who little Emily was in the world. For the rest of her life she lived in a more or less constant state of isolating unhappiness.

Her beloved Indians called her Klee Wyck, "the one who tends to laugh." But Indians and animals were the only creatures on God's earth Emily ever felt comfortable with. Everyone else was a threat of some sort: her sisters, set up as

authority figures the childish Carr could keep on rebelling against; men, who were rarely allowed to get close, let alone sexual; her peers in the arts, viewed as rivals or judges, and only occasionally as teachers or friends.

But Carr's sense of outsiderhood and loneliness did keep her wrestling to make some sort of connection to a larger world. She travelled to San Francisco, then to England and to France for art training at a time when it was a hard thing for a woman to do, especially on her own. She also knew, from her 20s on, that she should paint what was around her: her eyes never really opened up to anything but the Indians, the forests, things she thought she knew.

But it wasn't until she was 56 — after a life-shaking meeting with the Group of Seven, and particularly Lawren Harris — that her aims and art began to coalesce: "Two things had hold of me with a double clutch. Canada and Art. They were tossing me round & tearing at me." They sent her back to the forests to try to answer the question she posed in her notebooks, "What do these forests make you feel?" On canvas, Emily Carr struggled with the only questions of her life that weren't bleakly and bitterly personal: how to translate the transcending connection to the infinite that she felt in the B.C. woods into paintings that could communicate the rightness of it to others. She filled in a huge blank for us by daring to try. Carr may not have been an innovator of style, as Tippett says, but she was a true "innovator of perception."

Moving from Maria Tippett's excellent book to another outstanding biography, *James G. Endicott: Rebel Out of China*, by his son Stephen Endicott (University of Toronto Press, \$9.95), is a little like escaping from the sanatorium into the stiff breezes of the real world. From artist to public man, from private life to public forum — the two books, accidentally read together, form a complete picture of two of the strongest

responses to the question of how to live one's life.

Endicott, a Canadian United Church missionary in China during the 1930s and '40s, was caught up in one of the greatest social upheavals of the 20th century, China's communist revolution. He had the nerve, the independent spirit, as well as the opportunity, to witness those events with a mind unclouded by national self-interest, racial bias, or fear of the atheistic red menace. He saw where communism and the social gospel connected, and he told the world that the revolution was good. Which got him branded in Canada as Public Enemy Number One, among other epithets picked up from the Americans.

In fact, Endicott from his earliest days as a probationer for the (then) Methodist ministry, was a pioneer in the expression of a new Christianity that concentrates on fighting for social justice — that tries to integrate public and private values rather than provide an escape route for those who have to deal (or suffer) in the dirty world.

In 1921, in dust-blown Saskatchewan, Endicott was faced with either preaching about social justice or acting for it — by helping poor farmers organize a wheat pool that would operate in their interests and not those of the grain exchange. His advocacy was so successful that the pool was won: and Endicott got his first letter of reprimand from church headquarters. "He wasn't sent out to help farmers to organize a wheat pool; he should confine himself to activities suitable for a preacher." It was Endicott's interpretation of activities suitable for a preacher — indeed for a Christian — that continued to get him in trouble with the church and later on with the Canadian government. Ironically, it was also an interpretation that prefigured the position of today's United Church — and the stance of Christians of all sorts all over the world.

Endicott was also a high-profile figure in the ban-the-bomb and international peace movements; he edited with the help of his wife Mary a newsletter on China for over 30 years; he visited the Soviet Union and was honoured in China; he won the Stalin Peace prize at a time when everyone thought that all the Soviet Union wanted was war. He did not fit easily into public life in Canada because he was a constant thorn in the side of Canadian perceptions of the way in which the world works. His son Stephen has produced an exhilarating portrait of a remarkable man who had to put up with the constant pressure of telling the truth to people who didn't want to hear it (and still largely don't). After reading *Rebel out of China*, I felt the overwhelming and uncharacteristic urge to recommend that Endicott should



be studied by children in public school, to shake the next generation out of our perennial 19th-century attitudes to the world. Endicott can do it to you. . .

**IN BRIEF:** a wonderful treat in the form of *The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer* (Penguin, \$6.95). Spencer was born and raised in Mississippi, spent much of her adult life in Europe, and now lives in Montreal. Her reputation was a little eclipsed by those other Southern writers (Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty, and so on) but this collection goes a long way toward remedying that.

Alden Nowlan's prose has been eclipsed by his own poetry, but *Miracle at Indian River* (Clarke Irwin, \$8.95), published in hardcover in 1968, shows that Nowlan has a wonderful grip on the art of the short story. You think at first that it's gritty, funny slice-of-poor-Maritime-life you're dealing with here, but stories like "The Girl Who Went to Mexico" and "The Glass-Roses" go far beyond that.

A duo of original New Press Canadian Classics, called *Canadian Poetry*, Volumes 1 and 2 (\$5.95 each, General Publishing and ECW Press), should keep you thinking about those other "innovators of perception" — Canadian poets. The publishers have taken an original tack on the idea of a poetry anthology. While two project editors, Jack David and Robert Lecker, did winnow out 46 poets to represent Canadian poetry from Charles Sangster to bp Nichol (chronologically speaking), the culling of work and the writing of critical comments on each poet was then assigned to a multitude of critics to produce an anthology that they hoped would be as unbiased as it is possible to get. I can't tell if *Canadian Poetry* is going to be a timeless tool of understanding or one of those collections that seems to mark an age — I don't know enough about poetry or anthologizing for that. For me it seems like a good place to start: attractively presented and logically thought out. □

## LETTERS

### Seeing red

Sir:  
I have just seen Morris Wolfe's comment on *The Gouzenko Transcripts* in the January issue. The heading under

which it appears is a vicious libel, and Wolfe's comment is sillier than his usual work. In the first place he seems more upset at Robert Fulford than he is at us, but that is a matter for Fulford to deal with. Second, and from my point of view most important, he offers no indication that he has read Grierson's testimony in its entirety in the Royal Commission transcripts. Unless he has done so, how in heaven's name could he judge whether or not we had picked out the best, the most important, or the most damaging segments? Very simply, he could not, and in my view his closing comment about being mistrustful of the editing is a completely uninformed one. In any case, what should we have done? To leave out Grierson would have left us open to the charge of being unhistorical. To select other passages would have been justifiable only if they were better from the historian's point of view, and they were not. What we chose were the sections where Grierson explained his reasoning and motivations. How is that an anti-communist smear?

I don't like red-baiting and I don't practise it. But I also dislike shoddy reviewing by ignorant and ill-informed people. Mr. Wolfe is developing a good reputation for this — see John Metcalf — and frankly I can think of no reason why he should have space in your journal. Unless my co-editor and I receive the apology to which we are entitled, please rest assured that I shall never seek space in *Books in Canada* again.

J.L. Granatstein  
Department of History  
York University  
Toronto

*Morris Wolfe replies:* Prof. Granatstein frequently trots out the view that history should be left to professional historians; his comments to that effect appeared most recently in *Queen's Quarterly*. But history is too important for that.

Yes, Prof. Granatstein, it *would* have been better to leave Grierson out: Or at least to have offered some editorial comment on his testimony. There was a lot of bluster in John Grierson; it's all too easy to misread that bluster as guilt. As it stands, the Grierson testimony in *The Gouzenko Transcripts* permits even as intelligent a reader as Robert Fulford to hint at highly dubious conclusions.

### The Applebert report

Sir:  
I've already heard one publisher defend the leaden prose of the Applebert Report on the grounds that it will not alarm the bureaucrats and the policy makers. And now Joyce Wayne ("Home Truths," January) calls for a "coordinated,

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stable, and generous cultural policy" for Canada. Culture and creativity, by their very nature, cannot be coordinated and stabilized. This country runs the danger of escaping the perils of foreign colonialism only to fall into the clutches of a domestic bureaucracy.

We should be happy that culture has a low priority in Ottawa. Would you like the attention given to the Canadian economy — which has a high federal priority — to be given to culture?

The cultural and creative communities in Canada should stop looking to Ottawa to solve their problems. They should recognize the tensions and conflict implicit in matters involving free spirits and bureaucrats. Bureaucracies divide people, push them into little boxes, drain the magic and mystery from life. Creativity brings people together, jolts them, heals the split between mind and body by touching people at their deepest spiritual levels. Creativity reaches out to everyone and offers them a chance to become participants and partners — not just consumers.

By all means, let's keep political pressure on Ottawa to recognize the role of culture in national development. But let's also build bridges between all cultural groups, and share our knowledge while we rage against the dying of the light and struggle to free the human spirit from the forces that seek to stifle and stunt it.

Jim Lotz  
Halifax

### Hemingway in Toronto

Sir:  
Gary Michael Dault's review of my book, *Hemingway in Toronto, A Post-Modern Tribute* (January) struck me as a bit unclear. There's only one "narrator" in the book and Dault can probably call the narrator "Donnell/Hemingway" if he likes without upsetting anyone except Carlos Baker. But there are no second or third narrators. References and "dubs" aren't narrative lines; post-modernism isn't close-reading, it's a general concept of history. What's post-modern about the book, I think, is the way it compares things ranging from Bren-gun carriers to the Group of Seven, to whom I apologize for my lack of respect, around the figure of a writer who wasn't always totally conscious of what was affecting him. There's a comic preface, signed Gertrude, Paris, 1981, which makes fun of Stein's belief that Hemingway was drifting away from art for the sake of art in 1923, i.e. modernism. But why should modernism be more important than the war or Michigan or Hemingway's grandfather?

The book isn't about Paris or Stein or theories of post-modernism; the book is

about Hemingway and Toronto and theories of personality and history. I juxtaposed Hemingway and Paris with Toronto to lacerate Toronto; and Hemingway and Michigan with Stein and Paris to lacerate some of the avant-garde. Fairly simple time segue. I thought it was clear. No abstract sentences. No five-syllabobble words. No footnotes. And photographs even. Including a great photograph of Mayor Tommy Church leaning against a car during a 1917 victory speech inciting us into patriotism. Background. Theoretical exegeses of post-modernism are interesting enough, but if Dault doesn't think Hemingway changed the North American sentence in Toronto, or if he doesn't like *The Sun Also Rises*, Michigan, Canadian Club, the idea that the First World War was significant, or the fact of a writer paying his dues in the rough, why doesn't he say so?

David Donnell  
Toronto

### Crowin' for Owen

Sir:

All blessings to I.M. Owen, Toronto critic, editor, and translator, who has finally set the record straight on Leon Rooke (January). I only wish he'd plunged deeper. Frankly, I *abominate* the creep's writing, and, moreover, can't stand the man himself. My hatred extends to his *entire* family, to the very street on which he resides, and even to his goddamn dogs that once were so innocent and merry. I loathe him to his goddamn *socks*. I.M. Owen has rendered real service here, and by golly I love him for it.

Leon Rooke  
Victoria, B.C.

### Murky thinking

Sir:

What on earth is Gary Michael Dault talking about when he suggests in your December issue that Theosophy inspires "dangerously murky thinking on the part of its adherents"?

A system of thought whose main emphasis is the formation of a universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, colour, sex, etc., is hardly dangerous. Were this and related Theosophical propositions put into practice how better the world would be.

Again, in my experience Theosophists are mostly happy individuals. (Were Lawren Harris, Conn Smythe, and other Theosophists as gloomy as Dault would imply?) Bound to no creed or dogma, what they have in common is a tradition of independent thinking. They may be of any religion, or none, and Theosophy

only suggests they are responsible to think for themselves and make their own philosophy of life. Usually it is a cheerful philosophy. Murky thinking indeed!

I cannot judge Dault's competence as an art or literary critic, but if his knowledge in these fields equals his understanding of Theosophy, his reviews are better left unread.

Ted G. Davy  
Calgary

### Our mistake

Sir:

Much as we are gratified at seeing George Woodcock's review of our book *Plakun Trava: The Doukhobors* featured in your January issue, we're perplexed at how the incorrectly stated price of \$14.50 was arrived at.

At the time the review copy was submitted, the book retailed at \$39.50. Since Sept. 1, 1982, it had been priced at \$45.00. A quick glance at the large format, lavishly illustrated book itself would clearly indicate that it could not possibly be sold for \$14.50. Indeed, although a softcover, updated edition is contemplated for the future, not even such a less costly edition will fit into a \$14.50 retail price.

D.E. Popoff  
MIR Publication Society  
Grand Forks, B.C.

### CANWIT NO. 81

ONCE AGAIN our old friends at McClarkan & Newspider have been hit by inflation. Not long ago financial problems forced them to bind two books inside one cover, producing such back-to-back combinations as *Who Do You Think You Are?/I Am Mary Dunne*. Now, faced with staggering production costs, they have decided to combine their titles in *threes*. Two trios already announced are *Bear/The Edible Woman/Bodily Harm* and *The Temptations of Big Bear/The Temptation of Eileen Hughes/A Mixture of Frailties*, but the rest of their spring catalogue is as yet incomplete. We'll pay \$25 for the best list of triple-barrelled titles received before April 1. Address: CanWit No. 81, *Books in Canada*, 366 Adelaide Street East, Toronto M5A 3X9.

### Results of CanWit No. 79

OUR REQUEST for comments, in verse, on the state of the nation prompted a remarkable number of entries that rhymed — to no one's surprise —

"discontent" with "unemployment." The winner is W.P. Kinsella of Calgary, with obvious apologies to William Henry Drummond:

*Now is de weenter of our dis content  
We sell off de children to pay de rent  
But Little Chretien not moche you care  
You takin' you orders from Big Pierre.*

*Scare off de oilmen and raise de tax  
No matter how hard we break our backs  
Dis depression she gonna linger  
While Big Pierre give us all de finger.*

*Little Lalonde not moche you care  
You out to get us wit you metric scare  
Parole de killers, rapists, wife beaters,  
But jail de man don't sell gas in litres.*

*Now is de weenter of our dis content  
Soon compulsory have de French accent  
Lalonde he say "To read de news on de CBC  
You got speak English good as me."*

**Honourable mentions:**

*Now is the winter of our disc content  
Made glossy by our glorious video games  
And screen for first-run movies; pay-TV  
Arriveth soothing well the troubled mind,  
With super-channel, and the promised lure  
Of naked bodies glistening thru the tube:  
With family entertainment, Mafia-style.  
'Tis time to phone in sick, and wisely pry  
Into the world's deep problems, while a case  
Or two of beer lie open for the task —  
To lube the brain, unused to labouring thus.  
Meanwhile remote from tragic circumstance  
Our leader plies the life our films but show,  
And acts out many a role, and puts aside  
Reality, as far as from the west  
The barren eastern shores of Labrador  
Stand, and repel e'en Yankee financiers.  
Thus far from winter does our leader strive  
Not as in films, vicariously, as we,  
But in the fabled Indies basks in sun —  
Not to return till winter's wrath is done.  
— Kevin McCabe, Hamilton, Ont.*

*Now is the winter of our discontent  
which follows a dreary fall that went  
as badly as three seasons gone before.*

*Too long have voters in this land  
endured the antics of the liberal band  
that rants and raves and prattles on and on.  
Where have the days of Plenty gone?*

*Can one  
with any hope foresee good days ahead?  
Pierre, on public waves of air, bemoaned  
our sorry state, accused, excused and  
groaned  
that all our belts are far too loose, that  
labour,  
capital, and government must with the sabre  
fight the evil that he himself brought on  
which will not cease till he himself is gone.  
Though April is the cruellest month, we  
know  
we must endure this winter full of snow,  
discouragement, remorse, and sorrow deep  
and in our triple taxed bubbly weep.  
— Christopher Klus, Ottawa*

*Now is the winter of our discontent  
Made glorious summer by the stirring news  
There is no need for us to make lament,  
That we are silly when we cry the blues,  
A High Authority has loudly grinned,  
That none need stay in chilly winter's wind,  
Canadians all may bask in southern sun.  
Avant dull care. God bless us every one.  
— Mary Lile Benham, Winnipeg*

**THE EDITORS RECOMMEND**

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

**FICTION**

*Héloïse*, by Anne Hébert, translated from the French by Sheila Fischman, Stoddart. In a rather simple tale of vampirism in Paris — which in the hands of a less skilled artist could easily have become a very silly book — Hébert re-explores a relationship that also dominates her earlier fiction, the link between passion and death.

**NON-FICTION**

*The Little Band: The Clashes Between the Communists and the Political and Legal Establishment in Canada, 1920-1932*, by Lita-Rose Betcherman, Deneau Publishers. An absorbing book that sounds a timely warning: in times of political and economic crisis — most recently, in October, 1970 — the authorities will act ruthlessly, with little regard for civil rights, to silence dissident points of view.

**POETRY**

*The T.E. Lawrence Poems*, by Gwendolyn MacEwen, Mosaic Press/Valley Editions. By assuming the (on the surface unlikely) persona of T.E. Lawrence, MacEwen creates the overall impression of a fascinatingly real voice, and behind it an atmosphere that mixes fatalism, cruelty, beauty, and nonchalance.

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:

- Affairs, by Mary Anne Wollson, Musson.
- Are You Paying Too Much Tax? 1983 Edition, by Wayne Beach and Lyle R. Heppner, McGraw-Hill Ryerson.
- Better Black-and-White Darkroom Techniques, by Bob Casgrande, Wiley.
- Black Tongue, by Antonio D'Alfonso, Guernica Editions.
- The Book of Animals, by John Bradshaw, M & S.
- Canadian Poetry: Vol. 1 and 2. Edited by Jack David and Robert Lecker, General Publishing.
- Canadian Manufacturing, Vol. 1 and 2, by Uri Zohar, James Lorimer and Company.
- Clowns, by Stefan Sikora, Westlands.
- Color of Her Speech, by Lola Lamire Tostevin, Coach House Press.
- The Courage to Believe, by Allen D. Churchill, G.R. Welch.
- Creative Still Life Photography, by Bruce Penfoldson, Wiley.
- Dead Shadows, by Daniel Slocate, Guernica Editions.
- Dear Mom, Dear Dad: Poems for Everyone, Anick Press.
- Books by Kids.
- The Ecstasy of Rita Joe and Other Plays, by George Ryga, General Publishing.
- Empire Inc., by Clarke Wallace, Seal Books.
- Experiments in a Pure Form, by Murdoch Burnet, Westlands.
- Fables For Isolated Men, by Barry Dempster, Guernica Editions.
- Flash Harry and the Daughters of Divine Light, by Kevin Roberts, Harbour Publishing.
- "Fun: Damentals in Horizontal" Vol. 1, by Rudolf Lovas, Hungarica Publishing House.
- God's Fire on Ice, by Kay Gordon with Lois Neely, G.R. Welch.
- Gourmet Vegetables, by John Bradshaw, M & S.
- Harrier, by Terry Origgs, Brick Books.
- I Have Walked Alone With Jesus, by Oswald J. Smith, G.R. Welch.
- High Crimes, by William Deverell, Seal Books.
- Highland Games Sketches, by Douglas A. Fales, Borealis Press.
- How God Gave Us the Bible, by W. Harold Reid, G.R. Welch.
- Improving Your Colour Photography, by Joe Marvullo, Wiley.
- In the Last Hour's Call, by James Deahl, Aureole Point Press.
- In God's Hands, by Shirley Brown, G.R. Welch.
- The Indoor Plant Primer, by John Bradshaw, M & S.
- It Needs to Be Said, by Frederick Philip Grove, edited by W.J. Keith, Tecumseh Press.
- The Last Frontiersman, by Leland Stowe, Stoddart.
- The Lawn Book, by John Bradshaw, M & S.
- Libertarian Deferred?, by Carol Lee Bacchi, U of T Press.
- L'objet-livre, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
- "Lord, How Will You Get Me Out of This Mess?" by Kay Golbeck with Irene Harrell, G.R. Welch Co. Limited.
- Making Do: A Prairie Memory Guide, by Dave Cunningham, Lone Pine Publishing.
- The Martyrology — Book 5, by bpNichol, Coach House Press.
- The Modern Image — Cubism and the Realist Tradition, by Sandra Shaul, Edmonton Art Gallery.
- Music We Can See and Hear, by Peter Magadial, Frederick Harris Music Co.
- Nights in the Underground, by Marie-Claire Blais, General Publishing.
- Non-Tariff Barriers: After the Tokyo Round, edited by John Quinn and Phillip Slayton, Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Northern Review, 1945-1956: a History and an Index, by Hilda M.C. Vanneste, Tecumseh Press.
- The Other Woman, by Joy Fielding, Doubleday.
- Oz In Canada: A Bibliography, by C.J. Hinkle, William Hoffer.
- Progressive Complog, Vol. 1, by Rudolf Lovas, Hungarica Publishing House.
- "Remember Kirkland Lake": The Gold Miners' Strike of 1941-1942, by Laurel Sifton MacDowell, University of Toronto Press.
- Ricordi, by Joyce Meyer, Queenston House.
- Same Truck, Different Driver, by Mel Dagg, Westlands.
- The Seats of the Mighty, by Gilbert Parker, Tecumseh Press (1981).
- Selected Poems, by Fred Cogswell, Guernica Editions.
- The Silence of Jesus, by James Breech, Doubleday.
- Start and Run Your Own Successful Business, by Peter D. Cook, General Publishing.
- The Studhorse Man, by Robert Kroetsch, General Publishing.
- Teenage Sexuality: God's Design For Youth, by Gerald B. Wilson, G.R. Welch.
- Three Homilies From Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41, edited by Raymond J.S. Grant, Tecumseh Press.
- To Kill a White Dog, by John B. Lee, Brick Books.
- Two Strand River, by Keith Maillard, General Publishing.
- The Way of the Sea, by Norman Duncan, Tecumseh Press.
- A Weapon Against Alienation, by Ellen Weber, G.R. Welch.

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